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# Living room, folding chairs, eats: Welcome to the concert venue

By Michael Halstead

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If you have ever found yourself shopping for new home audio equipment, then it's likely you have heard this inevitable cliché:

"Our product's sound quality is so good you'll think the musicians are right there in your living room!"

However, any audiophile knows there simply is no substitute for the real thing.

The "real thing" being live musicians playing original material, right there in your living room.

Few people in Albuquerque know this truth as well as Neal Copperman and Jeff Hanson. For the past four years, they have skillfully cut out all the intermediary gadgetry, bringing live musicians directly to people's living rooms.

Copperman and Hanson are co-founders of the AMP House Concert Series, an organization devoted to bringing an alternative to musicians and music lovers weary of the club and coffeehouse circuits.

The house concert is a simple concept. Music lovers in the know — through word of mouth or a newspaper calendar listing — get secret directions to an undisclosed house, pay a donation (or don't; it's up to you) to get in and experience an hour or two of anything from folk to jazz to world and everything between.

There is usually mingling before and after the shows, with food and drink usually provided by the host.

The result is a more intimate, music-oriented experience.

"The house concerts provide a level of intimacy between the listener and the musician that's usually lost in a larger venue," says Copperman, a computer analyst at Sandia National Laboratories.

Copperman, 39, and Hanson — a 38-year-old computer engi-

## AMP HOUSE CONCERT

A dance party featuring Prince Diabate, African kora player. 7:30 p.m. Thursday. \$12 donation. Reservations and directions: 842-5073 or abqmusic@att.net.

neer who leaves the public relations to his more outgoing partner — met each other in San Diego during that city's fertile folk scene of the early 1990s.

Copperman's appreciation for small venues came after seeing pop star Jewel performing all original material in a coffee shop.

"Outside of a select group of people in San Diego, I don't think anyone had even heard of Jewel. She performed in a small coffee shop for three hours, and the cover was 3 bucks," Copperman says, shaking his head in wonder. "This is an artist who would eventually be on the cover of Time magazine."

Copperman became hooked on recreating the intimacy of that show.

"I actually moved to Albuquerque with the idea of putting on house concerts," he says.

In 2000, through a combination of chance and favorable job transfers, Copperman and Hanson reunited in Albuquerque. That year they put on their first house concert for 18 people.

AMP, or more formally Albuquerque Music Presenters, has grown considerably since, putting on roughly 18 concerts per year, amassing a 700-person e-mail list and often turning away talent because of booked schedules.

"It's pretty amazing to think how far AMP has come," Copperman says. "Our attendance at these shows hovers between 90 and 100 percent. It's grown so much it's kind of scary."

"People think we're in the music promotion business," Copperman continues, leaning forward

to make his next point: "We're not. One hundred percent of the donations go to the artist. If we're a business, we're not a moneymaking one."

However, success has caught up with AMP. As the organization branches out, promoting more conventional concerts, AMP is considering the unthinkable: booking performance spaces and actually charging a cover.

"I'm a music fan, not a business guy", Copperman says, smiling and rolling his eyes, shifting a little uncomfortably in his chair. "I'm learning a lot of this stuff as I go along."

Still, Copperman gives assurances the house concerts will continue as they always have, where the people who profit are the musicians and the audience.

On a recent Saturday night, Bay Area singer-songwriter Vienna Teng and a string accompaniment performed before a crowd of roughly 70 in Hanson's home west of Old Town.

The crowd mingles before the show, munching on hors d'oeuvres until Copperman signals the guests that the show is about to begin. They quickly take their places in folding chairs.

Teng smiles playfully behind her keyboard and addresses the audience:

"We were recently playing a show at the Paramount in Santa Fe to a disappointing crowd of about 15 people," she says. "After the show, Neal walked up to me and said, 'You know, you really need to play our living room.'"

Teng shrugs and nods in Copperman's direction.

"So, here we are," she says.

The lights dim, and the sound of Teng's soulful voice resonates across the sliver of a room.

There is no mistaking it. It's the real thing. Right there in your living room.