

Live Music Capital of the World?
The Effects of Austin's Urban Branding on Its Local Musicians

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Is Austin Still the Live Music Capital of the World?

“It absolutely holds true more than ever. We have so much live music now. We are saturated in it”

Gavin Garcia, Austin Music Commission Chair

“It’s a pretty grandiose, self aggrandizing title”

- Thor Harris, local musician for 30 years

“Austin has a lot of work to do to continue utilizing that moniker”

- Ryan Garrett, General Manager of Stubb’s BBQ

“The change that needs to be made is making sure as a City, we are still living up to the name and focusing on how we can make it a better environment and city to live in for musicians.”

- Lindsey Sokol, Festival Director at C3 Presents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Abstract	4
2. Acknowledgements	5
3. Introduction	6
4. From Progressive Country to Punk: The Development of Austin's Music Scene through the 1980s	8
5. Capitalizing on Culture: How Austin's Government Used Its Music Scene for Economic Development	23
6. Austin's Current Ecosystem and the Lives of Musicians	50
7. Conclusion and Potential Paths for Improvement	68
8. Bibliography	93

ABSTRACT

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Title: Live Music Capital of the World? The Effects of Austin's Urban Branding on Its Local Musicians

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Since 1991, Austin has branded itself and been heralded as the "Live Music Capital of the World," drawing people from all over to take part in a culture fueled by its creative residents. This thesis aims to answer the question of how Austin's branding as the Live Music Capital of the World has affected the living and working conditions of its local musicians. While one might assume that musicians in Austin thrive given an enthusiastic music community, much of Austin's growth, which can partially be credited to the city's music-centric branding, has made it increasingly difficult for musicians to live in the city today.

In an effort to answer this question, this thesis will evaluate Austin's music scene and economy in four parts. The first section will discuss how Austin's ecosystem during the last half of the 20th century fostered a successful music scene. The major factors reinforcing one another revolved around relatively inexpensive housing, geographic advantages, a large and generally affluent student population, and a growing artist community. The second section will examine how Austin's local government used the music scene to attract more people and businesses to grow the city through branding Austin as "the Live Music Capital of the World." The third section will assess the current music ecosystem, how it differs from historical trends, and how these changes are affecting musicians today. Finally, the concluding section will propose opportunities for improving the livelihood of musicians in order for Austin to maintain its musician population.

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I. Introduction

When stepping off any given plane at the Austin Bergstrom International Airport, passengers are greeted by a plaque reading “Welcome to Austin! The Live Music Capital of the World.” This self-proclaimed title is more often than not what comes to mind when thinking of Austin, regardless of whether someone has ever stepped foot in the city. Built on the legacy of progressive country and local musicians like Willie Nelson and Stevie Ray Vaughn, Austin’s music scene has developed in the last fifty years to encompass a wide array of genres and talent.

This thesis examines the ways in which Austin’s branding as the Live Music Capital of the World has affected the living and working conditions for local musicians. While one might assume that musicians in Austin thrive given an enthusiastic music community, much of Austin’s growth, which can partially be credited to the city’s music-centric branding, has made it increasingly difficult for musicians to live in the city today.

In an effort to answer this main question, this thesis will evaluate Austin’s music scene and economy in four parts. The first section will discuss how Austin’s ecosystem during the last half of the 20th century fostered a successful music scene. The second section will examine how Austin’s local government used the music scene to attract more people and businesses to grow the city through branding Austin as “the Live Music Capital of the World.” The third section will assess the current music scene ecosystem, how it differs from historical trends, and how these

changes are affecting musicians today. Finally, the concluding section will propose opportunities for improving the livelihood of musicians in order for Austin to maintain its musician population.

This thesis will utilize three main research methods: analysis of primary texts, examination of secondary sources, and interviews with ten relevant stakeholders in varied corners of Austin's music scene and municipal government. Primary texts such as newspaper articles, surveys, and government documents provide insight into the atmosphere of Austin's music scene from the 1950s through the present day as well as necessary data points to analyze the economic impact of the scene on the entire city. Secondary sources synthesize larger trends in the development of Austin's music scene, its economic impacts, and the reaction of stakeholders to this growth. Lastly, interviews with local musicians, government officials involved in music policy, club managers, and other private sector industry workers give tangible perspectives on how life as a musician and the music industry as a whole have changed in Austin, as well as ideas for how the present situation can be improved.

The reasoning for drawing back the curtain on issues facing Austin's musicians is to call to attention to the need to improve their livelihood and maintain Austin as a live music town. So much of what makes this city a special place to live in and visit is rooted in its rich history of music and performance. I fear, along with those in the industry, that without improvements made by both the city through public policy and by the private sector that Austin will watch its unique live music scene diminish.

II. From Progressive Country to Punk: The Development of Austin's Music Scene through the 1980s

"There's a freedom you begin to feel the closer you get to Austin, Texas"
– Willie Nelson

Willie Nelson's idyllic description of Austin captures one of the chief factors contributing to the growth of Austin's music scene during the second half of the 20th century. Alluding to its tolerant atmosphere, Nelson, like many others, flocked to Austin as a means to escape something. In his case, that something was the rigid structure of Nashville's country music industry, while for others, it was often the overbearing, conservative values of their hometowns.¹ Still poised today as a laid-back city, Austin's liberal atmosphere, in conjunction with other factors, helped stimulate the creation of its local music scene, and eventually led to declaring Austin the live music capital. Before this self-designation of Austin as "The Live Music Capital of the World," the city's local music scene grew organically due its progressive climate in addition to three main components: the city's relative affordability, a captive student population at the University of Texas, and a buildup of local musicians ranging from the unknown to the legendary.

¹ Furgeson, William A. "Willie Nelson and the Austin Music Scene, 1972-1976." Doctoral thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2003.

Economically speaking, Austin proved attractive during the second half of the 20th century as housing was cheap in comparison to the rest of the country and other larger cities in Texas such as Houston and Dallas.² Geographically and ideologically, Austin's central location within Texas and its status as a laid back, more open-minded city made it a haven for those leaving the smaller towns marked by conservative values within and outside of the state. Demographically, the University of Texas provided a captive and enthusiastic student audience for the various musical movements that emerged during the era from the 1950s through the 1980s. Musically, this student population and liberal atmosphere allowed for a self-reproducing dynamic of artists' relocating to the city throughout 1950s through the '80s, securing Austin's status as a thriving center for music.

The greatest motivators for the participants in this burgeoning music scene were twofold, with the first being the intrinsic desire of its participants to redefine what it meant to be Texan, and the second being the distrust of the national, commercialized music industry.³ Overall, "the region's mild climate, low cost of living, the presence of the University of Texas at Austin, and the city's reputation as a liberal and tolerant island in a conservative region has attracted successive waves

² Powers, Pike. *Building the Austin Technology Cluster: The Role of Government & Community Collaboration in the Human Capital*. Federal Reserve Bank of Texas, 2004. Accessed April 24, 2018. <https://www.kansascityfed.org>.

³ Shank, Barry. *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*. Wesleyan University Press, 2011. Digital file.; Stimeling, Travis D. *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin's Progressive Country Music Scene*. New York: Oxford University, 2011.

of creatives. They in turn put Austin on the map.”⁴ This history will examine the beginnings of Austin’s music scene and its maturation through the mid 1980s, just as city government began utilizing the music scene as a means for economic development.

The conditions that made Austin’s adoption of the live music capital moniker possible can be traced back to efforts to define the Texan identity through musical performance. In the late 1880s, cowboy lore crafted from legends and folk songs highlighted the idealized cowboy, which served as a metaphor for individualism, independence, and strength. All aspects of Texas life, from business to music to democracy, drew on this image of a strong, masculine entrepreneur. Published by John Lomax in 1910, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* shed light on the ideals of the cowboy, a cowboy that had been previously misconstrued in the media. The attractiveness of this imagery grew in reaction to the growing complexity, urbanization, and industrialization of the nation, with the cowboy representing an entity untouched by governmental and social constructs.⁵

The progressive country era that drew inspiration from the beloved figure of the cowboy acted as a chief initiator for the music scene known today in Austin. Much like the cowboy, those involved in the progressive country music scene worked to distance themselves from the modernization of Texas and growing commercialization of the music industry. Given country music’s association with

⁴ City of Austin Economic Growth & Redevelopment Services Office. *CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan*. 2009. Accessed April 8, 2018. http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Redevelopment/createaustin_cultural_master_plan.pdf.

⁵ Shank, 26.

conservative values and a rejection of modernity at the outset of the 1970s, the term “progressive country” seemed incongruous. However, progressive country music became a way to redefine what it meant to be Texan as it blended country with other rock influences, creating a fan basis of liberal hippies and conservatives alike.⁶

The roots of the progressive country era developed within the walls of Threadgill’s, a local bar opened by Kenneth Threadgill in 1933.⁷ Early on, most of Threadgill’s customers were local workingmen, but beginning in 1959, four University of Texas graduate students became some of the regularly featured artists. Willie Benson, Ed Mellow, Stan Alexander, and Bill Malone⁸ helped expand the venue’s younger crowd, and the newcomers were able to learn country music from the older regulars, including Threadgill himself.⁹ Kenneth Threadgill served as a personification of the country music scene through his encouragement of locals to perform live in front of an audience and providing a “safe space for the city’s emerging counterculture” through the 1960s.¹⁰

Simultaneously, the younger crowd bled into a new folk-singing group at the University of Texas created by English professor Roger Abrahams. Simply titled “The University of Texas Folk Sing,” the group’s members included many nonconformist students who also frequented Threadgill’s, such as Janis Joplin, Ed

⁶ Stimeling, 17.

⁷ Stimeling, 18.

⁸ Malone went on to become one of the first and most renowned country music historians.

⁹ Shank, 40; Stimeling, 20.

¹⁰ Stimeling, 34.

Guinn, John Clay, Powell St. John, and Lanny Wiggins. Their membership in this club served as a way in which to stand out and against the larger student body at UT, acting not only as a singing group, but also as an ideological community.

The performances at Threadgill's that created the folk-singing movement among younger audiences are credited with the surge of local music making in Austin and birthed the scene known today. These college students were inspired by an older, seemingly more authentic honky tonk culture, which was in turn inspired by an older, folkloric notion of the cowboy idealized by Lomax. Born in part out of Threadgill's, the folk music scene that blossomed in Austin during the 1960s "was the first direct antecedent of Austin's progressive country music scene of the early 1970s."¹¹

Around the same time as the early glimmerings of the progressive country scene were forming, a rock and roll scene was also growing in Austin. Much like the progressive country scene, the rock and roll scene simultaneously served as a means for emerging artists to fashion new identities for themselves. "Indicating a constellation of divergent interests and forces,"¹² Austin's music scene was developing quickly during the late 1960s, as clubs began opening to support the emphasis on live music found at Threadgill's. In 1967, Gary Scanlon and Huston White opened the pivotal Gas Co. club, creating a home for the hippies and freaks of the growing Austin counterculture. Managed by Eddie Wilson, Shiva's Headband was the most popular local band to grace the Vulcan. However, operating without a

¹¹ Stimeling, 70.

¹² Shank, ix.

liquor license proved difficult as it removed a major source of revenue that most clubs rely on, and the Vulcan struggled financially and was forced to shut down after two years in business. Today, a club inspired by the original Vulcan Gas Company sits on Sixth Street bearing the same name.¹³

The equation that a liquor license plus a fan base with a love for music resulted in the survival of a club went against the hippie community's anti-commercial value system. Rejecting the strategy adopted by certain venues of booking hippie bands solely because they increased beer sales, Eddie Wilson sought to create a different atmosphere. One night after a Shiva's Headband performance at the Cactus Club in south Austin, Wilson spotted the vacant armory across the street and decided to turn it into a music venue, which would solve Shiva's Headband's issues of being linked to the honky-tonk, commercial economy. With the vision of a larger Vulcan, Wilson turned the armory into the Armadillo, creating a safe space for "alienated young Texans."¹⁴ Like the Vulcan, the Armadillo operated without a liquor license at first, but was forced to succumb to the economics of running a successful club. Linking rock 'n' roll with a way to succeed commercially also involved diversifying the Armadillo's booked acts beyond Shiva's Headband. Expanding their performance talent as far as the Austin Ballet Theater, the

¹³ Vulcan Gas Company. "About." Vulcan Gas Company. Accessed May 2, 2018. <https://www.vulcanatx.com/about-1/>.

