As I write this in June 2020 some parts of the world are emerging from Covid-19 shutdown and isolation. For perhaps the first time in history there was virtually no music being played to live audiences. However clubs, bars, restaurants, and other venues are reopening and keen to get back to business and I am certain music will still be a big part of their offering yet live music could be constrained for some time.

The following was written as the 'Vid' was breaking. But I won't update the main text as it remains relevant. Yet how we get our music to our audiences Post Cee Vee (PCV) is a whole new challenge with some immediate solutions such as online performance and shows. Getting paid though will be an ongoing headache. And that is where performing live comes in. So I will leave you, the people of the future, to apply local knowledge and contemporary events to your personal situation. But we're musicians! Our job is to innovate. I'm sure we will cope. Enjoy the guide :-)

Electronic Music Performance Guide

You've been playing, writing and mixing some great electronic music and now you want to take it to the world. But how? Should you DJ, take your laptop, use groove boxes or play instruments?

This PDF is an Electronic Music Performance Guide and an attempt to clarify some of the unknowns we face when we decide to produce and perform **electronic music**. Playing live can be an expensive and time consuming business with lots of false starts. This Guide is designed to assist some major decisions we need to consider before playing live. Such as:

Why do I want to perform electronic music?
        To share the love, improve my skills, party, see the world, make money? This could define your budget.

How will I make/perform music?
        With software, hardware, instruments, with others or by myself?

What styles or genres should I play?
        I'll get into genres in a bit but first we usually arrive at a preferred genre from an irrational emotional place. Or because your mates are into it. It's the music you love. But beware your choice of genre will have consequences. Death Metal bands don't often play weddings!

Where do I find gigs?
        Every venue and hence audience has particular needs. It is your job to match/attract them. Restaurants want background. Cafes want vibe. Clubs want a full house dancing. Concert halls want to fill seats. Or you create your own gigs - hire a venue, go online, get some other acts involved, market the gig.

The answers to the above questions will define your place in the performance matrix yet can also limit you. Flexibility is required but can be expensive.

So before we get into the Guide…

We have to talk about Genres

Electronic Music is such a vague term. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_music

I'll use Justice Potter Stewart's argument from 1964 regarding porn "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description… But I know it when I see it…"

First the electronic music I envisage is not EDM, Big House or fist thumping anthems. Nor is it glossy synth pop ballads sung in falsetto/vocoder by teenagers (yes I'm looking at you Apple Music). It is cool, personal, intelligent, emotional and interesting. At one end it is designed to make you move your body. It has groove. Hence it derives from House, Funk, Disco, Techno. At the other end it comes from thinking, experimentation, Musique concrete, Jazz, IDM, Eno and Kraftwerk etc. But we can't call it underground because underground is now mainstream.
https://www.magneticmag.com/2016/10/underground-myth-term-no-longer-electronic-music-culture/

To clear up the whole genre wars in this Guide I am just using the limited list of genres from traxsource.com plus few others.

Here is their passionate mantra:

> " We are the home of Real House Music! This phrase has never been more relevant than in today's over-saturated post EDM market. With electronic music continuing to take a central stage with widespread global attention, the necessity to champion 'quality over quantity' and 'artistry over hype' is even more real to us than ever before. We uphold the soul of the scene and defy the faceless and commercial enterprises so prevalent today. For us, it's always all about integrity and keeping it fiercely independent. **Not everybody understands House Music… but we do."** Traxsource.com/about

I somewhat agree but would also argue that less commercial genres such as modular driven ambient and IDM, immersive soundscapes and schoolboys making fart loops should get a look in. You don't have to conform to genres though since like Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith, Four Tet, Aphex Twin and Nils Frahm you can also grow your own audience despite being on the 'edge'.

And you can find a current view of 'Electronic' here: https://pitchfork.com/features/lists-and-guides/best-electronic-albums-2019/

So you want to perform your music?!

There is a continuum from a DJ playing other producers' highly polished mixes to a single girl on stage cranking out techno on an MPC1000. And in between we get vintage and analog purists, DJs, in-the-box, DAWless, tape, software, hardware, instruments, percussion, samples, looping vocals, solo acts and 'bands'.

This chart and table are centred around electronic music performance. So regardless of the format you choose to do that with it usually involves entertaining people, filling venues and getting paid. It's a business. So some compromises may be needed.

