

House Music:

Why Independent British Musicians Want to Play in Your Living Room

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Contents

ABSTRACT	2
CHAPTER ONE	4
CHAPTER TWO	8
CHAPTER THREE	12
CHAPTER FOUR	15
CHAPTER FIVE	19
CONCLUSION	22
BIBLIOGRAPHY	25

Abstract

In recent years there has been a quiet, but significant, revolt by independent musicians in the United Kingdom. Frustrated with being poorly paid to play in soulless venues to unappreciative audiences, many artists have now started to think small — choosing intimacy over incompatibility — by playing to tiny but enthusiastic audiences in the homes of their fans. These audiences, and the people who host house concerts, are also mounting their own silent uprising; tired of paying over the odds to stand in busy venues, struggling to hear their favourite artist over a loud and drink-fuelled crowd, they've chosen to support independent, self-starting musicians by inviting them to play in their home, using the opportunity to introduce the artist's music to their friends. The current house-concert movement is a well-established one in North America, but is a relatively new concept in this country.

This study analyses the growth of the UK house concert movement and investigates why musicians, and their audiences, are choosing this particular route. It draws on ethnographic data to identify the benefits and drawbacks of playing house concerts — with specific regard to the actual house-concert performance experience, the financial implications for ticket, CD and merchandise sales, as well as the touring costs involved, and what potential there exists for building a long term fan-base.

All of these considerations will be looked at in comparison to the experience of playing at a 'more traditional music venue'. When faced with this phrase,

one survey respondent asked, 'Is there such thing as a traditional gig?!'. While clearly a valid point, for the purposes of this study I am defining the 'more traditional music venue' as any place where one would normally expect to see a musician perform, e.g. a pub, club, café, theatre, arts centre, or music festival.

One limitation of this study is that I have not, for obvious reasons, been able to interview every musician who has played a house concert in the UK. Instead, I have used research methodologies to interview some of the key players in this burgeoning movement in an effort to generalize the results back to the house-concert-musician 'population'. A further limitation is that when looking at the benefits and drawbacks of playing house concerts, I have focused mainly on independent, solo and acoustic musicians. It is this type of touring musician for whom the house-concert concept is best suited because they will already have personal contact with their fans (either in person or via online social media) and can travel lightly (typically not needing a P.A. system). Lastly, being independent musicians, it is likely they already have the qualities of self-motivation and entrepreneurship needed to book and promote a house concert tour.

The value of this research lies in both discovering and sharing the proven benefits and drawbacks of playing house concerts; to help those musicians who are already playing house concerts to learn from each other, and to help musicians who want to start playing house concerts to learn from those with more experience.

Chapter One

A house concert, sometimes known as a living-room concert, is exactly what it sounds like: a performance by a musician, or a small group of musicians, in someone's home, to a group of invited guests. The exact circumstances will vary for each house concert but they are normally hosted by the house owner (or permanent resident) and take place in their living room or dining room. The concerts are essentially intimate affairs with audience numbers somewhere between 15 and 50. The artist will typically play two sets, with a break in-between for food and beverages, and will often be given a bed for the night by the host.¹ The current house concert movement started over twenty years ago in the USA, but the very concept of having musicians perform in your home is, in fact, just the resurgence of a very old idea.^{2 3} In the world of classical music, the term 'chamber music' ('chamber', in this case, meaning anything from a room in a private house to a room in a palace) was originally used as long ago as the 16th century to describe 'soft vocal ensemble music performed in a noble person's private palace'.^{4 5} Three hundred years later, despite many changes as to what chamber music was and where it was performed, this idea of having classical musicians perform in your home was still alive and well:

¹ F Snyder, 'What is a House Concert?', in *House Concerts and 21st Century Touring*, November 2007, viewed on 12 March 2012, <<http://www.concertsinyourhome.com/blog/archives/44>>.

² B Bossin, 'How To Put On The Perfect House Concert by Martha Stewart and Me', in *Bob Bossin's Old folksinger's homepage*, viewed on 12 March 2012, <<http://www3.telus.net/oldfolk/housecon.htm>>.