¹⁴ Shank, 54.

Armadillo became the spot for all types of music, alcohol, and a “sexualized critique of modernity.”¹⁵

Within the walls of the Armadillo, the disaffected youth crowd and the mainstream/country crowd fostered the progressive country movement. The Armadillo continued searching for musicians who were able to represent this new version of Texan musical identity for young audiences, which led to booking Willie Nelson regularly. Having just moved from Nashville out of frustration and “refusal to conform to Nashville norms,”¹⁶ Nelson proved a proponent of progressive country while simultaneously being an open user of and advocate for marijuana.¹⁷ This affinity for the illicit attracted audiences that had previously believed country music was only meant for a more conservative crowd.

The seventies marked a time of explosive growth in Austin’s music scene as the progressive country movement began gaining national attention. Those heavily involved in the countercultural era of the 1960s brought progressive country to the forefront as they strove to maintain the memory of their antiestablishment beliefs as well as grassroots efforts in music. By the 1970s, musicians who had returned to Austin the decade beforehand in order to enjoy less competition than they faced in New York, Los Angeles, and Nashville began realizing that the movement they had crafted was, in part, bringing a surge of people to Austin. The city had begun transforming from a relaxed college town to a busy hub; this, however, had the

¹⁵ Shank, 57.

¹⁶ Furgeson, 2.

¹⁷ Furgeson, 2.

effect of creating a more competitive music industry landscape that these musicians had previously tried to evade. As Stimeling notes:

the musicians who returned to Texas in order to escape the competition of Los Angeles, New York and Nashville in the early years of the progressive country movement found that their own creation encouraged too many people to come to Austin, changing it from a laid-back small town into a booming metropolis with national influence. These transformations threatened the close-knit communities that many musicians had formed upon arriving in Austin as competition for work and cultural capital became more intense¹⁸

The staggering difference between the harshly competitive environments found in the creative industries of these cities as opposed to Austin was evinced in the tolerance of, and even emphasis on, imperfection in the latter. Not only was imperfection a distinguishing feature of the Austin music scene relative to the bigger music cities, but also served as a token of the sincerity found between performers and their young audiences. This openness and sense of perceived genuine communication between artists and their fans spurred the nature of Austin's clubs as a meeting hub for the younger crowd.¹⁹ As Stimeling notes:

The spontaneity and artist-audience interaction that were characteristic of live performance in Austin's progressive country venues were essential, therefore, to the musical aesthetics of progressive country music, which privileged the imperfects and idiosyncrasies of individual musicians over the precise playing and overt technological mediation heard in much of Nashville country music.²⁰

By 1974, major record labels were not finding Austin's anti-commercial utopia as promising as they had hoped and struggled to understand its music

¹⁸ Stimeling, 62.

¹⁹ Shank, 15.

²⁰ Stimeling, 78.

scene's lack of influence from national and commercial recordings. Marketing Austin's music nationally proved difficult as the progressive country scene continued to be marked partially by conservative values and the dominant culture of white, male Texans. Institutions like the Armadillo garnered attention, but were not making enough money to survive economically, and the new surge of clubs that followed its closure competed against one another for the spotlight.²¹

At the same time, Joe Gracey, a broadcaster at KOKE-FM and proponent of the new progressive country radio format, observed that non-Austinites were commanding a greater control of the progressive country rhetoric. Wanting to shift this the power back into the hands of Austinites, Gracey's suggestions, influenced by Jan Reid's book titled *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, led to the creation of the Austin City Limits Live television program. Created by Bill Arhos in 1974, ACL Live was initially shot within the walls of the University of Texas communications school and featured Willie Nelson in the pilot episode. ACL Live marked a critical turning point in Austin's music scene as it spread Texas' progressive country nationwide.²²

The year 1975 served as the peak of the progressive country scene in Austin, as many began critiquing the image of the cosmic cowboy and arguing that progressive country was beginning to lose its sincerity through commercialization. By 1976, RCA-Nashville marketed a collection of songs by Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and several others titled "Wanted! The Outlaws," that sold one million copies. The unexpected success of this collection led to the recording industry

²¹ Shank, 16.

²² Stimeling, 79.

producing more and more outlaw music, and historians like Jan Reid credit these efforts the major commercialization of progressive country. According to Reid, the cosmic cowboy had become a sales tool for record companies, and this notion led to the initial decline of the progressive country scene.

By the mid '70s, several other music scenes were beginning to emerge that previously had not received attention, sailing under the radar in comparison to the progressive country scene. Most notably, the east side of town had become home to a growing blues scene, as white blues players began performing with African American blues players within a historically African American dominated community. Serving as the foundation for Antone's blues scene, this mix of African American musicians, fans, and club owners with white blues players matured alongside the beginning of the end of the progressive country scene. Soap Creek Saloon, One Knite, and Antone's became the primary clubs for viewing live blues music during 1975, operating as home to local acts like the Cobras, Fabulous Thunderbirds, and the Nightcrawlers, the latter of which featured Austin legend Stevie Ray Vaughan. Progressive country had not entirely died, though, as Willie Nelson released his most popular album, *Red Headed Stranger*, and Jerry Jeff Walker and Asleep at the Wheel's albums simultaneously joined *Red Headed* in the top 20 on Billboard's country charts. By the summer of 1976, the real evidence of progressive country's decline came with the beginning of the Armadillo's failure, as competition from other nightclubs expanding into new genres grew.

In the late '70s, the musical tastes of UT students began changing while they searched for another genre to latch onto, which brought disco to the forefront.

Briefly, and through a much smaller movement, disco became a “modern, safe attractive environment,” representing sexuality and the ability to be entirely engaged in “the now.”²³ In a moment of “technological mediation,” parties no longer required a cover band or live performance, and disco could be provided through recordings.²⁴ However, as disco came and went, the late ‘70s posed a turning point in Austin’s music scene as it began experiencing intense growing pains due to internal tensions.

Doug Sahm outlined the scene’s tensions as he moved west in an open letter for his fans published in *The Austin Sun*, “Let’s face it, fellow Austinites, the scene is rapidly decaying from the lovely, stoned, slow town it once was to a sometimes circus of egos that has made it not the fun it used to be.”²⁵ Increased competition between nightclubs as their audiences grew smaller coupled with the realignment of local music businesses with national recording industries led to local musicians losing the ability to rely on live performances for their income. This period was marked by the dire need for local musicians to either acquire part time jobs or take their act on the road to other locales. Several musicians left Austin since they could not survive off of live performances alone and were not successful in signing record deals while only performing in central Texas. The winter of 1977-1978 proved one of the more troubling times in the Austin music community as the quality of its local music declined due to what Hank Alrich described as “the inflationary pressure of

²³ Shank, 82.

²⁴ Shank, 82.

²⁵ Shank, 87.

too many musicians and too many clubs.”²⁶ Students had lost interest in progressive country, and the Austin music scene became split. The old progressive country scene was only catering to its few proponents and older fans while the younger musicians at UT grew tired of this scene. Beneath this tension, the youth started to fuel a rock scene.

Alongside this tension within the Austin music scene came a national and international punk movement, as rock fans in the U.S. clung to fanzines and music papers from New York and London, obsessing over this new form of rock. By 1977, UT students’ love of disco began fading, the live music scene wrestled with how to cling to nostalgia, and the burgeoning punk scene began forming within the walls of the Inner Sanctum record store. During this period, if you were a fan of punk and lived outside of New York or Los Angeles, the only way of obtaining punk media was through a small, independent record store within your town. Inner Sanctum Records was Austin’s store for this, and the Radio, Television, and Film and communications school communities at UT served as two of the major groups that came here to absorb all things punk. These students, many of whom wrote for *The Daily Texan*, came to Inner Sanctum to interpret punk and translate it for UT and beyond through their editorial work. Student-led punk bands began forming amongst the Inner Sanctum crowd; however they lacked a central venue in which to play.

Simultaneously with the growth of the UT punk community, Roy Gomez established his club, Raul’s, in a central location on Guadalupe Street. With the goal

²⁶ Shank, 89.

of giving the local Chicano scene a place to perform, Gomez booked small Tex-mex Mex bands that had successful recording deals and toured across the Southwest and Midwest. Being far from what most considered a part of Austin's music scene, Gomez sought to bring this marginalized group under the spotlight. In light of this, one night a week Gomez deemed non Tex-mex night at Raul's, typically featuring jazz bands or other genres outside the mainstream of Austin's music scene.

However, one night Gomez decided to feature both The Skunks and The Violators, two of Austin's first local punk bands, which led to Gomez establishing a weekly punk night at Raul's. The student scene began steadily growing at the punk nights, and these shows eventually became the main event for the Inner Sanctum patrons, communications school students, Daily Texan writers, queers, and anyone else feeling marginalized in Austin. This essence of finding a home amongst other marginalized people resonated with Gomez, and he continued booking punk bands despite his distaste for the rowdy crowds they drew.

One band especially caused an incident within the walls of Raul's in September 1978. The Huns, a band formed by UT students Phil Tolstead, Dan Puckett, Manny Rosario, and Tom Huckabee, performed for the first time in September 1978 during Raul's punk show. Performing in a more antagonistic manner than previous acts at Raul's, The Huns drew a crowd rowdier than normal, leading to a visit from the Austin Police Department. A refusal to pacify the event coupled with a physical altercation (Tolstead kissing a cop on the lips), several members of the Huns as well as Nick Barbaro and Richard Dorsett (who would become inaugural writers at *The Austin Chronicle*) were arrested. Also in the

audience was Louis Black, who went on to co-found *The Austin Chronicle* and the South by Southwest Music Festival. People were outraged by the arrests and by Tolstead's subsequent conviction of disorderly conduct, and The Huns became a representation of rock and roll that truly challenged the norms in Austin.

Other punk clubs came into being in the wake of Raul's, but the scene here served as the initial surge of something entirely new within Austin's music scene, leading to the creation of local punk bands, magazines, record companies, and movies. Unlike progressive country, the punk scene experienced a stronger bond with the UT student population and distanced itself even farther from the culture of Texas. While the proponents of the punk scene put forth an anti-commercial outlook, they also recognized that an entirely non-commercial scene could not survive, presenting an irony within the mentality of the punk scene. Among these proponents, the punk scene birthed the founders and initial writers for *The Austin Chronicle*, several of which also went on to begin the South by Southwest Music Festival, "the most significant business link between the Austin music scene and the alternative recording industry."²⁷

As UT students shifted away from what they saw as an antiquated progressive country scene, punk rock in Austin represented "pure exhilaration, pure energy, pure noise, pure fun," and shaped the manner in which music was being produced in Austin during the 1980s.²⁸ The punk scene born out of Inner Sanctum Records and Raul's helped foster a music community in Austin that continued

²⁷ Shank, 116.

²⁸ Shank, 116.

criticizing commercial music, while at the same time was not averse to the potential of commercializing music. This contradictory setting then transitioned into an indie scene that coincided with the first forays of city government into music policy.