The Electronic Music Performance Guide

How can you find your place in this alphabet soup of genres and styles? First we need to define the critical elements that you will combine to create a unique performance solution. In this Guide I have used Energy and Interaction as the major axes. The flow is from the low energy and passive styles/gigs through to high energy and interactive performances. Not exactly scientific but hey…

Electronic Music - Live Performance Guide (Diagram)

		Performance Style/Function		
C	Hi NRG	Melodic/Rhythmic	Dance Groove	Play/Dance Hard *Pumpin'*
B	Cruisy	Atmosphere/Vibe	Performance Focus	Entertaining (people focus)
A	Low NRG	Background	Ambient/Experimental	Entertaining (music focus)
		Passive	Active	Inter-Active
		1	2	3
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Energy in Performance

This is an easy one. Performance ranges from very chill and spacey through to heart thumping, adrenalin fuelled workouts. It is mainly about tempo and rhythmic drive. Not necessarily passion since we would hope passion is a part of every performance, regardless of energy.

I have labelled these three levels of NRG **Low NRG - Cruisy - High NRG**. Self explanatory!

Interaction in Performance

This is not just about whether you are an introvert or extrovert. Both do equally well in music. It is more about your 'Show'. At ambient and background gigs the audience may have zero interaction with you the performer but that doesn't mean they are not listening/absorbing. Other venues will expect you to whip the crowd into a frenzy. Playing 'instruments' adds interactive value. And even if you're playing pre-recorded tracks or launching scenes you should try and at least look active.

I have labelled these three levels of interaction **Passive - Active - Inter-active**.

How to use the Guide

This 3x3 matrix gives us nine unique cells that describe a type of gig. There could of course be lots of overlap. I for instance do art gallery openings where I start the night in ambient mode and noodling on my small Modular rack with the reverb on 11. Then after speeches and everyone has had a few drinks I crank it up to about 126 bpm with a variety of House and Techno using a groove box and synths.

		Electronic Music	Performance Guide		©2020 Paul McKey	
Box#	**Style/Purpose**	**BPM**	**Genre**	**Venue**	**$**	**Your Audience**	**Performance**
C3	Play/Dance Hard *Pumpin'*	130+	Drum n Bass, Techno, House, Trance, EDM	Clubs, Festivals	$$$	Yoof, Ravers, Mono-genre fans.	DJs, Producers, Electronic
C2	Dance Groove	120-130	House, Techno, Tech House, Trance	Clubs, Festivals, Parties	$$	There to dance	DJs, Producers, Electronic, synths
C1	Melodic/ Rhythmic	110-125	Minimal/Melodic, Electro House	Clubs, Parties, Weddings	$$	There to dance	DJs, Producers, Electronic, synths
B3	Entertaining (people focus)	120 - 130	EDM, Big House etc. Performance styles	Shows, Concerts, Clubs, Festivals, Parties, Weddings	$$$	There to party and be entertained	DJs, Producers, Electronic, synths, guitars, Vox
B2	Performance Focus	110-120	Performance styles, Funk, Soul, RnB, House, techno, IDM	Concerts, Lounge Bars, Clubs, Festivals, Parties	$$	Dancing, listening, chatting, swaying hips, absorbing. Multi-Genre fans.	DJs, Producers, Electronic, Bands, synths, keys, guitars, horns, Vox
B1	Atmosphere/ Vibe	80-120	Lounge, Acid/Nu Jazz, Chill House, Afro, Latin, Soul, Funk	Corporate, Lounge bars, Restaurants, Cafes, Parties, Art Galleries	$$	Drinking, Chatting, absorbing - standing, sitting	DJs, Electronic, synths, Modular, keys, guitars, horns, Vox
A3	Entertaining (music focus)	80-120	Ambient, Acid/Nu Jazz, Chill House, Afro, Latin	Shows, Bars, Corporate, Restaurants, Cafes, Concerts	$$$	There to listen and enjoy - dancing, sitting	Producers, Electronic, Modular, synths, keys, guitars, percussion, horns, Vox
A2	Ambient/ Experimental	60-100	Ambient, Experimental, Soul, Nu Jazz	Corporate, Restaurants, Cafes, Art Galleries, Museums	$	Listening, chatting, absorbing - standing, sitting	Electronic, Modular, synths, keys, Vox
A1	Background	60-100	Ambient, Experimental	Restaurants, Cafes, Art Galleries, Museums	$	Absorbing the sounds/atmos - standing, sitting	Modular, Electronic, synths, keys, percussion
	These are a vector of interaction and energy. Not exactly science but a starting point!	*These are just guides*	*From Vibe to Groove. Lower BPM could be Lo-Fi. High BPM typically Hi-Fi. Mono-genre vs multi-genre.*	*Matching the music/style to the venue is the hardest part. Either seek out 'your' venues or conform to what exists.*		*Matching music to audience. Corporate and restaurants etc. need high quality background/ vibe. At a certain energy and stimulant level dancing will break out.*	*For me, DJ means playing mainly other people's stuff. Producers means original material using either DJ decks or Ableton (in the box). Electronic means Ableton and/or groove boxes driving synths, modular and drum machines etc. in real time. Then musicians add hardware synths and instruments to increase performance/interaction.*
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ELECTRONIC MUSIC PERFORMANCE GUIDE

