

# WoodSongs Coffeehouse & House Concert Startup Manual

## How to Start and Operate My Own Hometown



or, "How to hang around musicians  
without going broke ..."

Greetings, friends:

You know, when we first started the radio show, I never imagined that we would be on the air all over the world. But we kept at it, stayed patient ... and it worked!

Now we are helping folks across the USA and Canada bring the spirit of the broadcast into their hometowns. The WoodSongs Coffeehouse is, simply put, just for you . . . your community, your artists, your audience, your hometown radio station. All of you can work together to create a stage for grassroots music in a fun, entertaining atmosphere that is respectful of the audience and the artists at the same time.

What a great way to celebrate this vital, exciting and growing musical art form, whether it's folk, blues, bluegrass, country, old-timey or new singer-songwriters.

And you're not alone . . . WoodSongs Coffeehouses are springing up all over the country. Just think, while you organize the coffeehouse in your hometown, dozens of other cities are doing the exact same thing!

To make things run smoothly, we've come up with plan so that everyone will run the WoodSongs Coffeehouse with the same spirit of intent.

1. We will never ask you for money
2. We give you the right to use the WoodSongs name at no charge
3. You promise to hold the coffeehouse at least four times during the year.
4. You promise to run a clean show that families can attend if they choose, you won't damage the reputation of the WoodSongs name and you will be fair with the artists who play the coffeehouse

The WoodSongs Coffeehouse Startup Manual is full of helpful ideas and suggestions to get you going.

Well, that's all I have to say . . time for me to pick up my guitar and banjo and hit the road. Thanks for coming to the WoodSongs Coffeehouse and for tuning in to the weekly broadcast of the WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour!

Folk on!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Burton".

e-mail Michael: [michael@woodsongs.com](mailto:michael@woodsongs.com)



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## Starting a WoodSongs Coffeehouse is easy.

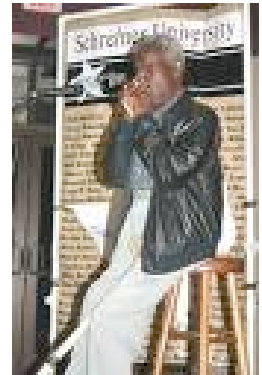
By the term "coffeehouse" we mean a clean, acoustic, quiet listening space for artists and audiences to enjoy each other's music and encouragement. It's the kind of place that whole families can visit. It can be your home, an existing cafe or coffeehouse, a church or school basement ... anyplace that is clean, accessible and easy for you to use.



### STEP ONE:

Find a clean, respectable coffeehouse, club or venue with a wholesome reputation that is easily accessible to the public. Many times you can use a school auditorium or church as a venue. There may be a coffeehouse, health food store, club, church, music store, cyber cafe or small theater in your hometown that already presents music that would be eager to participate. Many venues will be glad to work with you just to get folks into the room.

The venue should seat 30 or more folks comfortably. We recommend nothing over a 200-seat capacity to start. Often, the venue will take a small percentage of the ticket price or simply be happy with all the food and drinks they will sell. **An ideal location to start would be your living room.** No need to start big ... sometimes 20-30 friends make for a lovely evening. We have a WoodSongs Coffeehouse in Las Vegas where the owner turned his garage into a mini concert hall ... dubbed the "Garage-Ma-Hall."



### STEP TWO:

**FACT:** Artists, as a general rule, do not travel with their own sound system.

So, it is likely you will need a working sound system with mics amplification and speakers. We like Shure 58 for vocals, Shure 57 for instruments), the new MACKIE systems are wonderful, so is the EV and JBL/EON brand pa's. Most venues that already have live music have a sound system in place that you can use.

Perhaps a local music store or pawn shop will trade underwriting with your host radio station to provide a PA for the coffeehouse free of charge. Local musicians may have one that they will be glad to let you borrow in exchange for free tickets or, better yet, let them perform now and then.

Of course, if your venue is small ... like your living room ... and the acoustics are good, chances are you won't even need a sound system.



Photo by Rowena Otremba

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## STEP THREE:

### BOOK THE ARTISTS

We highly recommend working with a radio affiliate of the *WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour* to find artists and to promote the events. The station can help select local artists from their playlist, or artists traveling through your area that have already appeared on the national broadcast of the *WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour*.



### BE ADVENTUROUS!

Don't get stuck in the "guy with a guitar" mode ... there is so much great music and art out there. We've seen brilliant singer-songwriters performing with just a cello. Or a mountain lap dulcimer. Or a harp. And, sure, the guitar. The audience only cares that they are passionate and good!

Once you have the venue, the sound system secured, the artist booked and local radio station on board to help out,

## STEP FOUR:

### PROMOTE IT. Get the word out. Spread the love. Attract an audience.

Here is where our brilliance for encouraging you to start small becomes evident ... 30 friends in your living room is much easier to fill than 200 in a big club. If 30 show up in your living room, it looks and feels "sold out." If the same 30 show up in that big hall or club, it comes off as a disaster. PERCEPTION IS EVERYTHING!