Part III. Capitalizing on Culture: How Austin's Government Used its Music Scene for Economic Development

"Music is how we sell Austin [...] Music is our brand." – Rose Reyes, former director of music marketing at the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau

As Austin steadily transformed from a small college town into a music epicenter, city agencies began seizing on Austin's growing popularity as a mechanism for economic advancement. In order to attract people and businesses, government officials sought to brand Austin much like major cities had done before. This move toward "neoliberal organization," the effort to find and capitalize on a non-economic quality of a city in order to propel their competitive advantage, utilized music as the aesthetic force with which to brand Austin.²⁹ Rather than seeing cultural activity as a "supporting actor" in economic development, live music became one of the primary tools.³⁰ Accentuating a music community, however, was not a new method of branding a city in the United States by the 1980s. Midsize cities like New Orleans, Memphis, and Nashville had latched onto particular music genres as a way to sell their respective environments.³¹ Austin had never been defined by one music style, nor did the city's music industry focus on commercial recorded

²⁹ Polk O'Meara, Caroline, and Eliot M. Tretter. "Sounding Austin: Live Music, Race, and the Selling of a City." In *Musical Performance and the Changing City*, edited by Fabian Holt and Carstein Wergin, 53-76. New York: Rutledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.

³⁰ Grodach, Carl. "Before and After the Creative City: The Politics of Urban Cultural Policy in Austin, Texas." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 34, no. 1 (2011): 81-97.

³¹ O'Meara and Tretter, 56.

music, which proved more difficult from a business standpoint in comparison to other cities mentioned previously.³² Instead of highlighting a specific genre, influencers in Austin chose live music as a way to promote Austin economically. This led to the government more overtly working to create an infrastructure to better support a variety of music venues and musicians living within the city.³³ As Austinites watched beloved music venues like the Armadillo shut down in the wake of Austin's growth, the public became far more invested in the conservation of Austin's music industry and desired the creation of specific government entities that helped to do so. The combination of the public's increased worry for the local music industry's survival and efforts made by individuals and budding organizations led to the city's efforts to maintain and market Austin's local music.³⁴

The Texas Music Association and The Austin Chamber of Commerce

In an effort to help businesses affected by the collapse of progressive country, the Texas Music Association held its inaugural meeting in 1981 with the goal of increasing support for those in the music business infrastructure. Mimicking the Country Music Association in Nashville, the TMA established a chapter in Austin in 1982 with Ernie Gammage serving as president. Having played in several bands and graduating from UT's finance program, Gammage began working to shift the

³² Conti, Scott Christian. "A Historical Review of the Planning and Public Policy Initiatives Designed to Encourage Music Industry Development in Austin and Dallas." PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1996.

³³ O'Meara and Tretter, 60.

³⁴ Conti, 11.

manner in which Austin's music was being promoted, moving from promoting one band or particular genre to instead the local industry as a whole. For the first time ever, Austin's cost of living began exceeding the national average in 1984, mainly due to increased property values, which in turn increased housing costs. Seeing this peak in economic growth, Gammage and the TMA strategized creating a relationship with the Chamber of Commerce in order to funnel some of this money flowing into central Texas to the local music industry. Gammage saw that live music was a key aspect to the quality of life in Austin, and he believed businesses should readily support this industry given the relationship.³⁵ What he learned, unfortunately, was that the Chamber of Commerce knew little about the industry and how to properly market it. In an interview between Gammage and Scott Conti in 1995, Gammage explained, "Austin music was called the country and western experience, classified next to the Mexican breakfast experience and the hill country experience."³⁶ Austin's diversity in its local music genres was neither understood nor marketed locally or nationally. Writing broad reports surrounding the economic impact and importance of Austin's music to its local community, Gammage worked to gain the attention of the Chamber of Commerce, but initially received little support from the organization. What he did achieve, though, was a firm understanding that the Chamber needed their eyes opened to the critical nature of supporting Austin's

³⁵ Shank, 198.

³⁶ Gammage, Ernie. Interview by Scott Christian Conti. Austin, TX. March 21, 1995.

music industry as well as prove that Austin's music industry was not just a group of total weirdos, hippies, and punks.³⁷

In order to prove this, Gammage utilized the findings of Phyllis Krantzman in her thesis titled "The Impact of the Music Industry on Austin."³⁸ Featuring interview and questionnaires from stakeholders across the industry, Krantzman's graduate thesis at UT was published in 1984 and concluded that the city required several improvements in order to keep its local music industry from diminishing. These improvements ranged from gathering more extensive data about the industry and its specific effects on Austin's economy. Another suggestion from Krantzman's findings included forming a committee to facilitate communication between the music industry and local government officials. Finally, Krantzman urged creating a survey that would learn if and how the music industry has shaped in-migrants' view of Austin and its quality of life.³⁹ Gammage utilized her data, which was built on the musicians and stakeholders of the progressive country wave, in efforts to convince the Chamber of Austin's local music industry's worth to its constituents.⁴⁰

In the same year, Dowell Myers created a report along similar lines as Krantzman's that more strongly urged the Chamber of Commerce to become more involved in Austin's music industry. A professor at UT's Architecture Community and Regional Planning School, Myers' report—titled "Quality of Life: Austin Trends

³⁷ Conti, 15.

³⁸ Shank, 199.

³⁹ Krantzman, Phyllis. "Impact of the Music Entertainment Industry on Austin, Texas." Doctoral thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1983.

⁴⁰ Shank, 199.

1970-1990”—found that more than 80% of survey respondents saw the music scene as a critical factor in the quality of life in Austin.⁴¹ Additionally, Myers found that young people age 20-30 created the club scene’s foundation, and that Austin’s population increase, at the moment, was not taking place within this group. According to the report, Austin’s recent population growth had been concentrated in the 30-40 year old demographic rather than in the 20-30 year old age range. Not being known for going out late and inhabiting the clubs, the 30-40 year olds did not do as much to bolster the music industry.⁴²

Widely embraced by the community, these two studies coupled with Gammage’s enthusiasm captured the attention of Chamber member David Lord, who was focused more on “fast growth” efforts in the mid 1980’s and viewed tourism as the manner in which to achieve this.⁴³ Lord wanted music to be more than just a “hook” and instead saw the local industry as having the ability to form an entire foundation for a group of businesses. Finally convincing the entirety of the Chamber, Lord’s explanation in the Austin Business Journal emphasized the economic power of the local industry:

Music as a business fits in with several goals of the Chamber. It fosters economic growth by, among other things, promoting entrepreneurship and the formation of a new business as well as attracting conventions and tourists to the area⁴⁴

⁴¹ Denberg, Jody. “Music Scene in Austin Is the Hub Around Which Many Lives Revolve.” *Daily Star*, 1 Jan. 1986.

⁴² Weeks, Jerome. “Party Over for Austin Clubs?” *The Houston Post*, 29 July 1984.

⁴³ Shank, 200.

⁴⁴ Shank, 201.

Stemming from Gammage's ideas, Lord's analysis finally pushed the Chamber to give the local music industry the attention industry professionals and aficionados believed it deserved, as well as made the first move toward creating a structured "opportunity economy" that would create a true infrastructure.⁴⁵ After the Chamber embraced this effort, different cultural forces would work to deal with expressing the ideals of this opportunity economy while cutting through the contradicting efforts that had historically characterized the Austin music scene. This initiative also shifted the Chamber from strictly dealing with local business to also dealing with the quality of life in Austin, working to capitalize and give more structure to a portion of the economy that enhanced the quality of life. This quality of life aspect led to several studies by the Austin Music Advisory Committee, which will be examined later on. Additionally, reports by Krantzman and Myers served as some of the first of their kind during an era when studies and statistics on the local music scene did not exist. Their texts serve as precursors to similar reports subsequently undertaken on a much larger scale, including the 2015 Austin Music Census, which will be discussed later in this paper.

The first tangible effort made by the Chamber of Commerce to utilize Austin's music industry for promotion purposes occurred in 1986 on MTV's "The Cutting Edge." A member of the Chamber, Ed Ward,⁴⁶ convinced MTV to bring Austin's music industry to a national audience, with the show covering more than twelve of

⁴⁵ Shank, 204.

⁴⁶ Ward also wrote for *The Austin Chronicle* and *The Austin American-Statesman*, helped found the South by Southwest Festival, and served as a rock historian on NPR's *Fresh Air* program.

Austin's local bands.⁴⁷ Bringing "The Cutting Edge" to Austin symbolized the strategy of the Chamber to unite members of the music industry with local business interests. "The Cutting Edge" primarily highlighted indie and rock bands, and the Chamber and local businesses like the Driskill Hotel, Waterloo Records, and Liberty Lunch worked in conjunction to help make the episode a success. With the main goal of the episode (held by the Austin Music Advisory Committee) being to update Austin's local music image, the episode did not feature a single country or blues act. Not only did the episode highlight the music scene, but also the overall growth and "vitality" of the city itself. Host Peter Zarema explained in the episode, "They say that ninety people a day move to Austin. Signs of growth are everywhere," and continued with concerns voiced at AMAC caucus meetings (described later in this section) about the growth. These concerns, stated in the episode by Zamera, included: "Changes are not always welcome, however, some of Austin's best clubs have disappeared," as well as contrasting statements like "Through it all, the bands survive." Similar branding moments occurred during the episode, such as the statement made by musician Joe Carrasco, "You know music is important for Austin because everybody that I meet that knows Austin, they know it because of its music." This episode served as a step toward further economic development, as the Chamber of Commerce began its blatant branding of Austin as a music town.⁴⁸

In its efforts to continue gathering more information about the economic and social impact of Austin's music industry, the Chamber of Commerce commissioned a

⁴⁷ Denberg, Jody. "Music Scene in Austin Is the Hub Around Which Many Lives Revolve." *Daily Star*, 1 Jan. 1986.

⁴⁸ Shank, 208-211.

study completed by the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in 1985. By examining Austin's social culture and arts, the SRI concluded that music played a crucial role in the Austin community, yet was not well understood by community members. Additionally, the study found that Austin lacked the business infrastructures that cities like Los Angeles, New York and even Dallas had, which had led entertainers in Austin to move away in search of a better support system. Because of the SRI study's findings, the Chamber of Commerce held industry caucuses, which worked to bring music industry stakeholders together to discuss the issues plaguing Austin's music and entertainment infrastructure.⁴⁹ From the caucus meetings, John T. Davis of the *Austin American-Statesman* relayed that the primary issues at hand in the music community included minimal affordable housing, increased land costs, and a lack of a communication pathway between music industry personnel and the broader business community.⁵⁰ In response to this caucus meeting, the Chamber of Commerce formed the Austin Music Advisory Committee (AMAC) mentioned previously to assist with aiding these issues.⁵¹

Gammage's efforts continued in his work with AMAC as he involved other industry professionals in the group such as Ed Ward, Louis Meyers, and Roland Swenson, all three of which would be credited with creating the South by Southwest

⁴⁹ Conti, 15.

⁵⁰ Davis, John. "Caucus Designed to Boost Music Scene - Musicians Press Case for Support." *Austin American Statesmen* (Austin, TX), February 15, 1985.

⁵¹ Conti, 17.

Festival.⁵² The AMAC acted as a committee within the Chamber of Commerce to continue helping the Chamber understand the intricacies of the local music industry and create an outline for what needed improvement. Gammage and others broke down the industry into its simple parts, noting that Austin had plenty of the research and development function (R&D) in its clubs, musicians, and songwriters, but was missing the production, distribution, and marketing, and finally, the “point of sale” in order to reach audiences.⁵³ He analogized the local industry as such, “Here in Austin, we grow the oats, and the rest of the country takes these oats, these raw materials, and turns them into Cheerios. We have to establish our own means to turn our oats into Cheerios.”⁵⁴ Austin was missing the means to commodify its own music, and the AMAC wanted to create an infrastructure that incorporated recording businesses in order to move away from the Austin that only symbolized live performance and honky-tonk.⁵⁵

The initial meetings of the AMAC led to a report titled “Austin Music: Into the Future” in 1985, providing the most thorough analysis of the industry at the time. Written by the AMAC and individuals like Ernie Gammage, Phyllis Krantzman, Roland Swenson, Ed Ward, Jeff Whittington, and many others, “Into the Future” summarized the findings of thirteen caucus meetings from January through March of 1985. On the local level, the AMAC found that music was one of Austin’s principal industries and acted as the leading industry in the local entertainment field. In

⁵² Shank, 205.

