



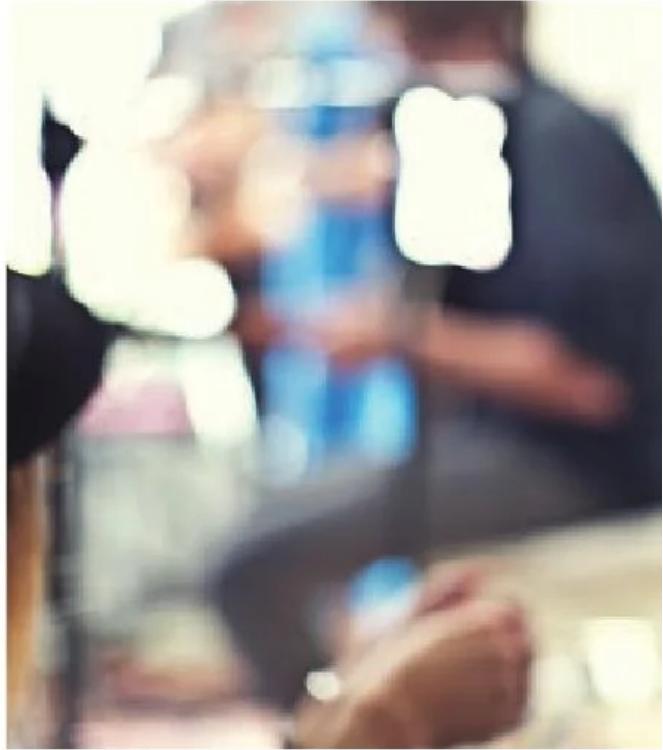
*Sofar,
so good*

 **TOTALLY STOCKHOLM**



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SONGS FROM A ROOM



The Sofar Sounds community brings live music into your living room. We paid a visit to someone's apartment on Södermalm when the Stockholm branch had their one-year anniversary earlier this month.



I'm cycling through Sofo

on a gorgeous fall Saturday, rushing to get to my destination in time. It's edging on for 3 o'clock and I'm cursing the hill on Bondegatan and the fact that this flat is further up than I thought. I finally spot a couple of cute hipsters standing outside a nondescript door of your average apartment building and figure this must be the place. One of them is holding a guest list containing the names of 40 or so people fortunate enough to be chosen as the audience for this event. The address was sent to us just the previous day, and we only have a 15-minute window to enter the premises before the doors close and the show begins. Welcome to Sofar Sounds, the world's largest live music discovery community, curating secret, intimate gigs in people's flats and bringing the magic back to live music.

The idea for Sofar (from the Leonard Cohen album *Songs From A Room*) arose in London back in 2009 when three friends, just back from a Fiery Furnaces gig where they could barely hear the singer over the loud drunken chatter and clinking bottles, said to each other there must be some other way to experience live music. Out of this, the Sofar concept was born, turning ordinary people's living rooms into pop-up venues for a couple of hours, creating a completely unique gig experience never to be repeated again. Now, only five years on, the movement has reached over 80 cities in more than 30 countries, spreading

like wildfire amongst true music fans that are not satisfied with paying a fortune for a performance they cannot hear, by an artist they can barely see. "There's been a lack of real connection between the audience and the artist and we wanted to create an environment as magical as the music," says one of the original founders, Rafe Offer. "It seems to have hit a chord everywhere."

Rafe couldn't have been more right, or succeeded better with his vision. Here I am, five years after that first gig in a tiny flat in North London (where all you could hear while the musician played his songs was his grandmother's clock ticking), and even after the rapid growth of the concept the promoters stay faithful to the original vision, keeping the audience small and sticking to the same rules: you must stay during the whole show, and you have to shut up and listen.

Entering the venue of the day I have to take a large step over a big pile of shoes that has accumulated by the front door. Everyone's a bit shy as they arrive, not really knowing what to make of this unusual situation that has thrown us all together for the afternoon. It feels odd being at a complete stranger's home in the middle of the day, queuing for the bathroom while observing family photos on the wall, mixed with classic Bauhaus posters. There's one of those retro Gustavsberg bowls full of Karamellkungen candy on a dresser,





beside some empty cans of hipster-favoured pale ale, already indicating the sort of crowd I'm about to spend the next couple of hours with.

The audience is already sat on the floor (a rough estimation tells me about 80 percent is sporting horn-rimmed spectacles), squeezed together in the bright living-room bathed in sunlight. The first band is setting up in the dining room, their chords snaking past piles of art books, resting on Persian rugs. Then everything goes completely silent and all you can hear is the collective breathing of anticipation before the first note resonates around the room.

