

intimate melodies

Before there were computers and DVDs. Before there were televisions and radios. Before music became the stuff of stadiums and expensive tickets, people enjoyed entertainment at house parties in neighbors' homes. Hosts rolled up the rugs, popped tubs of popcorn, and invited friends and neighbors to congregate around the piano to sing or to dance to the music of local musicians. The setting was intimate, inspiring close social ties between artists and audiences.

It turns out, everything old is new again. Today they're called house concerts, providing an opportunity for audiences to experience live music and the artists who play it in a home or other private space. "House concerts let audiences sample new musicians before they become famous or musicians who are good but aren't as popular now," says Martin Arthur of Spencer, who has been hosting groups of 15 to 100 people at concerts in his home since 2006. "Artists like them because they can get close to the audience. Audiences really get to know how a musician creates and feels about the music."

For Arthur, one of the benefits of hosting the concerts is getting to know the artists, many of whom stay overnight in his home after the performance. A recent two-hour concert by the Gabrielle Louise Trio morphed into an after-hours jam in Arthur's kitchen, even using kitchen utensils to make their music, playing until 3 a.m. Later, after spending the night, they sat at Arthur's piano exploring a wide range of music styles. "I felt so privileged to be hearing them," says Arthur. "As they played, I thought, 'This is what kings and presidents get to hear!'"

Socializing is an aspect of house concerts that also appeals to Father Tim Johnson, who hosts similar events in Ft. Dodge and Carroll. Johnson is part of the Brushy Creek Friends of Traditional Music, a group that opts for coffeehouses to stage its events. By holding the events after normal business hours, the concerts avoid the normal noise of a coffeehouse and let people concentrate on the music.



COURTESY MARTIN ARTHUR

The Boulder Acoustic Society brought their sound from the foot of the Southern Rockies to the living rooms of Spencer.

"These events offer a comfortable environment for people to meet," says Johnson. "And people are not as intimidated by a coffeehouse as they may be going to someone's home the first time. House concerts let us enjoy the social essence of what we once had."

House concert hosts offer light beverages and snacks and encourage guests to bring food to share. Suggested donations usually range from \$10 to \$15, with all proceeds going to the musicians. — C.B.

To find local house concerts, or to explore staging one yourself, visit www.concertsinyourhome.com — an online connecting point for artists looking for venues and hosts looking for artists. House concerts nationwide are listed at www.houseconcerts.us, and Cedar Rapids events are promoted at www.hitagahouseconcerts.checkoutmypage.com.

THE ART OF COMEBACK

Cedar Rapids arts organization Legion Arts acted quickly last summer to establish the Iowa Artist Relief Fund, supporting artists who lost studios, tools, music instruments, artwork, and more as a result of the flooding. Programming resumed last fall with the apt theme "Cedar Rapids Rising." Learn more and donate online at www.legionarts.org.