THE

FOLLOWING MYTH

Why solo covers performers should not be expected to fill your venue



A BETTER EXPERIENCE | **MORE RETURN VISITS** | **MORE WORD OF MOUTH**

How live music helps venues create memorable visits, stronger customer loyalty and lasting reputation.

A RESEARCH-INFORMED GUIDE FOR MUSICIANS AND VENUE OWNERS

1 THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Do Solo Cover Music Performers Have Followings?

A restaurant, bar, winery, vineyard, brewery or brewpub books a solo cover music performer. The owner asks: “How many people will you bring?” It sounds reasonable. But it often measures the wrong job.

The central idea: A performer hired to entertain guests should not automatically be expected to supply the guests. Yes, they may have the ability at any given time to bring some new faces in, but it is not a sustainable prospect to expect a “following” from most performers.

A cover act typically performs familiar songs that people already know. Listeners may love the performance without arranging their next outing around that specific artist. Enjoying a musician is not the same as becoming a traveling fan.

At non-ticketed hospitality shows, a better question is: **How will this performer improve the experience for people who visit?**

This guide keeps that distinction front and center while showing how live music can support short-term spending, repeat visits, guest recommendations and the venue’s own marketing.

THE TAKEAWAY

Loving a performance is not the same as following a performer. Hire solo cover music acts to make your venue worth visiting, not to supply your customers.

2 ONE SPREAD / QUICK ANSWERS

Research at a glance

What surveyed guests said they would do when they enjoy the music:

86% — Would return to a venue if they liked its featured live music.

86% — Would recommend the venue if they enjoyed the music.

~80% — Would stay longer when good music is playing.

~60% — Would buy more food or drinks when good music plays.

89% — Of millennials said good music makes an experience more memorable.

1,000 — Frequent U.S. venue-goers surveyed, ages 21+.

Source: BMI / National Research Group (2023), hospitality consumer survey [1]. Percentages are self-reported opinions and intentions; they are not measured increases in revenue, visits or referrals.

78%: LIVE MUSIC CAN DRAW INTEREST. A 2023 UK hospitality industry survey reported that 78% of consumers were more likely to visit venues offering live music [2]. This does not demonstrate an identifiable following for a named solo cover music performer.

What to consider: Guests see music as part of the overall experience. That gives venues a reason to test live music as a hospitality feature—not to assume an individual performer has a built-in crowd.

THE TAKEAWAY

The research supports the appeal of live music—not the assumption that one local performer brings a portable crowd.

3 THE CASE FOR COVER MUSIC PERFORMERS

Why a built-in following is uncommon

The venue is the main attraction, and the performer provides added value. Many visits begin with a food, drink, location, social or service decision and end with guests being pleasantly surprised by the add-on entertainment.

Familiar songs are shared across acts. Recognizable covers delight a room, but a familiar setlist does not automatically make patrons travel between venues.

Attention stays in the room. Guests may sing along, chat, applaud and enjoy themselves without tracking future dates.

Distance and convenience matter. A customer who enjoys a performer locally may not drive across the region to see them again.

Repeat bookings are a better clue than follower counts alone. The right act often fits the room, stays dependable and makes the venue experience stronger.

“Customers loved the music” and “customers followed the artist here” are different claims. The first can be valuable without the second.

THE TAKEAWAY

Guests may love the music and stay engaged without ever becoming traveling fans. That is still a valuable result.

4 THE REAL SERVICE

What the venue is buying

Atmosphere. A lively, welcoming feeling that differentiates an evening from ordinary background audio.

Guest enjoyment. Familiar songs, human interaction and a comfortable energy level.

Reasons to linger when appropriate. Additional chances to order a drink, dessert or snack—especially in social, unhurried settings.

Return-visit potential. Customers remember that a certain venue is enjoyable on music nights.

A reputation worth sharing. Guests can recommend the overall experience to friends, colleagues and social networks.

Flexible entertainment. One performer with a guitar, electric piano or ukulele can work in a small space at manageable sound levels.

None of these benefits is automatic. They depend on performance quality, volume, scheduling, service, venue fit and consistent execution.

THE TAKEAWAY

Great entertainment is more than a setlist: it makes the room welcoming, memorable and worth another visit.

5 TWO WAYS LIVE MUSIC CAN PAY OFF

Short-term and long-term value

The short-term opportunity is simple: a guest enjoys the atmosphere, feels welcome, stays when it makes sense and perhaps makes another purchase.

The long-term opportunity is larger: the guest remembers the night, returns with friends, tells a coworker, posts a photo, tags the venue or leaves a positive review. Those actions reinforce the venue's own brand—not necessarily a performer's fanbase.

Tonight: Better mood, engagement and appropriate upsell opportunities.

Next week: A customer chooses the venue for another pleasant visit.

Over time: Recommendations, recurring habits and stronger local reputation.

Worth noting: a restaurant with long waits may prize comfortable turnover; a taproom, winery or lounge may value longer dwell time. The right outcome depends on the business model.

Rather than asking whether the artist filled the room, ask whether the music helped make the venue the kind of place guests want to come back to.

THE TAKEAWAY

A strong music night can create value tonight through enjoyment and over time through repeat visits and recommendations.

6 A SIMPLE PLAYBOOK

Turn good nights into repeat business

Build a recognizable program. Make live music a dependable part of the venue calendar, even when the performers rotate.

Book for the room. Choose repertoire, style, sound level and personality that complement how customers use the space.

Tell guests what comes next. Mention upcoming music dates on menus, table cards, staff conversations and check presenters.

Give guests an easy way to share. Use an attractive event space, venue social tags and an up-to-date entertainment calendar.