⁵³ Shank, 205.

⁵⁴ Shank, 205.

comparing Austin on a national scale, the AMAC found that the live music scene in Austin generated more activity than Los Angeles or Nashville in terms of per capita involvement. In terms of artists, according to the 1980 census, Austin ranked sixth nationally in terms of the number of residents who claimed the arts as their primary source of income. Additionally, according to the Chamber's measurements in the report, five million tourists spent \$349 million in Austin in 1983; with a major portion of this money being spent seeing live music. From these findings, "Into the Future" presented four main conclusions:

1. Those involved in the music industry in Austin are stable workers and take their craft seriously;
2. The local music industry has gained national attention and respect;
3. Music is crucial to the average Austinite's lifestyle; and
4. Increased support of the music industry from the community could result in more tourism and more local revenue. However, if this industry is not supported, it will rapidly decline.

Lastly, "Into the Future" pinpointed four main problems concerning the music industry, with a repeated emphasis on the current pace of the city's growth causing increasing property values, which, in turn, was causing many venues to close. The additional problems underlined by "Into the Future" included a lack of support and involvement by the financial community in the music industry, as well as inaccurate promotional campaigns undertaken by the city. According to the report, Austin was only being promoted and recognized nationally as a center of progressive country music, overlooking the diversity of the entire local scene.

On the basis of "Into the Future," the AMAC created a list of general goals for the city that included fostering streamlined communication and collaboration between the music and finance industries as well as between the music industry and

city entities. Additional goals included revamping Austin music's image, creating an office within the Chamber focused on music and entertainment development, and Chamber support of an annual music exposition that achieves national recognition.⁵⁶ This AMAC framework shaped how the Chamber of Commerce supported the music industry through the remainder of the 80's and 90's.

Early Efforts Made by the City of Austin

Beginning in April 1985, the Chamber of Commerce worked to involve the city in its efforts to bolster the music industry. Some of their initial recommendations based on the aforementioned reports and committees findings centered on tax breaks for live music venues, incentivizing businesses and promoters utilizing local bands, extending bus hours to nightlife areas, and adopting policies that take into consideration the impact of city decisions on the music industry. Additional recommendations included adding historical markers to places important in Austin's music history, like The Armadillo, as well as making tax free land available to incite music related industries to move to Austin.

The city ignored all of the Chamber's recommendations in 1985. While the Chamber worked to improve the music industry, the city did not.⁵⁷ The only city entity dedicated to aiding the music industry in any capacity was the Austin Arts Commission, created in 1975. With the goal "to cooperate in the development of its artistic resources [...] to stimulate and encourage many community interests to

⁵⁶ Shank, 210.

⁵⁷ Conti, 26.

come together and explore the ways in which the arts can become an integral part of community life,” the commission in practice proved a passive organization and an example of the beginning of a broader trend in Austin’s local government regarding a lack of tangible action made to support and improve the music industry.⁵⁸ The Austin Arts Commission mainly worked to apply for state grants, and because its mission supported any artistic activity regardless of discipline, the organization could not focus entirely on music.⁵⁹

By the mid-1980’s, it had become evident that the city and the Austin Arts Commission needed to more actively involve themselves in the current music industry climate. In May 1987, the city hired consultant Joe Englander of Englander and Keese, Inc. to further analyze the effect of the music industry on Austin. In a report titled “In Consideration of a Music Enterprise Zone/Cultural District,” Englander responded with an “emphatic yes” to the question of whether or not music could actually make meaningful contributions to Austin’s economy. The report explained that Austin had not given the music industry the attention it deserved given its potential. Englander concluded that while Austin musicians are worth millions to the national economy, they have not been utilized enough by the local economy. Additionally, he found that if developed properly, Austin’s music industry could prove economically advantageous and would significantly increase employment from unskilled workers all the way up to very specialized workers (lawyers, for example).

⁵⁸ Conti, 27.

⁵⁹ Gammage, Ernie. Interview. By Scott Christian Conti. 21 Mar. 1995.

Englander explained the urgency with which the city needed to support the music industry:

It is time for Austin to capitalize on our assets, to take advantage of what we have, to shore up what's here; and to cultivate it before it relocates elsewhere. Although many now recognize tourism as a clean and desirable industry for Austin, few have considered that one of Austin's most essential tourist attractions is entertainment and music. Music and the arts are an essential part of the "quality of life" that has helped Austin grow and attract other industries.⁶⁰

Englander's report serves as an initial example of the rhetoric inciting city policy to capitalize on the local music industry and work to integrate its economic impact into the branding of the city. Prior to Englander's report, the City Council and mayor disregarded the Chamber's urgings to support and improve the music industry in Austin; following its publication, however, Austin's then-current mayor, Frank C. Cooksey, declared June 1987 Texas Music Month:

Whereas: Austin is a hotbed of music in the Southwest and is recognized as the Music Capital of Texas; and

Whereas, Austin music has continually enjoyed demand nationally over the years, including such styles as Country Western, Swing, Rhythm and Blues, Rock and Roll, Pop, Classical, Bluegrass, Gospel, Traditional Folk, Norteño, and Jazz.⁶¹

Here, the mayor's declaration of Austin as a "hotbed of music" adumbrates sweeping declarations that would later culminate in its branding as "the Live Music Capital of the World." Following this declaration, the mayor, City Council, and other

⁶⁰ Englander, Joe. *In Consideration of a Music Enterprise Zone/Cultural District*. Austin, TX: Englander & Keese, 1987.

⁶¹ Conti, 28.

government entities would continue to utilize similar rhetoric in describing the economic impact made by Austin's local music scene.

By late 1987, the recession plaguing Austin became the final impetus inciting the city government to involve itself in the local music economy. As Austin's economy suffered, the music industry appeared as a way to grow both music and capital. Writing at that time, journalist Jim Shahin noted that,

The City's soured economy has helped turn the initiative inward, with music and economic boosters looking at how Austin can attract such industry components as booking, recording, publishing, managing, and publicity firms. Armed with statistics –live music clubs, says a Chamber study, attracted \$5.7 million and an audience of two million in Austin last year while Austin musicians recorded 98 albums – the boosters are convinced that capitalizing on the local music scene is good business. City government agrees.⁶²

The recession served as a mechanism to finally convince the City to seek economic development through the local music scene. Citing impressive numbers revolving around the economic footprint of the industry, Austin's government entities began seeking ways to draw other industry-related businesses like recording studios to the city.

On July 23, 1987, City Council created the Music District Committee in order to bridge the gap between government officials and those who wanted to create a proper music industry district. While the creation of the MDC did not officially establish a music district, it served as a way of letting the community know that the city was working to create one. Emphasizing the importance of tourism and keeping musicians in Austin, City Council established the MDC accordingly:

⁶² Conti, 29.

Whereas, tourism is a clean and desirable industry, and entertainment and music rank as major tourist attractions; whereas, the City would like to enable musicians to have successful careers while remaining in Austin, and make it unnecessary for musicians to leave for New York, Los Angeles, Nashville, or other cities in order to record and distribute nationally.⁶³

Acknowledging tourism as a means for economic growth, the Music District Committee's inception stemmed from a desire to support musicians in an effort to increase music tourism and brand the city accordingly. In the 1980's, the MDC drafted 14 recommendations that the city eventually adopted. A few of their main recommendations included the following:

1. Provide funding for live park concerts.
2. Use city cable to show live music going on within Austin.
3. Provide seminars centered on business and education for the music industry.
4. Create a small-business incubator zone for federal block grants for the music industry.
5. Provide incentives for businesses both in and out of the music district for providing live music.
6. Investigate creating a fund for marketing and promoting music and the music industry in Austin.
7. Work with the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau to strategize how to fully utilize Austin musicians and promote them.⁶⁴

By 1996, no official music district had been created. Efforts to develop a music district were eventually thwarted due to concerns from the African-American community within East Austin, who felt that the proposed music district, which would exclude the East, would serve as a mechanism to prevent other parts of Austin from enjoying the economic benefits that a music district would generate. Culturally, these individuals also worried a music district would underrepresent the

⁶³ Conti, 29.

⁶⁴ Conti, 31.

city's diverse music scene by only focusing on one region. East Austin served as the heart of the African-American community, and no African-Americans served on the committee writing these music district proposals. Additionally, business owners raised similar concerns over a music district, explaining that it would only benefit local businesses in a particular area, rather than citywide. Due to these concerns over privileging certain businesses and communities, an official music district was never established; however, today most would regard Sixth Street, South Congress, and Red River as live music hubs of Austin.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the Music District Committee continued working on its broader goals to further give city support to Austin's music scene by creating the Music Commission in January of 1989 as a permanent entity to study and report on the critical issues within Austin's music industry. City Council member Max Nofziger explained the Music Commission's origins, "It originated as an effort to see what the city government can do, if anything, to help the Austin musician."⁶⁶

One of the main goals of the Music Commission included "the resurrection of downtown through occupancy, through residences, through studios, through clubs would lend new life and vitality to one of the city's most valuable areas through one of Austin's most valuable assets."⁶⁷ The emphasis on the reconstruction of downtown served as a tool to further attract tech companies and other businesses to the city. Compared to today, downtown Austin in the 1980s had suffered from

⁶⁵ O'Meara and Tretter, 66.

⁶⁶ Conti, 38.

⁶⁷ Conti, 41.

urban decay, and the impetus to begin developing its core dealt with motives of improving the quality of life of its citizens in order to attract businesses to the area. In the '80s, urban theorists arguing in favor of New Urbanism saw that "positive urban social relations are best fostered by density, diversity of use, and a vibrant street life," pushing the notion that a bustling city center correlated with the vitality of a city.⁶⁸ This came during a time when suburbanization in the United States had reached an all-time high. In 1980, the United States census showed that more than forty percent of the population lived in suburbs, and Austin, like many other cities, continued experiencing a post-World War II "deconcentration."⁶⁹ This national movement toward suburbanization, Kenneth Jackson explained, stemmed from several factors:

It is a manifestation of such fundamental characteristics of American society conspicuous consumption, a reliance upon the private automobile, upward mobility, the separation of the family into nuclear units, the widening division between work and leisure, and a tendency toward racial and economic exclusiveness.⁷⁰

Austin experienced this manifestation as "white people, mostly the middle class, but upper [class] people as well, moved out of the inner city out of fear of crime in the '70s."⁷¹ As these factors caused suburbanization in cities across the country,

⁶⁸ Peterson, Marina. "Utopia/Dystopia: Art and Downtown Development in Los Angeles." In *Global Downtowns*, edited by Marina Peterson and Gary W. McDonough. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

⁶⁹ Jackson, Kenneth. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985.

⁷⁰ Jackson, 4.

⁷¹ Harris, Thor. Interview by the author. February 21, 2018.

including Austin, the city saw an opportunity to profit from investing in developing downtown. Proving economically sound, Austin worked to revitalize its downtown and draw people and businesses to its core.

The city's continued attempts to firmly grasp what needed fixing in the industry continued in 1990, with the Music District Committee's release of a survey to understand what issues in the music industry should be prioritized. Topics on the survey ranged from marketing the industry and developing infrastructure, to giving musicians benefits in order to maintain local talent. From the survey results, the MDC concluded that economically developing the industry as well maintaining and fostering local talent were two of the main priorities in the early '90's. This era during the late '80's and early '90's proved one of the more intensive sets of initiatives seen throughout the history of Austin's cultural planning in regards to music. Strategies beginning a few years before the MDC survey began to take further shape, and new tangible initiatives to brand the city and develop the downtown area resulted from the survey. Rather than just pitching recommendations and creating new government groups related to the music industry, this period is marked by efforts to rapidly support, develop, and market Austin's local music scene.

Originally, Austin utilized many of the same tools that other American cities had used to develop downtown: tax breaks, community develop block grants, and other development incentives in order to lure businesses into the downtown area. However, the MDC survey led to the MDC and Music Commission's realization that industry specific incentives should be used to economically develop downtown.