³ A Mitchell, 'Concert Tour, Next Stop: Your Living Room?', in *About.com Guide*, January 2011, viewed on 12 March 2012, <<http://performingarts.about.com/b/2011/01/04/concert-tour-next-stop-your-living-room.htm>>.

⁴ Dictionary.com, 'chamber', in *Dictionary.com unabridged*, March 2012, viewed on 12 March 2012, <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/chamber>>.

⁵ J Baron, *Intimate Music: A History of the Idea of Chamber Music*, Pendragon Press, Hillsdale, 1998, p. 1.

'On other occasions he participated in... after-dinner concerts in private houses, involving an invited group of professional players... informal musical gatherings at Ella's house before invited assemblies of patrons, such as the 'Party Chez Mois' in March 1836...'⁶

In a similar vein, the composer Mozart was well known for playing 'parlour concerts' in the homes of rich patrons of the arts.⁷ It is not just classical music that has this 'house concert' heritage though; the Scottish word 'ceilidh', used nowadays to describe a gathering of people that is focused on traditional Scottish dances, has its origins in a much older tradition described by Alexander Carmichael in 1900 as:

'a literary entertainment where stories and tales, poems and ballads, are rehearsed and recited, and songs are sung, conundrums are put, proverbs are quoted, and many other literary matters are related and discussed.'⁸

These ceilidhs would always take place in the village ceilidh house, which was often the dwelling place of someone in the village.⁹ These are just two examples, of many, of contemporary house concerts having their roots in

⁶ C Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture: John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2007, p. 67.

⁷ F Snyder, 'House Concerts - Small is the New Big', in *House Concerts and 21st Century Touring*, November 2008, viewed on 12 March 2012, <<http://www.concertsinyourhome.com/blog/archives/275>>.

⁸ A Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica Volume 1*, 1900, p. xxviii.

⁹ A Macleod, 'The Village Ceilidh House', in *The Angus Macleod Archive*, December 2012, viewed on 12 March 2012, <<http://www.angusmacleodarchive.org.uk/view/index.php?path=%2F3.+Calbost+-+History+and+Personal+Memories%2F2.+Social+Customs%2F1.+The+Village+Ceilidh-house.pdf>>.

established tradition. Looking back, we see that the home is where music would primarily have been heard, played and enjoyed.¹⁰ Despite this deep history, the current house-concert movement in Britain principally owes its existence to the rich history of musicians performing in homes in North America:

‘The tradition of the house concert is deeply embedded in the roots of American music; in fact, playing intimate acoustic performances in the home was the most common way for the music of pioneering communities to be spread and preserved. The sounds of families and neighbors getting together in a home to play and celebrate music could often be heard flowing out of the living room, off of the front porch, and into the lush fields of rural America.’¹¹

That tradition, so vividly portrayed in that quotation, died out somewhat in both North America and elsewhere with the rise of concert halls and the advent of the recording industry, radio and television in the 20th century.¹² It is, though, this very combination of new technologies and the commercialisation of music that has given birth to the contemporary house concert movement, one which is currently in full swing in the USA and growing rapidly in the UK and Europe. Thanks to the advent of affordable home recording technology and the easy

¹⁰ N Strauss, ‘Acoustic Music, Live from the Living Room’, in *New York Times*, November 1999, viewed 14 March 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/11/08/arts/acoustic-music-live-from-the-living-room.html>>.

¹¹ B Garza, ‘The Role of House Concerts In Modern American Culture’, in *Concerts in Your Home*, viewed on 14 March 2012,

<http://www.concertsinyourhome.com/resources/Garza_House_Concert_Research.pdf>, p.1.

