

Greetings BRB friends!

We had a lively discussion during the 11:00 am "Music Across Kansas" session at the Big Rural Brainstorm, and I promised all at that table that I would send out notes, so that we could follow up with ideas and stay in touch. Many people from that first session went straight to the 11:40 "Venues for arts or entertainment" session at table #16, which then moved to a separate room to continue on a similar thread. Because of the continuity of both ideas and people in those two sessions, I am including everyone in this mailing; if you want to opt out of further group discussion, just let me know.

**The proposal was for a grassroots level music touring network that can make any rural town richer in the performing arts.**

**Question #1:** What is the demand in my own community?

- Response all around was that the need is there. Positive responses were heard for house concerts, as well as brown bag concerts in businesses, and music instruction opportunities with groups such as the Girl Scouts. The brown bag or other daytime concerts could be held by any business in town that has the space that would like to pull a group of people into their business. Libraries, museums, historical societies and other institutions can jump on the bandwagon as well.

**Question #2:** How can Facebook and other social networking be used to facilitate bringing performers to our towns?

- Facebook can be used to set up networks of friends, some of whom are performers, some of whom are presenters. First, the network must be set up: as a performer, I would make a Facebook page called "Music Across Kansas - Kelly Werts" (and other performers would make similar pages, such as "Music Across Kansas - Ann Zimmerman"). Potential house concert hosts or "presenters" would be alerted to the available musicians by Kansas Sampler, KAN-REN, other websites, as well as print and radio news media. Then, let's say I want to tour Northeast Kansas, so I post an event to all presenters who are in that region: "Hey, I'd like to set up concerts from May 3 through May 10 of 2014. Who would be interested in hosting me for a house concert or a brown bag?" From there, we could form a Group on Facebook to sort out the best dates and times, and then finally communicate individually via email and phone to settle the particulars of each performance date.

**Question #3:** How do I put on a house concert in my home?

- Ann Zimmerman and Roger Ringer, both experienced presenters, talked about hosting audiences in a house or back yard, by inviting people they know who enjoy music. Ann mentioned that she borrows chairs from her church, whereas Roger just tells the guests to bring their own chairs. There is a 20-page [guide](#) available online that gives pretty thorough information on putting on a house concert; Ann and I might get together to write a more condensed version.

**Question #4:** When can we start?

- Judging from the level of interest at this session, I would say we could start pretty soon. I have a personal goal, perhaps lofty, of performing in all 105 counties of Kansas. I don't know how long that will take, or how many other artists would want to follow suit, but I think it would be very exciting to get a network in place that includes every county. In addition to individual artist Facebook pages, it sounds like we would need a web page as a central information source. There, artists can be listed with descriptions and reviews and links to their websites & videos; this would also include explanations of how things work, tips and feedback from presenters and artists, and other info that needs to be centralized.

**Other Issues We Discussed**

**Benefits**

- Sustainability: An important element of this proposal is the low overhead. While we miss the Arts Commission Touring Program, which paid artists reasonable fees to travel all the way across the state to play a single concert, we can do things much more cheaply. If an artist plays a week's worth of concerts along a 200-mile stretch of highway, they don't burn up all their profits in gas, not to mention the environmental impact. If the presenter of the house concert chooses to provide food and lodging for the performer, there's another big chunk knocked off of the touring budget. By tying in CD sales, the occasional lesson, school program and care home performance, an artist can reach many more people and actually hope to pay next month's bills and stay in business. Meanwhile, towns that can't afford to maintain an arts council can see a steady influx of performing artists while investing very little. The cost of putting on a house concert is very similar to throwing a party, and can be based on your own tastes. Whether you decide to serve fine wine and expensive cheeses, or go with a pot-luck format, the amenities of a house concert can fit your own style and budget.

- Networking: Every time an outsider comes to visit a town, they carry stories with them of where they've been. They tell you what's going on up the road, and they tell people down the road about what a good time they had in your town.

- Surprises & variety: It's refreshing to hear music and ideas from someone you haven't met, who may have common interests and interesting stories to tell. Not to mention talent to share. It may be possible to bring in a folk singer, classical pianist or chamber group, jazz duo, flamenco guitarist, or other refreshing performers. As one attendee said, "There's got to be more to life than sports!"

### **Concerns**

- Privacy: Like a party, a house concert is usually a private affair. Presenters usually start with a list of their close friends and broaden their guest list over time, discovering people who have similar interests and who bring enthusiasm to these events. Sometimes a house concert series will grow beyond a house, and an organization will form around it as it moves to a church or community building and becomes more public. Others stick with their circle of favorite people. Ann Zimmerman just hosted a private house concert last Friday after the BRB, and had 25 people in attendance, but has had as many as 50+ people turn out.

- Quality of performers: There was discussion of a "vetting" process to make sure that a prospective artist will put on a good show. The KAC Touring Program had a select roster of artists, and the Kansas Rural Entertainment Network (KAN-REN) has made some efforts in that direction. It was suggested at one of the sessions that a review system could be devised, similar to that found on websites for motels, restaurants and [Air BNB](#), that would reflect the experiences of prior presenters. That, combined with live YouTube videos and artist websites, might give you a sufficient picture of who would be performing at your house, and whether your local audience would have a good experience. How do you feel about this?

### **Your ideas**

I welcome your ideas and feedback on this. There are many questions about how best to utilize Facebook, what to feature on the website, and how to get the word out. Following are some suggestions and questions I heard on Friday:

- Need to use Facebook Groups as well as individual pages. (Expertise needed!)
- Need a central website. (Expertise needed!)
- News releases to papers and radio stations across the state can be used to attract attention and draw people interested in presenting, as well as artists interested in touring.
- Chambers of Commerce can help to coordinate brown bag concerts or concert series that occur in businesses.

### **Next**

I thank you all for your interest, and hope you will email me right away with your ideas, questions and any expertise you would like to share.

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