Some examples:

• If you're into High NRG you might want to invest in getting your DJ skills up and building a large library of music for all types of gigs. Remember you can also download an Eighties pack and do a wedding occasionally (just don't tell your mates).

• If you're a producer you most likely have a studio so should invest in a laptop, Ableton and maybe some instruments and concentrate on venues in the Cruisy -high NRG and active - inter-active levels. Play all your own stuff in a cafe or small concert and do a mix for clubs and festivals.

• If you're into ambient, chill or lounge target venues where the music is more about vibe and quality than quantity. Venues that ten years ago would've had a classical string trio will these days hire an electronic solo or duo as long as they know you scrub up OK and won't scare the punters. I'm talking museums and galleries, for opening nights and special events.

• The central cell is Performance. This is typically where you are on a stage with a paying audience facing you. You could be playing all original material which is both electronic and instruments. You are in control of the dynamics and while the crowd may be dancing they are probably also listening intently. This setup requires a lot more effort than dropping into your local club with a USB stick. This has primarily been the domain of bands yet electronic duos are muscling in.

What to do?

• While you don't have to define yourself completely at this stage it is good to have a direction.
• If you want to Produce you will need a studio - small is fine.
• If groove and lounge are your style invest in Hi-Fi production and maybe some good instruments (like a stage piano) and good playing skills.
• If you want to be an independent DJ invest in music, decks and maybe a small PA.
• If you want to DJ Festivals then spend every waking hour in the studio refining your next set of bangers! Practice turning knobs that don't need turning!
• If you're a hardware lover invest in good synths and groove boxes so you can recreate and improvise live. Lo-Fi is fine for this. (Deluge, Korg, Elektron, Akai, Yamaha, Roland, Arturia, Behringer etc.)
• Plan when you will use backing loops, how to improvise, how to transition songs and how to deal with mishaps. Practice, practice, practice before you play live.
• If you want corporate gigs you may want to work with a vocalist or break out the keys, and be prepared to do the odd cover.

You get the drift.

There are then two approaches to getting gigs:

1. You have a refined your style/show and you seek venues that conform to your crowd/abilities/preference. Make a list of these or agents who hire for them and then define your travel requirements, fees etc. and get marketing. Mix with the fans. Release original material. Be seen, be heard, be read!

2. The above is great if you live in a city where there are often single-genre clubs you can target. But the other alternative is you take what you can get - within reason. In the last month I have played in an art gallery, house/techno club and a cruisey Sunday afternoon bar and restaurant. It's a challenge because I use groove boxes and synths and write most of my material. But I can tailor the music to the venue. If you use Ableton it will be easier yet you still have to develop a couple of hours of music for a variety of sets. If you are just a straight DJ then it is simple - Just load Serato or Traktor up with a ton of songs then design and practice your set before the gig.

I hope that helps. There are a million things I have left out but that is the beauty of this biz. There is no right way. The objective is to get out and play music. I do it to make people happy and to promote electronic music (it certainly ain't for the money).

Just do what you do do well and have fun and you'll find an audience :-)

https://paulmckey.com/files/1060523/electronic-music-performance-guide-images-spiderlab.pdf