¹² Garza, page 2.

disemination of digitized recorded music, more and more artists are recording and releasing their own music to a worldwide audience via the internet. The evolution of online social-media interaction has now made it possible for house-concert-playing musicians and their hosts to connect, organise, book and promote their shows for free.¹³ Online house concert networks also exist, for example, Acoustic Roof. This Canadian network describes itself as, 'a growing network of house concerts, especially in rural communities, but also in cities, for the benefit of musicians and audiences.'¹⁴ North American networks like these have existed for a few years but now there are newer UK house concert websites such as The Euro House Concert & Acoustic Music Club Hub and House Concerts York.¹⁵ ¹⁶ As more online networks like these emerge across the UK, and as more and more UK musicians start to play house concerts (having been influenced by their North American counterparts) it is now worth investigating the career of one of the current key players in the house concert scene, the singer-songwriter Susan Enan.

¹³ Strauss, New York Times.

¹⁴ P Fredericks, 'Visions of house concerts danced in their heads.....', in *Acoustic Roof*, 2006-2012, viewed on 14 March 2012, <<http://www.acousticroof.ca/about.asp>>.

¹⁵ R Ellen, 'Vestibule', in *The Euro House Concert & Acoustic Music Club Hub*, 2012, viewed on 14 March 2012, <www.houseconcert.eu>.

¹⁶ K Spelman, 'All About Us', in *House Concerts York*, 2007-2012, viewed on 14 March 2012, <www.houseconcertsyork.co.uk>.

Chapter Two

One of the best examples of a British musician who has fully embraced the House Concert ethic is singer-songwriter Susan Enan. Raised in England and now living in Nashville, Tennessee, she started playing house concerts in early 2010 and has since played over 100, travelling 84,000 miles across Europe, Australasia, Canada and the USA.¹⁷ Her decision to start playing house concerts stemmed from her frustration with the drawbacks of playing more traditional music venues:

'I had some great support shows including opening for Tony Bennett, a tour with Damien Rice and Roger McGuinn but when it came to my own tours... I never seemed to gain the momentum you need to sustain touring. It's a lot of hard work, which I didn't mind at all, but when only a handful turned up in a little club it was kind of depressing. After a couple of years I never saw any growth so questioned whether that was the right thing for me.'¹⁸

In December 2009 she was asked to play at a church concert in New York as part of a monthly arts event. Only 40 people came but, even after the money was split 50/50 between Enan and the church, she still made more money than she ever had at a gig before. She puts this down to the fact that there were no middle men involved, i.e. promoters, sound engineers, venue

¹⁷ S Enan, 'Shows so Far', in *House Concert Tour*, 2008-2012, viewed on 13 March 2012, <<http://www.susanenan.com/House+Concert+Tour/Shows+so+far.aspx>>.

¹⁸ S Enan, email (see Appendix B)

owners, bar staff, etc. It was after this concert that, she says, 'the penny finally dropped' – but not just because of the money she had made: ¹⁹

'When you play a club you have to work so hard to get people to come, in this case the church did that. The fact that I didn't have to promote the gig myself, but there was a respectful listening audience was huge.'

The next month, while Enan was taking a short holiday in Nashville, she decided to take her initial foray into playing house concerts. ²⁰ She posted this simple entry on her Facebook page to see if anyone would be interested in hosting a house concert:

'So, I'm going to be in Nashville Feb 10th - 17th and was wondering.... would anyone like to host a house concert (ie I would come and play in your house)? We'd have to sort a few logistics but I think it would be fun. Let me know if anyone would be up for it and we'll talk :)'²¹

After then playing a hugely successful house concert in Nashville and being inundated with offers from all over the world as a result of her Facebook post, Enan began to plan a house concert tour. She named it the 'Bring On the Song' world tour (after a line from one of her songs) and started touring England and Europe in May 2010. Over the next 18 months she toured North America, Europe, Scandinavia, the UK, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand

¹⁹ Enan, email.

²⁰ S Enan, 'About Susan', in *susanenan.com*, 2008-2012, viewed on 13 March 2012, <<http://www.susanenan.com/Bio.aspx>>.

