

Best Practices for Writing a Concert/Festival Review

CFRC is seeking volunteer program hosts to write reviews of concerts and/or festivals they attend that they might otherwise discuss on their own programs. The station will publish your reviews on its website, its community newsletters, and also share on its social media platforms. We would love to see reviews of local concerts and festivals in particular, but we welcome any review of any concert or festival you attend even outside the region.

Interested? Here are some important things to think about before you go to the big show!

Concert and festival reviews break down for audiences what happened at a particular event, when the event occurred, and what musicians performed. Review writing should also convey the overall mood and experience capturing what it was like to be in the space, among the people and performances. These reviews are also helpful to place concerts and festivals into a broader context, for example, comparisons to other performances, a current tour, a new album release, a celebration of something, a fundraiser, or the recurrence of an annual festival event. Further, concert and festival reviews can help audiences discover new artists on the bill and learn more about them, while providing information about the venue and the promoters and organizers.

Still further, like album reviews, concert and festival reviews allow YOU to share your own experience of the event in your own voice and develop more critical and authoritative knowledge that you can convey in writing, but also during on air recaps during your CFRC radio program. Rather than saying 'the show had good vibes' (which tells people nothing), you can learn to talk more meaningfully about your in person experience on air. This can help build your audience's confidence in you as a CFRC Radio Host who not only presents fantastic music, but can speak in a fun, friendly, engaging, well-informed, and accessible manner.

There is no specific set of standards to follow when writing concert/album reviews. If anything, it's best to write in your own way and in your own words and perspectives. Also, while being a musician certainly has its advantages, you do not need to be a musician in order to review concerts or festivals formally. What you do need is a good ear and attention to details :)

Still interested? Let's jump into some discussion of important things to think about before you go to the big show!

Preparation!

First off, we recommend reaching out to CFRC staff to see if this is a local show put on by a group with which CFRC has a partnership. The station **MAY** be able to secure you a press pass. We cannot guarantee this access, but there are often opportunities for free tickets or guest list status for CFRC volunteers **IF** they are covering the event and representing the station. If CFRC does not have a relationship with the promoter, you can also contact them

directly telling them who you are and that you wish to do coverage of the concert/festival on your program. This is also a good opportunity to book interviews with bands before the actual show or arrange to do concert/festival ticket giveaways on your show/social media to help increase listenership and engage with your audience! It's also a great opportunity to establish relationships with promoters that can lead to access to future events for you as well 😊

Another great tip is to get yourself on the local concert-festival scene mailing lists, which will keep you up to speed with what's happening and provide you with direct contact information to promoters and venues.

Thirdly, did you know your show can have a CFRC email attached to it? Reach out to station@cfrc.ca to set up your own CFRC email that you can use to correspond with musicians, promoters, and venues! It's a great way to also have fans reach out to you with song requests and feedback alongside your social media.

Fourthly, start to do your research. Are you heading to a concert at Broom Factory, The Mansion, Ale House, Toucan, Grad Club, The Spire or even one regionally or beyond? Know who the act(s) is/are in advance, when and where they are playing, learn about their labels, catalogues, band history, genre details, touring details if any etc. Read their press kits and review their social media. Also learn more about the promoter and venue as well through their websites, social media and press kits. Basic information like this should be in your review, and remarked upon when talking about a concert/festival you attended on your radio show.

Heading to a multi-day festival like Skeleton Park Arts Festival, Blue Skies, Wolfe Island Music Festival, or even something like Osheaga or the Ottawa Blues Festival? Like above, do your research and plan ahead. Earmark the shows, exhibits, workshops, industry events, after parties etc. that you want to attend. Know the acts, learn about their labels, catalogues, band history, genre & contributions, touring history etc. Read press kits related to the festival itself, learn its history, learn about the organizers and partners, and pay attention to their social media too. Be sure to also know the schedule and the location for each festival function you will cover including stage and/or venue locations. Don't forget that while you may not see every act or attend every event, it's useful to have solid knowledge on what's happening festival-wide so that way when you are taking it all in, you can properly contextualize your written review, and also on air during your own radio show.

During your research process, imagine you are writing this for someone who has never been to the venue, festival, or seen the act(s) - what context would they want to know to best appreciate and benefit from your review?