Taking inspiration from cities like Memphis, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Nashville, New

Orleans, Athens, and others that had undertaken similar initiatives, in 1987 the MDC created a framework (titled “Music Incentive Analysis”) that allowed stakeholders to tell the MDC what they saw as their economic needs and offer potential solutions. In turn, the MDC began utilizing the survey results and Music Incentive Analysis to implement economic incentives that would promote the music industry. Incentives implemented by the Economic Development and International Trade Department centered on reducing development fees and expediting permit approvals for music related projects, creating an Enterprise Zone Program aimed at nightclubs to increase building similar ventures, and providing Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG), which would cover 20% of music industry projects, so long as they stimulated the economy. Additional ventures stemming from the MDC’s findings included a \$3.8 million trust fund created in the early 1990s to create Leverage Loan Pool Program, which helped with projects in the unofficial music district and enterprise zone. The state even gave money by sending \$15 million to the Texas Product Development Fund and Small Business Incubator Fund. Tactically, this stream of initiatives helped finance and promote the development of music and business ventures downtown.

In addition to creating financial incentives, strategies focusing heavily on marketing and publicity began taking force in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Smaller efforts like advertising a schedule of live music happenings on local cable TV channels as well as hosting seminars and conventions for industry workers worked to promote and support the music scene on a local level. On a grander scale, the City began working to build a Civic Center, which did not exist at the time, in conjunction

with the goal of promoting music tourism. In attempts to replicate efforts in Memphis and Nashville, the Music District Committee proposed the civic center concept to City Council in 1988. Additionally, the Music Commission chimed in on these efforts, explaining that more promotion of Austin's music would lead to more tourism and money pouring into the city:

Austin's fledgling visitors industry currently accounts for 6 percent of Austin's economy without the benefits of a civic center. If our music industry joined forces with our visitor industry, not only would the music industry grow, but the tourism industry and our environment would be greatly enhanced. As Austin's music industry attains greater prominence, so then does the total Austin community. We must acknowledge that becoming known as a center for music is a highly positive image and identity for the city. More importantly, music is economic development and jobs – and that has universal appeal.⁷²

These development efforts in the late 1980s and early 1990s were supported with data found in the Hicks Report written in 1987 by Sandra Hicks. As a socio-economist for Espey, Huston, and Associates, Hicks found that the arts and entertainment in Austin generated \$37.3 million annually, while live music venues maintained a two million-person audience per year. Her study also analyzed Austinites' leisure time and uncovered that 78.7% of 600 respondents would attend a citywide arts and culture festival. In March of the same year, Austin held its first South by Southwest Festival.

In 1986, the Chamber of Commerce began courting New York's New Music Seminar, a forum that linked the commercial recording industry within the alternative network. The Chamber wanted a similar point of discourse for Austin's

⁷² Gammage, Ernie. Interview. By Scott Christian Conti. 21 Mar. 1995.

music industry, and the NMS had agreed to help them plan one called the Southwestern Music Seminar. Eventually, the NMS backed out of the deal, and the Chamber called on individuals within *The Austin Chronicle* to continue planning the seminar. Roland Swenson, Louis Meyers, Louis Black and Nick Barbaro at *The Chronicle* founded this Chamber-supported project and utilized much-needed capital and advertising dollars from the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau. The primary goal of the first SXSW was to conduct panels discussing the issues musicians were facing when first entering the industry, and the founders deliberately had the event coincide with annual Chronicle Music Awards. Participants were able to discuss these issues while also engaging in live performances by over 150 bands, two-thirds of which were local. In contrast with the New Music Seminar, SXSW focused on emerging, unsigned artists and served as a way to discuss and witness modern music making. Barry Shank explains the significance of the first few years of SXSW, “Crossing the boundaries between the roles of fan and of business person, participants in SXSW reinforce the industrial structure that mediates this distinction.”⁷³ SXSW allowed for, and continues to allow for, the collaboration between those who are not only fans of music, but also proponents of a viable industry structure. Not only that, but the festival further propelled Austin’s local music industry onto a national stage, drawing people from all over the world to participate in panels and listen to music from emerging artists. In its inaugural event in 1987, SXSW saw 700 people register for the event. In 2017, SXSW boasted 70,696 attendees, bringing in nearly 150 million dollars to the local

⁷³ Shank, 230.

economy.⁷⁴ The SXSW Festival, heavily supported by city entities like the Chamber and Visitors Bureau, undoubtedly contributed to and sped up the momentum toward branding Austin as a music city.

Leading up to the official titling of Austin as “the Live Music Capital of the World,” the city created the Music Liaison Office in 1989 to serve as a “one stop service” inside the Economic Development Office to deal with marketing, financial assistance, and event development. Placing the organization within the Economic Development Office served as another manner of pushing music as an economic development tool rather than an auxiliary aspect of Austin’s lifestyle. The main goal of the Music Liaison Office was to “pro-actively engage in activities to promote Austin’s identity as a music industry center,” as an additional mechanism for further integrating music into Austin’s branding tactic. One stride made by the MLA was the Music Industry Loan Guarantee Program beginning in 1991, which helped orchestrate bank loans given to music related businesses in Austin because “financing is a critical problem for the music industry.”⁷⁵ Roy Benson from Asleep at the Wheel serves as a noteworthy example of the Loan Guarantee Program in use. Benson received a loan in 1993 to expand his recording studio, which led to recording a Grammy award-winning record within its walls. The MLA transparently described the goal of the loan program attract more businesses to Austin:

We are trying to attract the small business music owners, i.e. software developers and small manufacturers, small record companies, etc. By doing

⁷⁴ Greyhill Advisors. *Analysis of the Economic Benefit to the City of Austin from SXSW 2017*. SXSW, 2017. Accessed April 27, 2018. <https://www.sxsw.com/>.

⁷⁵ Conti, 57.

so, we will create a critical mass which will attract more music businesses. Combined with a highly educated labor pool, Austin's music industry should continue to grow and prosper.⁷⁶

Fostering financial networks between the music industry and banks had long been a goal discussed by groups like the Chamber and AMAC. This tactic sought to give financial support to the industry, which would in turn attract smaller businesses to Austin that would engage in the industry. The Music Liaison Office predicted this coordination between the two sectors would lead to continued growth.

Stepping back and examining trends up until this point, the efforts made by government entities experience a cyclical pattern of working to better understand the impact and size of Austin's music industry and implementing infrastructure improvements based on these findings. By 1990, the efforts of the Chamber and AMAC led to the creation of the Music Liaison Office as well as the national success of the South by Southwest Festival. The loosely defined music industry in 1984 transformed from 50 individuals and establishments to 600 by 1990 according to the Austin Music Industry Guide. Similarly, record labels grew from 22 to 43 in the same timespan.⁷⁷ This increase in businesses serves as a direct correlation between the city's efforts to capitalize on the industry for economic development. In response to these economic changes and the added structure to the industry, aesthetic changes naturally ensued. Younger people became more conservative in their behavior, and the music scene began being losing its trademark of dancing and intoxication. A sense of spontaneity that the scene historically possessed began

⁷⁶ Conti, 58.

⁷⁷ Shank, 211.

subsiding, and more people began promoting Austin’s music from a business standpoint despite dwindling crowds at actual shows. In light of all this change, the local music sector had fully gained national visibility and influence, and a critical mass had been formed for its developed industry.⁷⁸

All the previous momentum made by city government entities culminated with the naming of Austin as “The Live Music Capital of the World” in 1991. Proposed by the Music Commission, City Council officially adopted the slogan in August, and added the responsibility of owning and promoting the slogan to the Music Liaison Office. City Council’s declaration of Austin as the “Live Music Capital of the World” reads as follows:

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is, indisputably, the Live Music Capital of the World; and WHEREAS, there are hundreds of venues that offer live music on a regular basis; and WHEREAS, Austin’s musical diversity is legendary, encompassing all conceivable styles of music; and WHEREAS, Austin’s live music venues serve as a major cornerstone for Austin’s tourism, hotel and convention business; and WHEREAS, Austin has achieved international recognition for its live music industry; and WHEREAS, Austin’s live music industry provides the basis for employment, economic development, creative and cultural growth and greatly enhances our quality of life; NOW THEREFORE, the City Manager or her designee is authorized to adopt “Live Music Capital of the World” as the official slogan of the City of Austin, to be proudly displayed in connection with all correspondence, promotion, public relations and publicity.⁷⁹

Citing its number of venues, their economic contribution to the city and tourism, the city’s musical diversity, and effects of live music on an enhanced quality of life for Austin’s constituents, this declaration utilizes grandiose rhetoric in framing Austin

⁷⁸ Shank, 214-215.

⁷⁹ Conti, 59.

as the live music capital. Words and phrases such as “indisputably,” “legendary,” “encompassing all conceivable styles,” and “international recognition” are asserted without being supported by any specific data, which should call into question the validity of this title. In order to fully “sell” this slogan and rhetoric, the Music Liaison office had to further outline and study the economic impact of the music industry on Austin. Bob Meyer with the Music Liaison Office wrote a press release in February of 1991 bolstering the creation of the moniker:

The economic activity generated by live performances, recording, marketing and music products, music education and music business infrastructure support is a significant component in the local economy. The study currently underway attempts to describe, measure and assess this impact so that the maximum amount of information possible is available on which to base recommendations for programs that will promote and enhance economic development of the music industry in Austin⁸⁰

By 1992, the study advertised by Meyer found that the entire annual music industry impact for that year was \$435 million, but without providing evidence for this number. Criticized by many, this report left the public “completely in the dark” as to how the city arrived at the figure of \$435 million.⁸¹ Even at its inception, the declaration of Austin as the live music capital merited criticism, both by those outside of and within the industry. This movement spurred years of cultural plans for the city, the first wave of which continued efforts to grow the industry, and as a result, grow the city.

⁸⁰ Conti, 60.

⁸¹ Gammage, Ernie. Interview by Scott Christian Conti. Austin, TX. March 21, 1995.

Serving as the first major cultural plan, the Austin Comprehensive Arts Plan, created in 1993, acted as a global community arts and cultural plan.⁸² Led by the Austin Arts Commission, the plan's official goal emphasized creating "an environment which enables artists and arts organizations to realize fully their potential as contributors to the economic and cultural prosperity of the city of Austin."⁸³ This mission statement draws attention to the fact that the potential to be "realized" is not strictly musical, but relates to the overall prosperity of the city. Here the success of musicians and other creatives, more directly than elsewhere, is equated with the success of the city, while adding in the empty phrasing of "cultural prosperity" to reduce the sentiment that the city primarily cares about the capital these individuals generate. The ACAP made 34 recommendations across eight areas including economic development, funding, and public relations and marketing.

In analyzing this cultural plan, like many efforts predating its work, the ACAP lacked rigid implementation and fell back on "visionary descriptions" on how the city would look were the plan to be successfully carried out. The plan urged that it be integrated at the city level with other development plans, but like most cultural plans, it never was. Calling for groups to further analyze the impact of the cultural sector, the ACAP said nothing about evaluating the plan and its impact later on. The ACAP anticipates discourses popularized by writers like Richard Florida, to be discussed later on, and omits any analysis of neighborhood relationships and their

⁸² Smith, Rachel. "Sounds Like a Plan: Evaluating Cultural Plans." Master's thesis, Ohio State University, 2010. Accessed May 2, 2018. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/rws_etd/document/get/osu1281551226/inline.

⁸³ Smith, 50.

impact on the creative sector. Being one of the first cultural plans in the city, the ACAP mainly concerned itself with central Austin, and mostly focused on the arts as a whole rather than emphasizing the importance and problems within the music industry.