Make the rest of the experience worth repeating. Service, products, prices and hospitality still determine whether visitors return.

Example: A guest enjoys a relaxed Sunday tasting with live music, shares a photo tagging the winery, then comes back the next month with two friends. The performer may never gain a new personal follower, while the venue still benefits.

THE TAKEAWAY

A consistent music program gives guests a reason to return to the venue—even when the performers change.

7 NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR VENUE MARKETING

Promotion is a partnership

Solo performers should advertise their gigs. Most can reasonably maintain a calendar, post event details, tag the venue and occasionally share with a relevant local audience.

But a venue remains responsible for what brings customers through its doors: its identity, products, service, local discoverability, regular marketing and reputation.

Performer contributes: Posts the date, time and venue tag; shares with existing followers; provides images and simple promotional copy; creates a great guest experience.

Venue leads: Maintains website, listings and public event calendar; reaches the wider local market and its customer base; runs consistent brand messaging and any paid campaigns; delivers excellent food, drinks, staff service and operations.

THE TAKEAWAY

The performer spreads the word. The venue earns the visit with its own reputation, marketing and hospitality.

8 PROMOTIONAL WORK INCLUDED IN THE GIG

The extra marketing value

When a performer creates graphics, writes captions, shares the event and tags the venue, that is additional promotional effort accompanying the entertainment. The venue may receive useful reach and may save some routine work.

3–6 hours: Four performers × 45–90 minutes each.

$45–$75: Illustrative hourly rate for comparable freelance work.

$135–$450: Illustrative monthly value of that labor.

Important: These are planning assumptions, not study results. They are not automatic cash savings. Savings occur only if the venue would otherwise have paid someone or spent staff time on the same work.

Three distinct benefits: (1) time saved when work is actually delegated; (2) possible expense avoided when duplicate outside work is eliminated; and (3) added reach when performers share the venue with people the venue might not otherwise contact.

A few gig posts do not replace an agency’s campaign strategy, ongoing SEO, brand management or paid advertising. The fair claim is a marketing supplement bundled with the performance, not a complete replacement for venue marketing.

THE TAKEAWAY

Performer promotion adds real effort to the booking fee—but never replaces the venue’s overall marketing strategy.

9 MATCH THE METRIC TO THE VENUE

Different rooms, different goals

Restaurants. Guest enjoyment, dessert and beverage attach rates, reviews and repeat visits—without undermining needed table turns.

Bars and pubs. Bar sales per guest, welcoming energy, late-evening retention and return visits.

Wineries and vineyards. Tasting experience, appropriate length of stay, bottle purchases, repeat trips and referrals.

Breweries and brewpubs. Taproom engagement, return groups, merchandise or food purchases and social sharing.

These are possible indicators to test locally, not guaranteed effects demonstrated for each venue type.

THE TAKEAWAY

Success looks different by venue: choose the guest and business outcomes that truly matter for your room.

10 A LIGHTWEIGHT 90-DAY TEST

Measure what matters

Before: Choose a few comparable days and decide which outcomes matter: customer satisfaction, checks, repeat visits and recommendations.

During: Track guests, sales per guest, time on site when useful, staffing and whether the volume fit the space.

After: Look at online reviews, venue tags, direct guest comments, signups or repeat-customer indicators.

Compare fairly: Account for weather, holidays, promotions, local events and seasonality.

Decide: Keep and refine acts that make the experience better, instead of judging them mainly by claimed crowd size.

A fair booking question: “Can you deliver a great experience for our customers and help us promote the date?” This is more useful than simply demanding a follower count.

THE TAKEAWAY

Measure the guest experience, spending and return behavior—not simply how many people the performer claims to bring.

11 MAKE THE VENUE WORTH COMING BACK TO

The conclusion

A solo cover music performer may bring a few friends, fans or local supporters. That is welcome. But it should not be the baseline requirement when the booking is fundamentally about hospitality entertainment.

Successful establishments are built on the quality of their products, service, atmosphere and customer relationships. Live music makes those strengths easier to experience, remember and share.

Judge the musician by what the venue hired them to do: deliver an engaging, professional performance that makes the guest experience stronger.

THE VENUE BUILDS THE DESTINATION

Live music helps make that destination memorable.

THE TAKEAWAY

The performer enhances the destination. The venue builds the destination. Together they earn loyalty and word of mouth.

12 SOURCES AND PLAIN-LANGUAGE CAUTIONS

All evidence in one place

[1] BMI / National Research Group (2023). Survey of 1,000 frequent U.S. bar/restaurant guests: 86% willing to return, 86% willing to recommend; nearly 80% stay longer and nearly 60% buy more with good music. Stated intentions.
SOURCE LINK

[2] CGA by NielsenIQ / GigRealm (2023). 78% reported greater likelihood of visiting a venue with live music. Industry consumer survey, UK market.
SOURCE LINK

[3] Caldwell & Hibbert (2002). Restaurant research: music preference related to dining time; time spent was strongly linked with spend. Observational context.
SOURCE LINK

[4] Restaurant field experiment (2024). Slow music lengthened visits; bills did not differ by group. A useful counterweight to claims that more time always means more revenue.
SOURCE LINK

[5] Berger & Schwartz (2011). Word-of-mouth research on public visibility and environmental cues. Not a direct test of performers or music-night posts.
SOURCE LINK

The labor-dollar scenario in Chapter 8 is an illustration, not a published finding. No cited source establishes a typical solo cover performer’s portable following or a universal monetary return on booking live music.

THE TAKEAWAY

Strong evidence begins with honest labels: survey intentions are not guaranteed sales, and planning examples are not studies.