By working with a nearby radio affiliate of the national broadcast of WoodSongs, you are supporting your coffeehouse and your local station at the same time.

Visit our list of WoodSongs Affiliate Stations and call the program director of the station nearest you. Tell them you want to work with their station to set up a local hometown chapter of the WoodSongs Coffeehouse. Promote the event on the air as "*WXYZ presents the WoodSongs Coffeehouse featuring...*"

No stations in your area carry the show? Contact us and maybe we can help!



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## PROMOTION IDEAS:

### WEBSITE and EMAIL:

It's Free. It's fast. It's simple. And, again, it's FREE.  
Start collecting email address of your music loving friends and relatives. Then ask them to add to your list with friends from their address book. Then invite the friends of the friends to opt in. Always ask first and get permission to add them to your list. Never spam them.

Start a website.

Very soon, we will be able to help you with that.

For example, the WoodSongs Coffeehouse in Las Vegas will have the web address:

[www.woodsongscoffeehouse.com/lasvegas](http://www.woodsongscoffeehouse.com/lasvegas)

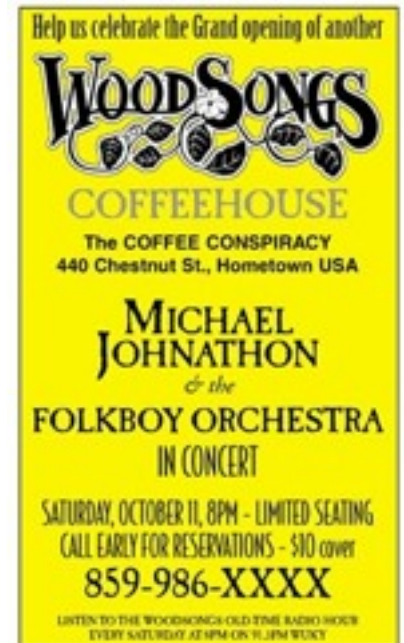


### POSTERS and FLYERS:

Tried and true and it always works. Show restraint, don't slap them on every store front. Ask permission first. Make smaller ones for counter tops. Place them wherever your audience might be: Health Food Stores, Book Stores, Music Stores, Insane Asylums, etc.

Here's an example of a flyer on 8.5x14" paper. Use the WoodSongs art we have sent you. Notice there are not a lot of pictures cluttering up the artwork. Keep it simple, bold and easy to read.

You would be surprised how many posters we've seen that forget to add the address, date or contact phone number. Make the poster in several sizes if you can.



### RADIO and TV:

If you are working with a WoodSongs radio affiliate already, this part is easy. If not, here are some tips:



a) Radio stations sell advertising and they don't give their airtime away for free. However, they try their best to be hometown friendly and will often include events like this on a local on-air "concert calendar" or "arts schedule."

b) Get them the information as far in advance as possible.

Usually three weeks ahead of your event will ensure that the station has enough time to process your event onto their on-air schedule. And the less you say the better. Here's an example:

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“Master guitarist JOE SMITH will be performing an acoustic concert at the WoodSongs Coffeehouse in Homestead Florida this Friday evening at 7PM. Children and families are welcome. Tickets are only \$10 and are available Carl’s Music Store or by calling xxx-xxx-xxxx.”



c) If the local radio station is co-sponsoring your coffeehouse, it means they are donating the advertising in exchange for a sign or poster at your event. The on air spot would be a little different:

“WXYZ FM and the WoodSongs Coffeehouse in Homestead present master guitarist JOE SMITH performing an acoustic concert this Friday evening at 7PM. The concert will be held at the WoodSongs Coffeehouse, 144 Main St in in Homestead, Florida. Children and families are welcome. Tickets are only \$10 and are available Carl’s Music Store or by calling xxx-xxx-xxxx.”

And play nice. If WXYZ is being supportive, don’t go down the road to WZYX and cause hurt feelings. Radio stations tend to enjoy the idea of being exclusive.

## NEWSPAPERS:

Hometown media does not replace a good grassroots campaign. Word of mouth and email lists will always win for you. But sometimes local media can be surprisingly supportive. Especially if you approach them with respect and in an organized manner. **The less you give them to do, the more they will do for you.**

There are two kinds of newspapers:

- 1) the big DAILY newspaper.
- 2) the smaller WEEKLY newspaper.

Write out your announcement as shown below, include a photo of the artist (or a CD with a high res. scan) It should look like this:

“Master guitarist JOE SMITH will be performing an acoustic concert at the WoodSongs Coffeehouse at 144 Main St in Homestead, Florida this Friday evening at 7PM. Children and families are welcome. Tickets are only \$10 and are available at the door, in advance at Carl’s Music Store or by calling xxx-xxx-xxxx.”

### MEDIA CONTACT/ARTIST INTERVIEWS:

Mr. Joe WoodSongs Coffeehouse owner  
(your email and phone)

And get it to the **correct person** at the paper. If you send the concert announcement to the obit writer, well ... you figure it out. Call them up and ask “... *who at the paper handles local concert events?*” Newspapers tend to be more inclusive, so feel free to send the announcement to all papers in your region. If they interview you, talk more about the ARTIST and the SHOW.