And once the research is out of the way, do your logistical planning including ensuring you have tickets and transportation in place. Don't forget to bring your camera or cell phone! Use it to take snaps or short video clips in the crowd and on the stage live on location and tag [@cfrcmusic](#)! Or takeover CFRC's social media while live on location (download the request form [here](#))!

You can also borrow a CFRC Zoom H2 handy recorder so you can do interviews with band members and or attendees live on location! Reach out to [Chancellor Maracle](#) to borrow this equipment. A \$20 deposit is required to borrow a zoom mic. Review our how to use Zoom recorders [document](#) and [video](#) resources as well before you go!

Don't forget to bring a notepad and a couple of pens! These will be really helpful to jot down thoughtful notes and observations throughout your time at the event!

Finally, before you go, if you are not entirely familiar with the act(s), listen to music from the acts that you intend to see so that you are familiar with songs and their titles and you are not left guessing off the floor. Sometimes you can find show playlists on Spotify to help you get a sense of what to expect.

At the Event

For concerts and festivals, you may wish to focus on the actual repertoires played, the enthusiasm of both the act(s) and the crowd and whether it translated into an overall good performance and experience. Pay attention to things that added to - or took away from the experience - various aspects such as lighting and sound quality, band dynamics, organization between sets/bands/stages etc. But your focus overall should remain WHAT was played.

For example, *for concerts* was this a tour supporting a new album and the headliner playing all new stuff or was there a good mix of old favorites with new fun discoveries? How well executed was the music itself? Did the band seem energized and well rehearsed or clearly very tired from a long road trip? How does the gig compare to other shows on a tour if they are on tour, or shows you've seen with them in the past? Focus on the music that really stood out and got the crowd up and rocking. What was the song, and what did the band members do to energize the audience?

For festivals, you'll see a lot of acts. You'll want to focus on the music you did encounter similar to the above, but also convey how the festival itself has or is changing, evolving and growing from previous years (use personal experience, crowd interviews or research). You'll want to be able to capture specifically the festival events you attend, but place these within the context of the whole festival itself. Is there a particular theme for the festival? Do the events and performances line up appropriately with the festival's overall scope? Talk to attendees and vendors live on location about their own experience of the event while developing your own story-telling narrative with a focus on moments that really stood out in a 'oh wow, you should have been there' aspect. Try to capture notes on unforgettable moments including the highlights and lowlights. You don't have to be entirely glowing in your review, but make sure you have concrete examples if mentioning things that didn't work.

Pencil down some notes while the action is on stage. Chat with folks between sets to get a better sense of where the audience members are at as well. Important: it's always great to talk

to the sound and light technicians too, but ask first as they will be incredibly focused on making the show actually work. Perhaps politely ask during a break for a comment right at the end before they start to load out. Never interrupt a sound or light tech while they are working just as you would not a musician on stage.

GET WRITING!

After the big show, it's time to get writing! Start drafting your review in a coherent manner that allows you to tell a story about the concert or festival and your experience of it. Other elements that you may wish to consider in your review include:

- Identifying how you felt during the event and how you felt at the end of it all. Try to identify how you felt with particular songs and or festival performances and what elements made you feel that way (for example: compelling lyrics, hair tingling instrumentals, amazing pyrotechnics and visuals?).
- Another more objective method is to dive into describing the actual music performed and the level to which elements like rhythm, harmony & melody, tempo & timbre, pitch or even sheer intensity excelled during the performance alongside transitions between sets and between artists.
- Is there something about the performance that didn't work for you? Try to identify what didn't work (for example, tempo? Instrumentals? Poor quality sound or amplification? Poorly executed set transitions? Describe these in detail as you will for elements that worked very well and do so in a professional, objective manner.
- You can certainly use comparisons in your writing to other concerts and festivals, but don't go overboard....does the performance remind you of a past experience with the same act or festival or production undertaken at the same venue or overseen by the same promoter? This may help readers get a sense of growth and trajectory for a particular act or perennial festival.

Do keep in mind that while CFRC will publish your concert and festival reviews, be sure to keep your writing simple with specific examples without a lot of flowery language. Use your own words and perspectives to develop a good solid story about the concept of the performance and your experiences and evaluations of it.

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