

# Window Serenades

*Window Serenades* share the joy of live music with isolated elderly people, bringing solo musicians or small groups to play outside nursing home windows for those who request a song.

Created as a socially-distanced program for Make Music Day on June 21, 2020, and a way to provide safe musical performances during a global pandemic, Window Serenades can be just as relevant in the winter, reaching those who are away from their families during the darkest days of the year.

“ With their masks on and their sheet music ready, four members of the Moorpark Symphony Orchestra each took a deep breath before creating a crescendo of melodies outside of Thousand Oak’s Belmont Village senior living community.

The quartet’s performance, which featured classic rock songs from artists like Stevie Wonder and The Beatles, brought the retirement home’s residents to their feet as they peeked their heads out of their windows and let out cheers from their patios.

“The response was really wonderful from not just the people there, but the staff as well,” said violinist Cyndi Hall, who organized the performance. “With COVID and everything going on, these seniors have been so isolated... The concert brought a little sense of normalcy and a little bit of joy back to their lives.”[...]

The four musicians picked out and rehearsed a dozen songs by well-known artists that seniors would remember.

The quartet played one performance outdoors for five seniors. Audience members were so overjoyed by the concert that they asked the orchestra to return to play jazz or something else they could dance to. In Thousand Oaks, the quartet played at four different spots throughout the property so residents could hear the music and watch from their rooms. – “Bringing music, joy to people’s lives,” by Christina Cox, *Moorpark Acorn*, June 26, 2020





## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- **A group of enthusiastic musicians.** Although a solo musician could do a Window Serenade on their own, it's more fun if there are multiple artists who can perform in rotation, or cover more territory at a large nursing home.
- **Any gear you need to perform.** To stay socially distanced, don't ask the nursing home to provide anything. Bring your own music stand, guitar amp batteries, warm jacket, and anything else you need.
- **“Make Music Winter” or “Window Serenades” signage.** However extensive the nursing home's internal communications, assume that some people never got the message and won't know why you are there or what you are doing. Having Make Music Winter signage or clothing will address any potential confusion.



## HOW TO ORGANIZE

Window Serenades generally follow one of three approaches.

1. **Colored paper shows which windows receive serenades.** Residents who want a serenade are instructed by the nursing home to tape paper of a certain color inside their window on December 21st. The musicians then stop at each identified window and perform one or two songs. In this scenario, you will need to coordinate a time for the musicians to come when the residents will actually be in their rooms. This approach can work if the nursing home is organized enough to distribute the paper and work out the timing.
2. **Musicians travel around the perimeter and play a song every few windows.** If the performance will occur while the residents are spread throughout the facility, or in their rooms but the home can't coordinate the colored paper, musicians can walk around the grounds, playing a song or two every few windows as appropriate. This can also be a backup to option 1 if the musicians arrive and find no papers displayed.
3. **Musicians perform in one specified location.** If the performance will occur while the residents are gathered together in a communal room with an open window, the musicians can play a longer set for everyone there together.



## Coordinate with a nursing home

When you call a nursing home that you're interested in working with, ask to speak to the Activities Director. Talk to them about Window Serenades, explain the approaches this could take (#1, 2, and 3 above), and ask if they are interested.

- Many will be skeptical at first, as they are used to being sold entertainment programming. Be sure to mention several times that this is completely free. A brief explanation of Make Music Winter (direct them to [makemusicwinter.org](http://makemusicwinter.org)) can give context.
- If you make initial contact more than a month before December 21st, be sure to follow up regularly so it stays on their mind and on the calendar, as they likely have a lot of schedules they're juggling.
- Some Activities Directors will have a preferred time for the performance, others will want you to tell them when the musicians are coming and they'll plan accordingly. Whatever you work out, confirm the details over the phone, and also in a follow-up email.



## Prepare your music

- While Window Serenade repertoire can be anything you please, your audience is likely to respond best to recognizable classics, holiday music, and upbeat songs.
- Typically, performances are brief (it doesn't take long to make an impact!) and you can feel free to repeat the same songs as you walk from window to window.
- Consider your volume, the acoustics of the outdoor space, and what's needed to be heard from behind a window.





## WHAT TO DO ON DECEMBER 21

- Check in with the nursing home a few hours before the performance is scheduled to make sure the staff that day are expecting the musicians.
- Ask the nursing home for the phone number of a contact person to call when the musicians arrive, to give them a heads up.
- Stay flexible. If the plan you arranged in advance doesn't work out exactly, there will still be a way you can share the wonderful music you've prepared.
- Have fun! This may be the first time in months some residents have heard live music, and it's certain to bring joy.