²¹ S Enan, 'Susan Enan's House Concert Tour Official Video', in *Vimeo*, January 2012, viewed on 13 March 2012, <<http://vimeo.com/35378638>>.

until she finally wrapped up that initial leg of the tour in late 2011. She made online video diaries throughout the tour and, when it was over, put together a short film detailing her adventures.²²

Aside from the financial advantages already mentioned, Enan found the primary benefits of playing house concerts to be that she is playing in an environment that promotes a listening audience, and the hosts (who are usually already fans of her music) are 'delighted' to have her playing in their home, so it's a 'win-win situation' where 'no one comes away unhappy'.

One of the advantages Susan Enan had in obtaining offers of house concerts from all over the world was the significant level of commercial success she had already achieved as a singer-songwriter. After having her music included on a *Paste* magazine sampler CD, touring with the band Over the Rhine for three months and then signing to Nettwerk Management in 2006, one of her songs was featured in the highly successful U.S. TV show 'Bones'. Unusually for a synchronisation, the entire song was featured and, after the broadcast, a friend of Enan's who had put the lyrics on her blog started getting thousands of hits on her website.²³ Enan released her debut album 'Plainsong' in 2009 which received critical acclaim from *Paste*, BBC Radio 2's Bob Harris and *Rolling Stone* magazine.²⁴ The Grammy award-winning singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan also recorded 'Bring on the Wonder', bringing Enan's music

²² Enan, Vimeo.

²³ T Cummings, 'Susan Enan: The UK-born, USA-based singer songwriter bringing on the wonder', in *Cross Rhythms*, November 2010, viewed 13 March 2012, <http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/music/Susan_Enan_The_UKborn_USAbased_singer_songwriter_bringing_on_the_wonder/42119/p1.>

²⁴ Enan, susanenan.com.

to an even wider audience. Enan readily admits that her house concert tour would not have been the success it was without this previous exposure:²⁵

'I get some requests from indie musicians asking me how I put together the whole tour, thinking that anyone could have done it. The reality is though, I could not have travelled the world had my music not gotten the exposure from 'Bones''²⁶

This raises the question of whether house concerts are a viable financial and fan-base building option for everyone. As Enan says:

'I know a couple of friends who tried the house concert route but they struggled to see how it was a long-term solution for touring for them. ie, how do the numbers grow. So, I don't think they are for everyone.'²⁷

I will address these issues in the next few chapters as I look at the benefits and drawbacks for other British musicians of playing house concerts. I have concentrated on the performance experience, building a long-term fan-base and the financial implications involved in house concerts.

²⁵ Cummings, Cross Rhythms.

²⁶ Enan, email.

²⁷ Enan, email.

Chapter Three

In his book 'It's Lovely to be Here: The Touring Diaries of a Scottish Gent', the Fife singer-songwriter James Yorkston recounts a concert he played in Galway where he and his support act were relegated to playing a tiny upstairs bar, while a better-known sixties band played the larger, and better equipped, venue downstairs:

'Surely, here is the foot of the gigging ladder – there's no stage – there's not even a soundman.'²⁸

But what starts out as an unpromising evening soon brightens up:

'The room is busy now, with the audience beginning around three feet away. Everyone's quiet and listening and there's a grand wee atmosphere starting... I reckon between us all we deliver a fine evening's entertainment.'²⁹

While this anecdote was not an account of a house concert *per se*, it still perfectly captures one of the reasons why many musicians prefer to play house concerts as opposed to more traditional music venues — the unique atmosphere created by an artist's intimate, and often unplugged, performance in a small room to a quiet, attentive audience. When comparing their

²⁸ J Yorkston, *It's Lovely to be Here*, Domino Press, London, 2011, p.30.