## IT'S SHOW TIME!

There are three basic rules to follow when presenting concerts like these.

1) **Start on time.** Many in the audience have hired baby sitters or have gone out of their way to show up. It shows a great respect to the audience and to the artist by starting when you promised you would. Feel free to act as host from stage, welcome your audience and always thank the volunteers for their efforts. Be positive. Be upbeat ... and be BRIEF.

2) **The sound should be clear ... not loud.** Here's a hint, the more REVERB you have the muddier the sound will be. So we recommend that you use NO REVERB. Also, **the louder the PA, the more likely you will have to deal with feedback.** Feedback is that annoying ear-piercing squeal that comes out of speakers when too many folks start screwing around with the knobs. So make sure only ONE person is allowed to touch your sound board.

3) **If you feed them, they will come.** Serve goodies. Munchies. Desserts. Coffees. And yes, charge a fair price for it and make some extra expense money this way. The more home made and organic the better. This kind of audience thrives on ambiance, so give em' whatcha got.



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## How do I financially set up my local Coffeehouse?

If you're not careful, you can easily find out why "Folk rhymes with Broke" pretty quick, so keep it simple, people! Not just on stage, but even in the world of book keeping. In a perfect world you are starting with a small, easy-to-manage living room style concert in your home once a month or so. The best way to do this is to keep track of all your receipts and file a "schedule c" at the end of your year for tax reasons.

Create a financial formula that all your concerts will run by.

FOR EXAMPLE: If you charge a \$10 ticket, we suggest 80% go to the artist, you keep the balance. If you sell the artists CDs and T-Shirts, the artist should keep 90% and the house will retain 10% (that is fair and a standard practice)

If you sell coffee or cookies for \$1, the house keeps 100% of and food concessions.

## I can't do it alone, How do I get help?

Remember this word: **VOLUNTEERS**. People who love music and art also have the passion and spirit to pitch in and help. Put together a small team of hometown volunteers who will assist the operation of your coffeehouse series. It's easy, it's not a lot of work and it doesn't require a lot of time ... IF you stay organized.

Volunteers will sell your concessions, put up posters, maintain your email newsletter, take tickets at the door, run your sound, clean up after the concert is done. Some may have a nice guest room and put the artist up as a hospitality gesture. That would be wonderful!!!!

Treat your volunteers with complete honesty and respect. Never give orders, "ask" them for their help. They are free to say NO to anything. But if they say YES, expect them to keep their word. And it is very important that you keep your word to them. You are setting the tone and spirit of your coffeehouse and volunteer crew.



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### My living room keeps filling up ... what do I do now?

The *WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour* was built with patience. First it was in a 15 seat studio. Then a 70 seat studio. Then a 135 seat auditorium. Now it's in a 400 seat concert hall that fills up every week. If you have a 30 seat room that fills up with 30 people every concert, great! **Ask your audience first if they mind moving.** Maybe it's better and easier to stay right where you are. Remember, it's not how many people that matters ... it's the quality of the event. Can they hear? Can they see? Are the artists happy with the event? If the answer to all of these questions is yes, stay where you are!

## FAQ's

**Why should I try this?** Because it's FUN. It involves you, your local radio station and local artists together with your audience in a very hometown way. It elevates public awareness of the wonderful talent that your hometown has to offer. It endears you to your regional artist community. It ties your local event into the national stage of the *WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour* — and did we mention it's fun?

**We already present music at a coffeehouse or club. Can I simply change it to a WoodSongs Coffeehouse?** Absolutely! You've already put most of the idea in motion. Once you have officially signed up, you can begin promoting the coffeehouse in your community right away.

**Do I really have to sign a contract to be a WoodSongs Coffeehouse?** Yes. Even though we loan the use of it for free, the WoodSongs logo is trademarked, plus we want to protect the spirit and integrity of what it represents and the public image of your own local WoodSongs Coffeehouse.

**Is my Coffeehouse broadcast on the radio?** No. The WoodSongs Coffeehouse is a local performance chapter just for your hometown. It puts the spirit and ideas of the national show into practice on a hometown level. It is not meant to be aired on the *WoodSongs Old-Time Radio Hour* or on local radio. However, folksinger Michael Johnathon will announce your chapter on the air and you will be listed on the Current Coffeehouses page of our website!

**WoodSongs doesn't air yet in my hometown. Can I start a WoodSongs Coffeehouse anyway?** Of course. Simply sign up first. Michael will announce your coffeehouse on the national broadcast and we will list you on our website.

**I want to be involved but I have never done something like this before. What can you do to help?** Once you sign up we will send you a WoodSongs Coffeehouse kit complete with a logo and artwork for posters, permission to use it, suggestions on approaching the media and local newspapers for support, a sample press release, a sample hand out sheet, what kind of artists to book, and other helpful materials. We will list your chapter on the WoodSongs website.