The efforts by city government to promote Austin music discussed in this section follow an overall theme of growing the city's industry and thereby its economy. Austin's desire to become a tech hub further spurred developing the arts and cultural activity within the city. Every policy plan and goal cited by groups like the Chamber emphasizes bolstering Austin's local music industry in order to grow not only the industry, but also Austin as a whole. What will come in the early 2000's is the realization that this rapid growth, in part due to branding the city musically, has created problems of affordability and livability. The growing pains of the city will more directly begin affecting musicians and other creatives, and policy planning will shift from "How do we grow Austin?" to "How do we sustain the music scene in light of these problems created by growth?"

Part III: Austin's Current Ecosystem and the Lives of Musicians

"It's pretty easy to be sour about how things have gotten expensive. But the upside is there's way more people to play with" – local musician Thor Harris on the topic of Austin's growth

In late February 2018, Thor Harris sat down with me and traced his roughly thirty-year journey as a musician in Austin's indie scene, describing the enormous changes experienced by the music community during that time period. Harris moved to Austin in the mid-1980s, began assimilating amongst the local "weirdos," and eventually started playing in various bands beginning in 1987. Aligning himself and his bands with the burgeoning punk scene, he only paid \$200 a month for rent in the West Campus area while simultaneously holding hourly jobs throughout the years at Whole Foods and bike shops. Handyman work has always helped keep him financially afloat. When discussing his finances in the 80s and 90s, Harris optimistically explained, "I could always live on a thousand dollars a month... if even that. We all could." Harris explained that cheap rent early on in his career and the timing of purchasing his house in the 1990s, prior to Austin's transformational growth, secured his ability to continue affording the musician lifestyle until now.⁸⁴

Musicians who have recently moved to Austin, however, have not experienced the same low cost of living as their counterparts of the 1980s. Austin's evolution since its music scene blossomed has led to a series of growing pains, with

⁸⁴ Harris, Thor. Interview by the author. February 21, 2018.

the main issues being increased property values and significantly steeper rental rates. At the same time, low-wage jobs have not experienced proportionate growth, making it harder and harder for musicians and others in the creative sector to survive in Austin's new ecosystem. Just recently in March, Austin legend Dale Watson announced his departure for Memphis in response to the new Austin.

Explaining the reasoning for his leave, Watson said:

I just really feel like the city has sold itself. Just because you're going to get \$45 million for a company to come to town – if it's not the best interest of the town, I don't think they should do it. This city was never about money. It was about quality of life [...] I make a good living. But the city has really made it hard to make a living and live in the city limits.⁸⁵

As many musicians continue to flood into Austin, Watson's exit has stunned locals and further symbolizes the impact of the city's growth on its music scene. Arguing that Memphis possesses a similar atmosphere to the Austin he knew in the 80s, Watson called Memphis' scene "electrifying" while Austin's has lost its personality.⁸⁶

This section will examine exactly how Austin's environment has changed, how musicians are being affected today, and the current policies in place dealing with the music industry.

⁸⁵ Scarpelli, Leah. "Dale Watson on Leaving Austin: The City Has Sold Itself." *Texas Standard*, March 8, 2018. Accessed April 8, 2018. <http://www.texasstandard.org/stories/dale-watson-the-city-has-sold-itself/>.

⁸⁶ Chris, Davis. "Puttin' Down Roots: Country Outlaw Dale Watson's Love Affair with Memphis Comes Full Circle." *The Memphis Flyer* (Memphis, TN), February 15, 2018. Accessed April 8, 2018. <https://www.memphisflyer.com/memphis/puttin-down-roots/Content?oid=11238223>.

From Promoting Growth to Promoting Problem Solving: A Shift in Cultural Policy Planning

Whereas cultural policy in the past worked to brand Austin and give the city broader awareness nationwide, more recent and current policy mostly follows themes of correcting issues resulting from the growing pains that these previous plans helped create. The growth spurred by the cultural plans and reports of the 1970s through early 2000s mentioned in the previous section required stepping back and crafting policy to deal with the problems created. While these previous plans led to economic prosperity for the city as a whole, members of the creative sector began dealing with a great number of issues related to affordability that they continue to experience today.

Creative Class Rhetoric and Its Influence on Cultural Planning

In 2002, urban studies theorist Richard Florida published his book titled *The Rise of the Creative Class*, attributing successful economic development with higher concentrations of “creative class” workers within cities. Both widely lauded and simultaneously criticized among academics, Florida’s work concludes that metropolitan areas with more technology industry workers, musicians, artists, homosexuals, and bohemians have shifted the urban working landscape and contributed to greater economic development.⁸⁷ Florida argues that Austin most successfully promoted what he refers to as the “3 T’s of economic development:

⁸⁷ Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

Technology, Talent, and Tolerance,” with the tolerance portion referring to the laid back, “Keep Austin Weird,” lifestyle that the city upholds.⁸⁸ Highlighting Austin as the lead city for the creative class, Florida’s rhetoric both influenced and was influenced by local cultural policy planning during the early 2000’s. And while he has recently stepped back and revisited his own claims with a more critical lens in a recent publication (discussed later on), the nature of his studies have continued to influence the mindset of policy makers today.

CreateAustin: 2009

Heavily influenced by Florida’s praise and rhetoric involving Austin’s creative community, the CreateAustin plan served as the first major cultural plan created in Austin since 1993. After the 1993 Austin Cultural Arts Plan, no cultural plans took on a similar size and scope, with only a handful being completed that mainly served as further reports on the creative sector and its economic impact.⁸⁹ By 2008, the city prepared a new cultural plan to fix both new and old problems experienced by creative industry workers. Before writing the CreateAustin plan, a council of 70 community leaders from different industries analyzed Austin’s creative community for two years in order to provide accurate issues, goals, and recommendations. This council defined the cultural plan as a “process that will identify Austin’s creative assets and challenges, define goals and establish

⁸⁸ Long, Joshua. *Weird City : Sense of Place and Creative Resistance in Austin, Texas*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010. Digital file.

⁸⁹ Smith, 50.

recommendations to invigorate Austin’s ‘culture of creativity’ to the year 2017.”⁹⁰

Its main goals articulate a 10-year plan that supports the following: maintaining Austin as a “haven for creators with adequate, affordable space, housing and health care, as well as opportunities for professional development and networking” while also creating a cultural sector that is “financially stable and sustainable, based upon a diverse and balanced range of earned and contributed income sources.”⁹¹

In terms of framing, the document explains its intentions of providing a “flexible phrase” with the name CreateAustin in order to create an image of inclusivity of all types of creative sector industries rather than honing in on just music or visual arts. This contrasts with previous plans adopted by City Council to specifically brand Austin as “The Live Music Capital of the World,” as the CreateAustin plan voices concerns with focusing mainly on the local music industry. The introduction opens with concerns voiced during the planning process, and includes the statement, “Austin is widely known as the ‘live music capital of the world,’ but other modes of creativity have not been as successfully supported or branded.” Accordingly, the remainder of the plan focuses on the creative sector as a whole and giving support to industries not recognized as widely as the live music industry.

⁹⁰ City of Austin Economic Growth & Redevelopment Services Office. *CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan*. 2009. Accessed April 8, 2018. http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Redevelopment/createaustin_cultural_master_plan.pdf.

⁹¹ City of Austin Economic Growth & Redevelopment Services Office. *CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan*, 10.

While listed as one of Austin's active cultural plans today, the CreateAustin efforts seem to have fallen by the wayside. Boasting general implementation suggestions, the CreateAustin plan shows demonstrated enthusiasm, but minimal tangible action taken. Like many cultural plans, CreateAustin was, in Don Pitts's opinion, "kind of haphazardly endorsed by then-Councilmember Morrison."⁹² One indicator of this is the Austin City Council website's note at the bottom of the plan's webpage stating: "If you are interested in getting involved, or you or your organization would like to implement one of the strategies, please contact Janet Seibert. Put CreateAustin in the subject line and tell her your area of interest."⁹³ Given this language, one can assume that every initiative is not tended to or included in a government entity's agenda. Additionally, the recommendations section at the end of the full-length document broadly outlines implementation strategies, but again, the text lists no tangible steps or direct paths to improvement. For example, the recommendation titled "encourage development of more affordable housing and live/work space" describes the first steps to be taken as a matter of "educat[ing] affordable housing people about creative individuals as a segment needing affordable housing, educat[ing] creative individuals regarding affordable housing options."⁹⁴ This rhetoric, while well intentioned, is broad,

⁹² Pitts, Don. Interview by the author. February 14, 2018.

⁹³ City of Austin. "CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan." City of Austin Economic Development Department. Accessed May 2, 2018. <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/createaustin-cultural-master-plan>.

⁹⁴ City of Austin Economic Growth & Redevelopment Services Office. *CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan*, 61.

sweeping, and unspecific. Who are “affordable housing people” exactly? What are the exact steps to be taken regarding this “education”?

Imagine Austin: 2012-2039

In 2012, the city created and adopted the Imagine Austin economic plan to serve as a comprehensive roadmap for the city to solve challenges created by Austin’s growth. Imagine Austin’s goals center on an outline for what officials want Austin to be by 2039, the 200th anniversary of the city’s founding. The main premise of the economic plan revolves around the idea of “complete communities,” which emphasize sustainability, interconnectivity, and creativity. Imagine Austin outlined the central problems facing Austinites as increased housing unaffordability, “a sense of loss about a simpler Austin of the past,” and too many low-wage jobs that are not adequate to Austin’s cost of living. Specifically related to musicians, Imagine Austin posed the question “how do we ensure that musicians, young families, and hourly workers aren’t priced out of Austin?”

To answer this question, Imagine Austin focuses on policy changes geared toward providing more affordable housing as well as professional resources to the creative sector. According to the plan, the median housing costs rose by 85% between 1992 and 2012, and Austin’s population is expected to double in the next 20 years. To combat these issues, Imagine Austin plans to preserve current affordable housing units and add affordable housing units through public sector/private sector partnerships. Additionally, the plan supports creative sector specific policies that will continue to increase collaboration and resource sharing

between artists and creative organizations and businesses; supporting the growth of Austin’s live music scene; and improve healthcare and transportation to maintain Austin’s creative sector businesses and individuals.

The plan discusses the ARTSPACE program in Minneapolis as an example of a best practice policy helping artists with affordable housing. Created in 1979, ARTSPACE has developed more than 30 affordable spaces that not only houses artists, but increases collaboration and networking through an area of shared resources.

In order to implement these policies, Imagine Austin divides tangible efforts into short term and ongoing (or long term) categories. The short term category, describing plans that will last between one and three years, list creating a culture tourism program as well as establishing a strategy for supporting the live music industry while also dealing with noise issues. The ongoing or long-term category, encompassing efforts that will go on for three or more years, discuss the following:

1. Working with the city to better coordinate “creative enterprise” services and resources.
2. Growing relationships with local, national, and international business to “expand and sustain the financial, artistic and cultural excellence of the Austin music, film, digital industries, and non profit arts and culture communities.”
3. Finding new financial resources
4. Performing a market analysis of the creative sector⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Austin City Council. *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan*. Austin City Council, 2012. Accessed April 8, 2018. <http://www.austintexas.gov/department/imagine-austin>.

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan requires a progress report every five years, and City Council released its first in September of 2017. Out of its list of initiatives, 17 have improved, 11 have experienced little to no change and 12 have moved in the wrong direction. Since the plan's inception, more than 111,000 people have moved to Austin, making the total population 2.1 million and Austin the fastest growing large metro area in the United States. Concerning one of their top eight goals of growing and investing in Austin's creative economy, the progress report concludes that the city has increased its investment in the arts, yet creative sector workers still struggle significantly with affordability.

The results of cultural plans like these read as efforts addressing symptoms rather than the root cause of problems. In its litany of "progress" made, the Imagine Austin five-year report only lists strides made in "building capacities and creativity in people" and "development of creative spaces." The efforts made in the last year seem to only pertain to performance and visual artists, given that musicians are not mentioned. Additionally, the creative economy indicators mentioned in the Imagine Austin plan were unable to be properly tracked during the five-year period.