²⁹ Yorkston, p.31.

experiences of playing house concerts with playing at more traditional music venues, nearly every musician who responded to the survey I conducted saw a difference in the way they interacted with their audience, as well as their audience's attentiveness. The main reason they gave for this was the lack of physical separation between the artist and audience; there is no stage or lighting and nothing to stop the audience having personal interaction with the performer. One survey respondent went as far to say that the line between the audience and artist even became blurred at times. Another respondent said:

‘The level of connection one feels is astounding... I'd rather play house concerts than play to hundreds at a venue.’³⁰

This upside-down way of thinking goes against the commonly-held view most people have of what musicians want to achieve: gaining stardom and playing their music in large arenas to thousands of people.³¹ While it is certainly true that many people do desire this level of success and fame, as is evident from the huge queues that regularly form outside auditions for ‘The X-Factor’ and its ilk, it is not the case for all artists. Intimacy and connection, the key ingredients that define the very ethos of house concerts, are largely absent from this bloated and out-dated way of viewing artistic success.³² This desire

³⁰ Lobelia, House Concerts survey (see Appendix A)

³¹ B Walker, ‘Lifestyle Band’, in *I Hate Mornings*, March 2012, viewed on 9 April 2012, <<http://blog.ihatemornings.com/lifestyle-band.html>>.

³² S Lawson, ‘What is Success? Starting from Scratch’, in *Steve’s Blog: Solo Bass & Beyond*, February 2012, viewed on 9 April 2012, <<http://www.stevelawson.net/2012/02/what-is-success-starting-from-scratch>>.

for intimacy and connection is one of the reasons why house concerts are so popular, not just with musicians, but also with their hosts and audiences.

Other reasons given by the survey respondents as to why they enjoy the actual experience of performing at house concerts include: the high level of attentiveness of the audience, the opportunity to stretch as a performer and experiment, to tell stories and answer questions from the audience and lastly, the simplicity of playing without amplification (for further information regarding the specific responses I received from the survey, please see Appendix A).

These factors, all of which contribute to the unique experience of performing at a house concert, can also lead to other benefits as well, as I will go on to discuss in the following two chapters.

Chapter Four

When writing about the chamber music house concerts of the 1830's in London, Christina Bashford stated:

'Although house concerts reduced expenditure (no hall to hire), they constrained the potential size of the audience and any profits. Even with minimized rehearsal costs and relatively easy organization, few speculations made money.'³³

Thankfully this is no longer the case and, as was noted earlier in the case study of Susan Enan, house concerts often prove to be more financially lucrative than playing at more traditional music venues.³⁴ A couple of weeks after Enan played the New York church gig discussed in Chapter Two, she went to see a band play a packed gig in one her favourite New York venues:

'I started to do the math... these guys on stage are responsible for this full room yet most of the money exchanging hands tonight will go on everything but them. Drink, staff wages, rent, lights and so on. The musicians... might make fifty bucks each if they are lucky. Yet I had just done a gig where there were half as many people but no overheads, so the money was going directly to the source.'³⁵

³³ Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture: John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London*, p. 103.

³⁴ D Schwartz, *I Don't Need a Record Deal*, Billboard Books, New York, 2005, p. 235.

³⁵ Enan, email.

The money that an artist makes from a house concert usually comes from two sources: the entrance fee that each audience member pays and merchandise sales. The entrance fee is often described as a 'suggested donation' for legal reasons as the host is typically not running an actual business.³⁶ This 'suggested donation' is, in the UK, usually somewhere between £10 and £20 per person, and with house concert audiences usually upwards of 15-20 people, the amount an artist can make in one night can be quite significant. The total amount of money raised from these donations normally goes directly to the artist but there are exceptions. Some hosts, especially those who have spent money on providing food and drink for the audience, sometimes choose to take a percentage of the donations raised to cover their expenses. Many artists, including some of the survey respondents, have pointed out the importance of ironing out the financial arrangements with the host well in advance of the actual concert, in case there is confusion as to how much the audience members are to be charged and if the money is to be divided in any way.³⁷

When it comes to merchandise sales, according to the survey results there were differing opinions. Some musicians sold far more merchandise at house concerts than they normally would at more traditional music venues. Lobelia went as far to say that she and her husband / musical partner Steve Lawson — who together have played over 100 house concerts — sell, 'at least five times the merch that we'd sell at a regular gig'. They attribute this fact to the deeper level of connection and 'sense of community' made possible by the

³⁶ F Snyder, 'House Concerts Guide and 2010 Calendar', in *Concerts in Your Home*, 2010, viewed on 3 April, <http://www.concertsinyourhome.com/CIYH_HouseConcertGuidex.pdf>, p.9.