I don't know if it's the quality of the bands or the setting in which their music is played, but the three short sets totally blow me away. And the small imperfections, noticeable because you are so completely focused on the performance, just add to the charm. "Bands are never more nervous than when they appear at our nights," says Offer. "Kill It Kid had just played to 2,000 people before they visited us, but they were terrified. When you can hear every note and they can see every expression, it leaves the bands nowhere to hide."

But what is it about the Sofar concept

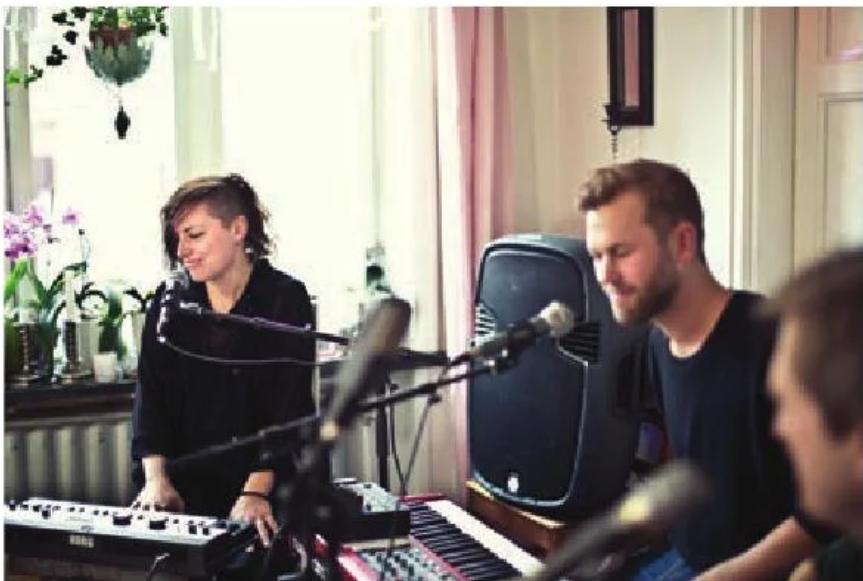
that has made it such a hit, circulating the globe in five years, and included celebrity guests, hosts and performers? "So much today is about technology and a lack of real connection," says Offer. "I think this is a very human counter-response to that, saying we want to be together, we are people, not machines, and the best way is in a closer more intimate way."

This rapid spread could also have to do with Offer's prolific background in marketing (he has held senior marketing positions with both Disney and Coca-Cola), and although Sofar is a non-profit organization, existing purely for the love of music, the team has been incredibly smart about spreading the word. All donations, made by the traditional passing of a hat, go straight to the talented volunteers in charge of documenting these unique events on film, therefore making sure that the world outside those lucky 40 on the guest list gets to see them, as well as giving free marketing material to unknown bands. Sofar thus skillfully balances the real-life experience with the reality of social media, and this digital strategy has not only kept the organization viable, but is on its way to revolutionize the way we consume live music.

Could it be that the big stadium days,



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where that dot in the distance could be anyone, are on their way out? In these post-recession times of couch-surfing, AirBnB and public dinner clubs taking place in people's private homes, Sofar could very well be the next step towards independence from the market, giving the power back to the people.

"People are creating their own way of entertainment more and more these days and building up communities", says Kattis Björk, who started Sofar Stockholm a year ago. Kattis had been working with big names in fashion both in London and New York when she ended up at a Sofar gig one night and got so inspired that she decided to get involved and set up a branch in her native Stockholm. "People are moving between countries so frequently nowadays so it's very easy for ideas to spread," she explains.

"I initially decided to start Sofar in Stockholm because people aren't typically very sociable here, but what really surprised me was finding out that the audience here was a lot more open and social than in London and New York for example! This might have to do with the fact that our gigs are typically smaller than the ones in London and New York, just because people live much smaller here, making the event even more intimate. Sofar is a very sociable thing and a great way of meeting people. It's very easy to strike up a conversation with someone you're sat next to on a living room floor, when the barriers come down. And you obviously have something in common since you're both there, enjoying the music."

Sofar Stockholm started out very small, with an initial audience of just friends and family. "That's generally how it happens, with a small community of musicians that start recommending other people, and the concept then spreading through word of mouth," says Kattis. "Now we're getting a couple of hundred requests for each show." The Sofar audience is typically your average young urban creative that is musically inclined, but the person in charge of designing the guest list makes sure to mix it up, adding new people every time so that everyone gets a chance to have a Sofar experience. "It's not an exclusive thing. All we do is to find incredible acts and musicians and have fun. When we have a music industry that is so uneven, either having a lot of money or no money at all, we think it's important to give new talented bands a fair start."