According to the report:

Due to the unavailability of data from an originally identified source, the indicators that were associated with the Creative Economy Priority Program in 2013 have been replaced by indicators that could be reliably tracked [...] Therefore, these indicators are limited in what they can tell us and not necessarily representative of the vast creative economy in our city.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ City of Austin Planning and Zoning Department. *ImagineAustin Year 5 Progress Report*. City of Austin, 2017. Accessed April 27, 2018. <http://austintexas.gov/imaingeaustin>., 31.

Given this statement and the absence of any explicit reference to musicians or the music industry, it is clear that the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan has not made many noticeable strides in aiding its music community. Or if they have, they have not been recorded.

With respect to the dilemma of affordable housing, reports drafted during the five years led to the creation of the Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint and introduction of Community Land Trusts, Homestead Preservation Districts, density bonuses, and the S.M.A.R.T. Housing incentive program.⁹⁷ However, the affordable housing category falls under the ranking of “worsening conditions” classified by the progress report as showing “consistent inequities along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines.”⁹⁸ Increased costs of living coupled with a lagging wage growth have contributed to this inequity, and the progress report cites the CodeNext plan as a potential method for alleviating some of the issues related to affordable housing.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ City of Austin Planning and Zoning Department. *ImagineAustin Year 5 Progress Report*.

⁹⁸ Marloff, Sarah. "Imagine Austin Five Years Later." *The Austin Chronicle* (Austin, TX), October 9, 2017. Accessed April 8, 2018.
<https://www.austinchronicle.com/daily/news/2017-10-09/imagine-austin-five-years-later/>.

⁹⁹ City of Austin Planning and Zoning Department. *ImagineAustin Year 5 Progress Report*.

Musicians Today - The Austin Music Census

In order to better grasp the effect of Austin’s growth and policy planning on the local music industry, the Music and Entertainment Division commissioned an extensive survey from Titan Music Group Consulting in 2015 to better understand the lifestyles of music industry professionals in Austin. Serving as the “most detailed” analysis of Austin’s music industry in history, the census compiled data from nearly 4,000 survey respondents, 8 focus groups, and 20 personal interviews to create a benchmark inventory of the three main sectors of the local music industry: live venues, musicians, and industry workers. With the private sector serving and continuing to serve as the main driver of the local music industry, the census sought to understand areas for improvement for each sector and propose steps for the city to remedy these issues. Artists comprised almost 2,400 respondents (60% of the total respondents).

Outlining the impact of Austin’s branding and music tourism, the Austin Music Census explained the following:

Music tourism creates cash flows that come directly to the City’s General Fund, as well as international branding that is a key factor for local companies outside the music industry to compete for high quality workforce recruitment, and also attracts technology companies and other employers to locate in Austin.¹⁰⁰

While Austin is experiencing incredible growth from music tourism, even outside of the industry, its musicians are not. Austin musicians are well aware of the

¹⁰⁰ City of Austin Economic Development Department. *The Austin Music Census*. By Titan Music Group. 2015. Accessed April 8, 2018: 5, https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Austin_Music_Census_Interactive_PDF_53115.pdf.

inconsistency between Austin's growth and their personal growth in comparison to the average Austin metropolitan statistical area (MSA) average.

The census' overall findings concluded that increased property values are negatively affecting industry professions, that the creation of a commercial industry hub would greatly benefit all parties involved in the industry, and that more city money should be allocated for affordable housing. Respondents across all fields expressed a disappointment in the level of civic engagement in efforts to create tangible change for music industry workers.

Overall, 60% of all survey respondents work two or more jobs to sustain themselves. Digging deeper into data about musicians specifically, the most striking and concerning set of statistics involving this group is their annual income, with the two greatest sources of revenue stemming from live performances in Austin and live performances on the road. Streaming and downloaded music contributes little to no revenue.

- 68.4% of respondents (1,288 artists) are making less than \$10,000 a year in their music industry jobs. This includes those working multiple jobs in the industry.
- Nearly 33% of musicians are making less than \$15,000 per year counting all types of employment. This means they are earning below the minimum wage annual income.
- 56% work another full time/part time job in a non-music industry role.
- 15% work another full time/part time job in the music industry.
- 22.7% are full time musicians

Another cause for concern discovered from the census is the number of musicians that require non-profit supported health insurance or are without health insurance entirely. From these musicians, 60% of respondents have lived in Austin

for 11 years or longer and 54% say they have been in the music industry for 10 or more years. In terms of health insurance, 63% of the musicians surveyed have paid health insurance from someone else, a company, or a spouse’s plan. For those without another entity supporting their health insurance, 18% of musicians receive services from non-profit organizations like HAAM and SIMS (which will be discussed more in depth later on in this section) while 17% of musicians do not have healthcare at all. In comparison to the United States’ Census, 66.8% of Americans have paid health insurance while 19% have no health insurance at all, signaling an issue not only within Austin’s creative sector, but also within the United States’ healthcare policy.

Fig. 4 Comparison Metrics: Austin MSA vs. Musician Survey Respondents – All Income Sources

MUSICIANS: ALL SOURCES OF INCOME, Pre-Tax 2013:	
More than 20.5%	Are Below 2014 Federal Poverty Level of \$11,670 ⁹
More than 50%	Qualify for Section 8 Housing Subsidies ¹⁰
Approx. 75%	Are Below the Austin MSA Area Mean Annual Wage ¹¹
More than 62%	Are Below the Austin MSA Area Median Annual Wage ¹²

From the Census, the Music and Entertainment Division suggested several policy changes that would help musicians, venues, and industry workers. First and foremost, they assessed that the City’s “brand marketing” and the City’s policy do not line up. Austin stresses the slogan “Live Music Capital of the World” without fully supporting the industry professionals involved. Austin has grown and experienced much prosperity due to the branding, yet musicians, acting as a crucial

branding point, are not seeing a prosperity that matches up. Overall, the benefit of living in Austin has come to be outweighed by the difficulties. Many would assume the opposite, but the census shows otherwise. Without major change, Austin's creative workers responsible for the city's image will begin leaving the city.

In order to retain the creative class, the census urged the City to set aside more affordable housing specifically for artists. According to Titan Music Group, this is easier than increasing revenue for musicians. Citing an example, in 2013, Nashville created the Ryman Lofts, an affordable housing building composed of 60 apartments dedicated solely to artists. The census urges Austin to create a similar model. One policy suggestion included creating music zones via "cluster development" to spur economic growth. Another policy suggestion advised setting aside specific affordable housing for musicians.

In terms of stimulating revenue, the census proposed creating an "Austin Arts Loyalty Program" that would prompt local companies to use Austin musicians for films, commercials, and other ventures as well as help invest in targeted professional development. To create new revenue sources for music, the census suggested creating a Global Business Recruitment and Expansion Division to identify other recruitment opportunities and trade partnerships with other music cities.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ City of Austin Economic Development Department. *The Austin Music Census*

Interpreting the Austin Music Census

Don Pitts, former manager of Austin’s Music and Entertainment Division, participated in commissioning the Austin Music Census and witnessed the reaction of its release. From his perspective, the census elucidated what role government should play in the local music industry, which is a limited one. Pitts explained that the census proved City Council should be focused on clear industry policy and helping festivals and venues navigate the “quagmire” of said policies. Additionally, Pitts explained his grief that the Music and Entertainment Division missed an opportunity by being mindful of not proposing too many recommendations in the census. “I don’t think much has changed,” Pitts said in response to whether or not improvements have been made since the census’ release. The conclusion section will examine Pitts’ more tangible ideas that still need enacting in 2018.¹⁰²

Non-Profits Working to Combat Affordability Issues

One positive aspect of this new ecosystem created by Austin’s growing pains is the number of nonprofits that have been created specifically to help musicians receive healthcare, mental health treatment, and funding for recording new music. While there are several organizations founded with these goals, three of the most well known industry non-profits in Austin include HAAM, SIMS, and the Black Fret, which work to combat affordability issues musicians face in both their professional and personal lives. HAAM and SIMS focus on musicians’ health, as HAAM provides

¹⁰² Pitts, Don. Interview by the author. February 14, 2018.

healthcare and SIMS funds mental health services. With a more professional development focus, the Black Fret gives grants to local bands for creating new music.

While these nonprofits are providing services necessary to the lives of local musicians, their long-term viability is uncertain. Each year these nonprofits face issues of supply and demand, as there is not enough funding to meet the demand made by musicians. Through the Austin Music Census, HAAM proved a critical resource for local musicians, and the improvements portion of this paper will deal with increasing funding for HAAM and these other nonprofits.

Music and Creative Ecosystem Omnibus Resolution – Current Planning

Incorporating ideas and information from recent reports and both the CreateAustin and Imagine Austin cultural plans, the Music and Creative Ecosystem Omnibus Resolution seeks to coordinate a set of actions to provide both short and long term changes to improve the local music industry. Adopted by City Council in March of 2016, the resolution lists the many reasons why music has proved a cornerstone of Austin’s economic development and calls for City Council to solve problems regarding affordability, land development, and permit processes.¹⁰³

In April 2017, the Economic Development Department (EDD) wrote a memorandum for the Mayor and City Council regarding actions taken since the Omnibus Resolution’s creation the year prior. In that year, the Economic and

¹⁰³ Austin City Council. *Resolution No. 20160303-xxx*. March 3, 2016. Accessed May 3, 2018. http://www.mayoradler.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/IFC_CJC-Austin-Music-Creative-Draft-Resolution.pdf.

Development Department hired two employees in order to create an entertainment services group, which will work to improve issues with permitting. Additionally, the EDD used \$75,000 to fund the creation of a revenue development platform for musicians with a release date of February 2018. No public announcement has been made concerning the state of this development platform, but it is expected to contain educational content for musicians.

In February 2018, Mayor Adler announced in the annual “State of the City” address that since 2015, City Council has increased the affordable housing trust fund by 530%, which has been used to partially invest in the construction of more than 2,000 completed income-restricted affordable units, with the expectation that the trust will fund 6,300 units in total. Segueing into the Omnibus Resolution, Adler discussed affordability and improving the lives of musicians:

The affordability crisis is hitting our musicians and artists particularly hard. This is not new, but what is new is how the Council is moving forward to help, working with artists and the Music and Arts Commissions to implement the Music and Creative Ecosystem Omnibus resolutions. We’re moving forward with professional development and on revenue opportunities with a busking pilot, a Facebook Live series, and a Live Music Venue best practice guide.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, Adler explained that Councilmember Kitchen’s ordinance had been recently passed, which involves the Chapter 380 incentive program encouraging new creative spaces.

While newly adopted, the Music and Creative Ecosystem Omnibus still lacks a detailed agenda and publicity surrounding its work and strategy. Unlike many

¹⁰⁴ "SOCA 2018: Planning for the Future." Mayor Adler. Last modified 2018. Accessed April 10, 2018. <http://mayoradler.com>.

recent policies imposed by City Council, though, it has a singular focus on improving the music community within Austin, which proves more hopeful in aiding musicians and those struggling in the industry. Additionally, the Omnibus Resolution appears to be taking into consideration data from the 2015 Austin Music Census and incorporating goals that involve the Census' main findings including issues with affordability, creating revenue, and skill development of musicians.

Part IV: Conclusion and Potential Paths for Improvement

“The city needs to realize that this industry, that the live music industry, is a cornerstone of what makes Austin Austin. And we’ve been neglected. And it’s time for the city to wake up and realize that if this isn’t preserved and preserved in the immediate, it’s never coming back. It’ll be gone.” – Ryan Garrett, General Manager of Stubb’s BBQ

The outset of this thesis posed the question “how does Austin’s branding as the ‘Live Music Capital of the World’ affect its local musicians?” The truth is that this urban branding has affected musicians and the music industry as a whole both positively and negatively, with the latter now requiring attention from relevant stakeholders within city policy planning, the private sector, and nonprofits. Without tangible changes, Austin could be in danger of losing its musicians, the core of its brand as the “Live Music Capital of the World,” and, in turn, alter the quality of life that the live music scene provides for its constituents. The reality in analyzing the local music industry, though, is that it serves as a microcosm for overall systemic problems of the United States and how to properly deal with managing economic growth and the concentration of capital in both a financial and human sense. Austin is not an isolated case of these issues within the greater music community, or within the country as a whole. Cities across the United States are beginning to reassess whether or not the creative city model spearheaded by Florida is sustainable and how to address the problems associated with cultural planning. This section will draw conclusions based on the previous sections and propose potential paths for improvement, weighing both the pros and cons for each proposal.