³⁷ Schwartz, *I Don't Need a Record Deal*, p.236.

intimate nature of the concert, as well as the fact that the audience 'save so much on beer.' There were other survey respondents who didn't make quite as big a distinction between merchandise sales at a house concert and at a more traditional gig, while others found it harder to quantify.

When asked the question, 'Excluding your expenses for travel costs, food and accommodation, what is the minimum amount of money you would hope to make at a house concert?', again there were a variety of answers from the survey respondents. The highest amount made in one night by an artist was £700, with the average amount they were making being around £300. Most artists, though, expected to make somewhere between £100 and £200 but, again, some found it harder to put an exact figure on it.

If there can be a disadvantage to the potentially profitable nature of house concerts, it would be that if one is cancelled at short notice it can mean quite a financial hit for the artist. But, according to Steve Lawson, it's worth the risk:

'The economics of house concerts are fragile in that they tend not to be contract/'business' based, but the worst-case scenario is so much less bad as you don't have all the overheads, so it's a trade off...'

(see Appendix B).

One respondent said she preferred to play at larger venues but that house concerts 'can help with cash flow... or if there are days between venues while on tour.' Another, when asked if they would still play house concerts if they

were able to easily sell out 100+ capacity venues said house concerts would then just appear as ‘a thorn in the side.’ Most respondents, though, did not share this view. When faced with this same question, Steve Lawson replied:

‘I’d still be doing the house concerts. At the point when I could pull 100 people, I could also then consistently draw 25-40 at £15 a ticket — more than I’d make off 100 in a normal venue.’

It should be noted that there are some rare exceptions among those musicians who see playing house concerts as opportunities to make money. One survey respondent, who has been playing house concerts since the early 1990’s when ‘it was a regular thing in the punk / D.I.Y. scene’ and has since lost count of how many he’s played, only charges expenses for playing and says money is ‘not what it’s about’. For this same reason he refuses to sell merchandise at his house concerts, saying ‘I do these shows because I enjoy connecting with people, no other reason.’ Most of the other survey respondents didn’t see any inherent contradiction between building that ‘sense of community’ with their fans and making money at the same time. It is this deeper level of connection with the audience, and the hope that it is a fruitful long-term connection, that I will explore in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

The third and final consideration to be looked at in this study is the potential of building a long-term fan-base by performing at house concerts. The definition of 'long-term fan' I will be using for this study is a person who attends a house concert and subsequently becomes a fan and follower of the artist online, signs up to their email list and is likely to buy future releases and attend further shows when the artist returns to their area. If an independent musician wants to sustain a career in music, it is vital that they build a fan-base that has this level of dedication. As Daylle Deana Schwartz says in her book 'I Don't Need a Record Deal':

'A BIG difference between major labels and independents is the value of fans. Majors are mainly concerned with selling records, but indies know that loyal fans can support a long career.'³⁸

One of the advantages of house concerts in this respect is that they provide the audience with personal access to the artist, which in turn can build a stronger bond between artist and fan. As American singer-songwriter Mary Gauthier explains:

³⁸ Schwartz, *I Don't Need a Record Deal*, p.122.

‘The star routine is not the way to be an independent artist. People need access to you. It’s part of the building process... it allows me the opportunity to do this for a living.’³⁹

Many of the survey respondents found that this approach can be applied more specifically to house concerts. There is, though, an obvious contradiction here: while house concerts, by their intimate nature, provide the potential to make strong connections with fans, it is the desire for this same intimate nature that demands the number of people who attend each house concert actually be relatively low. Having said that, the number of potential *new* fans can actually be higher than at a more traditional gig, as many in the audience are there not because they are already fans of the artist but because they have been invited by the host and are intrigued by the concept.⁴⁰ This, according to one survey respondent, provides the possibility for the entire audience to be ‘recruited to the cause of spreading the word about your music.’ Not everyone who answered the survey saw house concerts as having any kind of unique potential for building a fan-base.

