

'I PAID \$3,000 FOR A TOM WOPAT CONCERT IN MY BACKYARD'

Meet the superfans who are shelling out to have the Duke boys or Kool & the Gang play their house parties

BY REED TUCKER

PRETZELS and a few slabs of cheese just aren't going to cut it when you have friends over this holiday season. Want guests talking about your get-together? How about adding this to the invitation: "Oh, and the Dukes of Hazzard will be there."

"Dukes" stars Tom Wopat and John Schneider went on Kickstarter over the summer to fund their just-released holiday album, "Home for Christmas," and rewards included in-home performances by the duo themselves.

Two \$10,000 shows featuring both Schneider and Wopat were quickly snapped up by corporations. But for a very reasonable \$3,000, Wopat offered to show up alone at a fan's house, guitar in hand, and play a set, and he's had some enthusiastic takers.

"In a way, it's sort of expensive, but I don't have the time to do much else. I don't have any hobbies," says Roy Reaves, a Virginia man who purchased one of the Wopat concerts. "I couldn't see this

chance coming along again."

In November, Reaves invited a handful of friends and hosted Wopat in the spacious garage at his logging company. Reaves owns a replica "General Lee" Dodge Charger that was parked nearby.

"It was a blast," Reaves says. "[Wopat] didn't take himself too seriously."

Minnesota's Scott Marthaler also owns a replica General Lee, and he'll host Wopat next summer for a barbecue in the backyard of his farm.

"I knew it was a decent amount of money, but it's something you'll talk about for a long time," says Marthaler, who works at a grocery store. "You get to spend a lot more quality time [with Wopat]. You can get to know him."

The cost of private shows varies wildly. A Texas banker paid a whopping \$7 million to have the Rolling Stones play at his birthday, though there are plenty of more affordable alternatives.

"On the low side, old-school hip-hop is great," says Steve Einzig, president of Booking Entertainment, a Manhattan company that

specializes in arranging private shows. "Rob Bass, Tone-Lo, Coolio or something like that might be around \$15,000."

Bands are often more expensive than rappers because of the cost to truck in equipment, which can run as much as \$150,000. Add that to travel costs — bigger acts often demand to fly privately, which runs about \$75,000 — and the price quickly sky-rockets.

It's not only the crazed fans who love the benefits of a private show.

"It's wonderfully intimate and nice to actually meet people up close and personal," says Mike Love of the Beach Boys. The group is auctioning an in-home concert, valued at \$100,000, on charitybuzz.com.

Other performers love these shows for another reason.

"Money," Einzig says succinctly. In fact, artists often charge a premium for non-tour gigs.

"It's a much harder performance when they're performing privately," Einzig explains. "When Stevie Nicks plays at a Stevie Nicks concert, she has a bunch of ravenous fans who paid good money to see that concert. After every song, they're so happy to be there."

At a private event, however, the audience is not necessarily as invested. An artist may have to perform over group chatter or the clinking of waiters clearing dinner plates. Is that any way to treat a rock legend?

Almost all shows go down at rented venues, such as country clubs and party spaces, not private homes. Can you imagine Guns N' Roses, who earned a reported \$1 million to play for a Moscow man, setting up their gear in a New York apartment?

I couldn't see this chance coming along again."

— Roy Reaves on hiring Tom Wopat for a private concert



Scott Marthaler (left) and his brother Steve are huge fans of Tom Wopat (center).

Most buyers are — surprise! — folks with lots of disposable income. Einzig once had a lottery winner request a private gig with crooner Gene Pitney.

One big plus of a private show is that the host gets to provide guidance on the set list. In other words, you get to tell the Rolling Stones they better not dare play material post-"Goats Head Soup."

Another advantage is not having to plan your life around reunion tours.

John Tavliarios, a Connecticut resident in the shipping business, booked Earth, Wind & Fire for his 50th birthday party a couple years back, and Kool & the Gang for his wife's 50th.

"I had this thing where I wanted to see a lot of those late '60s and '70s bands before they couldn't perform anymore," he says.

He also once hosted "Get Down Tonight" act KC and the Sunshine Band. He says it's been money well spent.

"It's a special experience," Tavliarios says. "I never had one of those events where people didn't walk away talking about it forever."

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