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### Listening space

#### House concerts provide intimate settings for musicians and their fans

By Susan Glairon, Camera Staff Writer

September 6, 2003

As the sun slips behind the mountains, Brian Joseph lifts his acoustic guitar, stands before the picture window and sings his heart out.

In the cozy community house of Nyland Cohousing in Lafayette, a small but enthusiastic audience listens intently as he plays. Some sit on couches, others on chairs around small tables adorned with blue tablecloths and the soft glow of hurricane lamps. Some munch on homemade pies and cakes and drink coffee.

Joseph is playing at a house concert for about 30 people. House concerts are just as they sound: musicians play in a home setting, usually someone's living room, and often the food is a potluck dinner or potluck snacks. In this case it's Nyland Cohousing's "living room," a cozy community house where Nyland's roughly 45 households share dinners and host events.

"My coolest fans are people whom I met at house concerts," says Joseph, 32.

In the intimate surroundings, audience members laugh at his lyrics, banter with the artist in between songs, and mingle with Joseph at the break. In turn, Joseph talks with fans, signs his compact discs and tries out new songs.

For little more than the price of a movie — locally most hosts ask for a \$10 donation — house concerts are gaining popularity with the over-40 crowd, and those who prefer the serenity of house concerts over huge arenas filled with drunk audience members and smoke-filled bars. Typically the music is folk or light rock, although in other parts of the country some host loud pop concerts.

"House concerts are my favorite way to hear music because you can really hear it and really enjoy it and really connect with artist," says David Lowell, 42, organizer of Nyland House Concerts.

The musicians are almost always established professionals.

Joseph, who lives in Los Angeles recently competed against 450 music entries and co-won this year's Lyons Folk Festival's Songwriter's Showcase. He also received second place at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival. Those plugged into the folk scene are familiar with his music.

In better-established venues, the musicians can be quite famous. Russ and Julie's House Concerts in Oak Park, Calif. has attracted such well-known musicians as Karla Bonoff, Jim Messina from Loggins and Messina, John McEuen from the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band and Chris Hillman from The Byrds."

It's difficult to estimate how many homeowners nationwide open their living rooms to live music. Russ and Julie Paris, hosts of Russ and Julie's House Concerts say they collected information from more than 150 house concert locations nationwide, but they believe many more exist. Canada and Australia also have house concerts, they say.

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Locally, there were just two house concert venues in Boulder County in 1999. Now there are at least five countywide spreading from Nederland to Lyons.



Jonathan Castner

Brian Joseph, who co-won this year's Lyons Folk Festival's Songwriter Showcase and received second place at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, sings during a house concert at the Nyland Cohousing in Lafayette.



House concerts can be traced back to parlor parties popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s and as far back to the Middle Ages where wandering minstrels performed in inns and castles. Modern day house concerts have proliferated through the use of the Internet, because those who host house concerts can advertise for free.

It's important because the person hosting a house concert does not collect a fee for the use of his home. But hosts do get other perks.

"It's a fabulous community builder," says Debbie Ching, organizer of the Aspen Meadows House Concert series in Nederland. Ching says she met her husband, Greg, at a California house concert and has developed other close friendships with audience members and the artists. Often, the musician will stay at her home after the show, she says.

Ching says audience members travel regularly to her Nederland home from as far as Denver, Colorado Springs and Fort Collins. Unlike most house concert venues, Ching requires reservations and collects money in advance.

Joseph has played in much larger venues. But this is a setting he loves, he says, where he connects with his fans, where he keeps 100 percent of the entry fees and where CDs sell well.

"I can play for 30 people and make real money," says Joseph, who took home \$300 from the Nyland concert plus proceeds from the sale of 16 compact discs. Several nights later, a house concert in Colorado Springs Joseph took home \$850, before CD sales.

At music halls similar to Swallow Hill in Denver, he makes a lot less per show and sells fewer CDs. At house concerts, it's not unusual to sell CDs to 50 percent of audience members, he says.

House concerts also allow musicians to enter a new market, where other more established venues may be hesitant to host the artist.

As night descends, the warm glow of lights from the ceiling replace the fading light from outside. As audience members leave, they stop to sign Joseph's e-mail list.

"Thank you, you were wonderful" says an audience member as she shakes Joseph's hand.

Joseph smiles. "They are friends and my fans" he says.

#### Upcoming house concerts

**Aspen Meadows House Concerts**, Nederland. Contact Debbie Ching. e-mail: [deborah.ching@magnoliaroad.net](mailto:deborah.ching@magnoliaroad.net) (303) 442-8855. Sept. 14, Kate McDonnell; Sept. 28, The Winstons; Oct. 19, Rachel Garlin and Rebecca Folsom; Nov. 9, Joe Jencks. Reservations required.

**Boulder House Concerts**, Boulder. (303) 449-2444.

**Lyons House Concerts**, Lyons. Contact Steve Clark, e-mail: [sc@folkmusic.org](mailto:sc@folkmusic.org), Web site: <http://homeearthlink.net/folknut/houseconcerts/> (303) 823-6555. Sept. 7, Cosy Sheridan's one woman show —The Pomegranate Seed; Oct. 4, David Massengill.

**Nyland House Concerts**, Lafayette. Contact David Lowell (303) 449-2610. [subscribe@nylandhouseconcerts@yahoo.com](mailto:subscribe@nylandhouseconcerts@yahoo.com); Sept. 12, Tim Grimm; Oct. 11 Stephanie Corby; Dec. 5 Kreg Viesselman.

**Windsong House Concerts**, Louisville; Contact Doug Grinbergs. E-mail: [windsong@pobox.com](mailto:windsong@pobox.com) (303) 665-7086.

Contact Susan Glairon at (303) 473-1392 or [glairons@dailycamera.com](mailto:glairons@dailycamera.com)

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