Finally, despite the commonplace use of impersonal terms like ‘fan-base’, ‘recruit’ and ‘loyalty’ by independent artists, these words don’t quite give justice to how some of the UK musician survey respondents view the interaction they have with their house-concert audiences. Yvonne Lyon, a

³⁹ Schwartz, *I Don’t Need a Record Deal*, p.123.

⁴⁰ Enan, email.

Scottish singer-songwriter who has played about 20 house concerts with her husband and musical collaborator David Lyon, states that:

‘There is the potential for a more real, genuine community rather than just a fan-base... I love the intimacy of the gigs, the banter, the conversations and relationships born and developed, connections made and other doors that open from them’

(see Appendix A).

Conclusion

In July 2011 I invited Susan Enan to play a house concert in my home. I had heard about her music through a mutual friend, downloaded her album (which I loved) and, being a musician myself, was curious about the concept of house concerts. Susan arrived in the afternoon and, over a cup of tea at my kitchen table, we had a fascinating discussion about her career so far and the house concert world tour she was currently undertaking. Despite being nervous about how many guests I would be able to drum up, about fifteen people came to the gig that night. It was an amazing evening; Susan played her songs beautifully, told engaging stories about the songwriting and recording process, the audience asked her questions and, when Susan's performance was over, we all sat, drank and talked together until well after midnight.

I had been thinking about the possibility of playing house concerts myself for at least a year before Susan played in my home. Having hosted that gig, and then another one later that year by the Brooklyn-based band Numbers and Letters, I decided it was time to bite the bullet and play one myself. My first house concert was in the West End of Glasgow in November 2011. Having now played three house concerts and hosted two, I find that my own experiences are in keeping with many of the results of this research study, in particular that the primary factors that contribute to the unique nature of house concerts are:

- the intimate connection between the artist(s) and the audience
- the listening environment
- the lack of touring costs involved
- the potential to make a significant amount of money
- the potential to build a long-term fan-base and a sense of community

As I write this report in spring 2012, more and more independent, British musicians, like me, are starting to play concerts in the homes of their friends and fans. But has the day arrived when we can happily give up on the pub and club circuit altogether? Susan Enan has managed to do so, but what about those of us who have not yet achieved her level of mass exposure? Steve Lawson and Lobelia have never had their music synchronised on a hit TV show but have still played over 100 house concerts and embarked on U.S. house concert tours for weeks at a time. It would be foolish to assume that an emerging new artist could achieve this same feat, since both Steve and Lobelia have been writing, releasing and performing music for over 10 years, all that time working hard to build a loyal fan-base of thousands of fans and online followers. It is these long-term fans who provide Steve and Lobelia with most of their house concert opportunities. In fact, as the survey results showed, most UK musicians who play house concerts see them as just one opportunity among many, with shows at arts centres, theatres, pubs, cafes, churches and festivals making up the rest of their live performances.

For musicians seeking huge commercial success and worldwide fame, the house concert circuit isn't a likely choice. The idea, though, should not be ruled out entirely, as they may come to find that the intimacy and community-building potential of house concerts are perhaps more worthwhile and fulfilling than any amount of money and fame. Similarly, for a fledgling artist with no dedicated fan-base as yet, planning a major house concert tour may be an unrealistic goal, at least for the time being. But, if the possibility exists to play the odd house concert, perhaps in the home of a friend who can drum up a few guests, I hope the results of this study encourage them to do so. That said, for musicians who *do* have a significant number of loyal followers and who like the idea of performing their own music in an intimate environment to an attentive audience, all the while being prepared for the slow but rewarding task of building their fan-base one person at a time, the living room of a dedicated fan may well be the ideal venue.

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