

Thunderclap Murphy's Ambient Book Club

Live music for a silent reading hour. Bring a book, or unwrap one of ours.

The Ambient Book Club is a reading hour with a live score. People take a book, find a spot, and read, while Thunderclap Murphy builds a slow, wordless soundtrack in the room around them. It fills quiet hours with people who want to be there, and it asks almost nothing of the staff running it. He arrives with the format, the materials and the crew.

He does not need a slot. He brings the event

Most musicians deliver one thing. They arrive, they play, and they leave. The programmer does everything else: invents the framing, writes the listing, markets it, staffs it, works out what the audience is meant to do for ninety minutes, and then evidences it for the funder afterwards.

The Ambient Book Club arrives with all of that already done. The music is the smallest part of it.

What arrives with him

What a programmer would otherwise have to invent

The format, named, with a precedent a million people already take part in

"What is this event, and why would anyone come?"

The audience mechanic, the books, the materials, the permission to do nothing

"What are people supposed to *do* for ninety minutes?"

The marketing pack, in the branch's own house style

"How do I sell this?"

The documentation: a headcount, photographs, a clean recording, a line of copy

"How do I acquit the funding?"

The whole rig, and a crew to build it

"Do I need to hire sound?"

An arts officer with forty events and one pair of hands is not buying music. She is buying an evening she does not have to build.

What happens in the room

There is a book on every seat. People take one, settle, and read. Some sit, some lie down, and some never open it at all.

He plays from a table of instruments, everything from flute and glockenspiel to guitar and synth, looping each line over the last while the room watches it build. This is live looping, made from nothing in front of an audience, so the background to the reading hour is also a performance worth looking up at.

Four speakers stand at the corners of the room, so the sound surrounds the readers rather than facing them from one end. The set stays low and slow, sized to a room where people are reading, and a conversation at the desk still sits above it.

Everyone in the room can take part, including the people who cannot read

Reading is one way in. It is not the only one. Some people do not read, and some cannot: dyslexia, low literacy, English as a second language, poor eyesight, or a mind that will not settle that day.

So the table carries more than novels. It carries graphic novels, which hold a story with almost no reading load. Art and photography books, which hold none at all. Adult colouring books, blank paper, pencils and journals, for anyone who would rather draw or write than read.

And nobody has to do any of it. Bring your own book, close your eyes, or just sit.

This matters for a wellbeing programme in particular. A strand built on talks, workshops and discussion groups is almost entirely verbal and social. All of it asks someone to process language, sit among strangers, and often speak. **The Ambient Book Club asks for none of those things, so it reaches the people the talks structurally cannot.**

A format your readers already know

Silent Book Club has run since 2012 and now has more than two thousand chapters in sixty-eight countries, and over a million members: people reading their own books, together, in silence, with no assigned text and no discussion. The BBC recorded a 460% rise in UK events between 2024 and 2025.

Blind Date with a Book is a display many branches already run. Books wrapped in brown paper, a line from the story written on the front, opened to find out what you have.

The Ambient Book Club scores both, live, in the room.

Both halves are formats a librarian already knows, so nothing here asks a branch to gamble on an idea nobody has tested. If the branch wraps its own stock for the night, the sound of a room opening its parcels becomes the first layer of the music, and the audience is inside the piece without being handed an instrument or told to do anything.

Where it has already worked

- **Seattle Central Library** programmed a free ambient series in its main reading room in 2025: three Saturday sets of two hours each, framed as an installation, with the recording released afterwards as proof.
- **Harvard University's Countway Library** runs a regular Silent Reading Party, pairing a live pianist with drop-in reading and hot drinks. People read alone, together.
- **The National Library of Latvia** has staged silent reading with ambient music two years running, drawing 1,545 visitors across a single evening. No live performer was credited, which is the gap this fills.
- **Brooklyn Public Library** already runs live music alongside reading through its *Off the Record* series.

The format is established. What the Ambient Book Club adds is a score built live in the room, responsive to it.

What the branch provides, and what arrives with him

From the branch

- The room
- Two standard sockets
- An hour before doors
- Somewhere to sit or lie
- Someone to open the door
- Photography consent, agreed in writing beforehand
- The books, which a branch already holds in thousands

With him

- The four-speaker surround system
- The instruments and the mixer
- The paper, pencils and journals
- The bookmarks and the wrapping
- The crew who build it and clear it the same day
- The marketing pack, made
- The evidence pack for the funder

That is the whole list, and it has not grown. The branch has the books and it has the room. The Ambient Book Club gives people a reason to sit down with both.

How long it runs

Ninety minutes, door to door, in three sections with a short break between each. People stand up, make tea, swap a book, say something to whoever is beside them, and settle again. The breaks are part of the format rather than an interruption of it, and they are how a Silent Book Club evening already runs.

A shorter reading hour works too. Name the slot and he will shape the set to it. A quiet weekday daytime suits the quiet hours best, and an evening suits a late opening or a Culture Night slot.

Set-up, sound and safety, described plainly

- **Set-up.** He and the crew arrive about an hour before doors and install four speakers around the room, a compact mixer, a keyboard, one microphone and the instrument table. Library staff run nothing during set-up or during the session.
- **Power.** Two standard wall sockets.
- **Sound.** The set is held at about the level of a quiet conversation and stays inside the one room, so the desk keeps working through it. Four discreet speakers at the corners, the performer low and central.
- **Pack-down.** About twenty minutes, the same day. The room returns to normal use immediately.
- **Access.** Readers arrive, settle or leave at any point. Lighting can come down where the room allows.
- **Safety and insurance.** Cabling is matted and walkways kept clear. Public liability cover is held. **The certificate, the limit of indemnity and a written risk assessment are supplied with the booking paperwork.**

Three formats

Format	What it is, and when to choose it
Lite	The four-corner sound kept in full, with a pared-back instrument set, no staging or uplighting, and one crew. The straightforward option for a daytime session inside the branch.
Full	The complete production, with the full instrument table, soft uplighting and three crew. Choose this when the night has to <i>look</i> like an occasion: a late opening, an Ireland Reads evening, a Culture Night slot.
Residency	Three or four sessions across a season. The Seattle shape, the strongest fit for an Arts Office residency, and the format that builds a returning audience rather than a one-off headcount.

Send a date and a room, and he will come back within the week with a plan and a fee.

Where the money usually comes from

Programming rarely comes out of petty cash, so the proposal is built to sit inside a pot the branch already holds.

- **Healthy Ireland at Your Library.** Wellbeing and Mental Health is one of the programme's six named areas, and branches already programme mindfulness, relaxation and music sessions under it. This is a stronger instance of a category the service already funds, rather than a new one to argue for.
- **The branch's own programming budget,** for a Lite daytime session.
- **Creative Ireland,** administered through the local authority and its library service.
- **Local-authority Arts Office schemes,** including residency provision for a series.

And it reports twice from one booking. It is an event held, and a reading hour plausibly drives borrowing from the collection it sits beside. Very little wellbeing programming counts on both lines.

What you get afterwards

The acquittal evidence is part of the booking, not an extra: **a headcount, photographs, a short recording, and a line of copy** written for a report. The material is yours to use in an annual review, a Culture Night pitch, or the next funding application.

A marketing pack arrives on confirmation, made rather than described: a co-branded poster mockup in the branch's house style, a listing blurb for the what's-on channels, and a social caption. All of it is editable, and none of it needs design work from library staff.

Next steps

The easiest first move is to hold a provisional date. A fifteen-minute call, or a short visit to look at the room, works just as well.

Enquiries and bookings

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