Issues with Austin's Urban Branding

Austin's branding as "The Live Music Capital of the World" has crafted an aura that any musician can move here and easily succeed. This slogan puts forth the image that all is prosperous as an Austin musician, when in reality, musicians are suffering under a slogan that has become more and more misleading in recent years. While it used to hold some truth, this marketing mechanism has led to city policy that has worked to grow Austin to the point that musicians cannot afford or are barely affording a basic lifestyle. Musicians feel exploited by the city's branding, as the live music scene and music tourism have driven so much revenue into the city's pockets, yet these musicians do not see that same revenue proportionately trickling down to them. Don Pitts explained that "through this branding, musicians feel like the city was built on their backs and they've been used and abused."¹⁰⁵ While the branding and slogan have helped put Austin on the cultural map in the last thirty years, in turn, they have also helped contribute to increased rent and property values while decreasing affordability and a quality of life for musicians living here.

In the highly regarded economics book *The Winner Take All Society*, Frank and Cook outline the effects of winner-take-all markets, which can be applied to Austin's creative sector and beyond. Winner-take-all markets occur when minor differences in performance between individuals, whether noticed or not, result in large disparity in terms of income. These markets attract many participants in comparison to regular markets due to the natural human tendency to overestimate

¹⁰⁵ Pitts, Don. Interview by the author. February 14, 2018.

our chances of success. As more participants enter the market in the hopes of “winning,” they ignore the key fact that their entry worsens the chances of others succeeding.¹⁰⁶ The numerous winner take all markets in our country, among other forces, have been a chief factor in the income disparity within our country and relates to the situation plaguing Austin’s musicians. Austin’s branding as the live music capital further fueled an existing winner take all market by attracting more and more musicians to the city. With each musician’s arrival, this branding continues growing the music scene, but also likely works to depress overall wages for local musicians and lowered each musician’s odds at creating a sustainable career. However, this branding strategy in conjunction with winner take all market forces has had several positive impacts on the city and its musicians. Although Austin is inching toward a cannibalization of its music scene, the flow of musicians into the city has created the critical mass needed in order for key elements of the industry infrastructure, such as clubs, to be created. This growth has also provided a robust community for forming bands and finding creative inspiration among musical peers. Additionally, a city branded by music garners national and international attention, which can lead to a greater chance of exposure for these artists and bands in their competitive economy.

¹⁰⁶ Frank, Robert H., and Philip J. Cook. *The Winner Take All Society*. New York: Penguin Group, 1995: 1-23.

Issues with Cultural Planning

While the cultural plans examined previously have good intentions for affecting change, they have not made a noticeable difference in helping musicians in recent years.¹⁰⁷ This is not the fault of a lack of care by their creators and initiators, but instead is a testimony to the nature of our government and cultural planning. In his most recent book, *The New Urban Crisis*, Richard Florida reassesses his 2002 analysis of the creative class, one that influenced and supported the cultural planning of creative cities across the country. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Florida argued that if cities can create an environment hospitable to the creative industry, the resulting increase in human capital would attract more business and eventually economically revitalize urban economies. His optimistic outlook, while holding some truth, inspired city planning in areas like Austin and Pittsburgh throughout the early to mid 2000's; however, Florida was not able to foresee many of the issues that this growth would cause. *The New Urban Crisis* acknowledges that this theory may have worked too well in that it spurred overall economic prosperity in many cities, but created greater economic disparity on the individual level.¹⁰⁸ Knowledge hubs like Austin and Pittsburgh that experienced substantial economic growth due to the creative class are in turn seeing greater economic, educational, and income segregation among their citizens. These cities are experiencing

¹⁰⁷ Grodach, 81-97.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, Noah. "Rise of the Creative Class Worked a Little Too Well." Bloomberg View. Last modified October 27, 2017. Accessed April 27, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com>.

exponentially increasing rents and land prices, which can only be afforded by the most successful creative class members (tech entrepreneurs, lawyers, businessmen and women, etc.), while the service class and low-income creative class workers are being pushed out of the city center. According to Florida's segregation measurements, Austin ranks seventh based on creative class segregation, first in the segregation of the less educated, fifth overall in educational segregation, and first in overall economic segregation.¹⁰⁹ Policy planning in Austin, partially influenced by Florida's early creative class arguments, successfully worked to economically develop Austin while simultaneously segregating its citizens.

Looking specifically at these cultural plans in Austin, they repeat similar goals year after year with few visible results. In the last nine years, the plans adopted by Austin City Council all mention improving affordable housing and business opportunities for musicians and the creative sector as a whole; however, the former has only gotten worse, while the latter still exhibits significant problems related to silo effects. Part of the problem with affordable housing in particular can be attributed to the manner in which Austin seeks to resolve these issues through indirect mechanisms such as adopting plans and creating task forces. Austin typically falls back on this strategy rather than directly building affordable housing units itself.¹¹⁰ An additional issue surrounding these cultural plans is the natural

¹⁰⁹ Florida, Richard. *The New Urban Crisis*. New York: Basic Books, 2017.

¹¹⁰ Brown, Dick. "Commentary: 11 Reasons Austin Will Lose the Affordable Housing Battle." *Austin American-Statesman* (Austin, TX), September 13, 2017. Accessed May 3, 2018. <https://www.mystatesman.com/news/opinion/commentary-reasons-austin-will-lose-the-affordable-housing-battle/pfncCzUdbh48BkK3Gv86RM/>.

inefficiency of American bureaucracy as a whole to affect change, coupled with the lack of follow-through on these planning efforts by local government. The challenge with these types of plans is their broad-sweeping goals and “specifically vague” nature.¹¹¹ Additionally, music gets little attention in these more recent cultural plans, most likely because music seems to already be the focus due to Austin’s branding.¹¹² The CreateAustin plan, for example, works to support the entirety of the creative sector, but notably emphasizes supporting “other modes of creativity [that] have not been as successfully supported or branded.”¹¹³ Ironically, cultural planning efforts pay little attention to the music industry, despite the branding of Austin as the live music capital. This lack of attention can also be attributed to the image that this branding creates. If the city is “The Live Music Capital of the World,” then surely their music industry is robust enough to carry on without help from cultural planning efforts? This in turn calls into question the validity of Austin’s branding, as it creates an exaggerated image of the success of the local music industry.

As other issues get prioritized in local government, it has proved difficult to entirely adopt cultural plans in Austin due to a failure to follow through on proposals by providing ample resources and modes of enforcement. And while this inefficiency at a local level proves problematic in enforcing cultural plans, a larger issue at play stems from tensions between the state legislature and the city.

¹¹¹ Pitts, Don. Interview by the author. February 14, 2018.

¹¹² Pitts, Don. Interview by the author. February 14, 2018.

¹¹³ City of Austin Economic Growth & Redevelopment Services Office. *CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan*

Operating as a “blue” city in a “red” state, Austin’s liberal goals historically have clashed with the state’s republican ideals. In January of 2015, Governor Greg Abbott, an ardent conservative, accused Texas’ cities of “California-izing” Texas. He explained in a speech to the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation, “The truth is, Texas is being California-ized... We’re forming a patchwork quilt of bans and rules and regulations that is eroding the Texas model.”¹¹⁴ In the eyes of the republican-run state, its liberal cities including Austin, Dallas, and Houston are working to erode the so-called “Texas model.”¹¹⁵ So as Austin works to improve issues like affordable housing that continue to plague its creative sector, its city government is experiencing a lack of support at the state level to achieve these goals. For example, in 2017 Governor Abbott vetoed a bill proposed by state representative Eddie Rodriguez that worked to protect housing affordability in areas of Austin experiencing gentrification. Abbott argued, “We should not empower cities to spend taxpayer money in a futile effort to hold back the free market,” to which Rodriguez rebutted, “there is a real affordability crisis in my district, and the governor’s cruel veto will hurt hardworking Texans who rely on their government to work for them.”¹¹⁶ Rodriguez’s sentiments underline a collective issue felt by city

¹¹⁴ Goodwyn, Wade. "New Texas Governor Adds to Tension between State, City Governments." NPR. Last modified January 15, 2015. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://www.npr.org>.

¹¹⁵ Goodwyn, "New Texas Governor Adds to Tension between State, City Governments."

¹¹⁶ Sanchez, Daniel. "What Streaming Music Services Pay (Updated for 2018)." Digital Music News. Last modified January 16, 2018. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://www.digitalmusicnews.com>.

officials in Texas as state legislature continues to prevent local officials from governing their respective cities, which experience entirely different issues from their smaller, rural counterparts. Tensions in Texas follow a trend throughout the country as Americans have found themselves in the middle of what has been coined “the Big Sort,” characterized by the clustering of those sharing similar socioeconomic profiles and political mindsets. This has led to the concentration of liberal individuals in cities and the conservative in rural areas, and with 33 states being governed by conservatives; many liberal cities are not able to fully realize their goals.¹¹⁷ As democratic cities struggle to resolve issues created by staggering growth, their lack of power to fully affect the changes desired are hurting those of low income. In the case of Austin, a state government with more power and an antithetical agenda is the main problem in resolving affordable housing for the creative sector.

¹¹⁷ Graham, David A. "Red State, Blue City." *The Atlantic*, March 2017. Accessed April 27, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/03/red-state-blue-city/513857/>.

Proposals

From the 2015 Austin Music Census, it became even clearer that affordable housing, health insurance, and revenue sourcing prove three of the biggest issues facing local musicians. Another major issue uncovered through interviews and discussions with industry professionals is that musicians in Austin lack the knowledge and business mindset to succeed in the 21st century. Lastly, many of Austin's music economy's issues stem from a "silo problem," which has hindered the growth of small businesses and the fluidity of collaboration and problem solving between musicians, labels, venues, and other parties involved in the industry.¹¹⁸ The following proposals will address these issues listed and categorize them based on private and public sector involvement.

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is undoubtedly the greatest issue for not only for musicians, but also for creative sector workers and low-income Austinites across the city. This stems from larger issues surrounding affordable housing across the country and the stigmas that have led to its underfunding. Many have called for a reconceiving of affordable housing in the U.S., one that would restructure its funding framework.

¹¹⁸ Swiatecki, Chad. "Pols, Industry Vets Join Forces to Lead Austin Music Economy." *The Austin Monitor* (Austin, TX), March 6, 2018. Accessed April 4, 2018. <https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2018/03/pols-industry-vets-join-forces-lead-austin-music-economy/>.

While issues with affordable housing also stem from tensions between officials at the state and local level, there are a few ways in which Austin can utilize its power to alleviate this problem. Because this is a substantial problem for the city as a whole, City Council should expand its public housing on a much larger scale, and in a way that de-stigmatizes its notion. In March 2018, City Council Member Greg Casar proposed utilizing tax increment financing as a way to create more affordable housing units in Austin. Casar explained that impending improvements to Austin's corridors would cause increased property values that can be utilized to fund important projects like affordable housing that need attention. Typically, as these areas property values rise, their property taxes also rise. The revenue from these increased property taxes typically are used to pay off the debt caused by improving the area; however, Casar suggests leveraging some of the revenue to expand Austin's affordable housing stock. He suggested that City Council support a policy promoting a more flexible use of property taxes, which would offer more potential for affordable housing than the typical method of setting aside a particular percentage of tax revenue every year. He elaborated on this proposal saying:

“Not only do funds in the affordable housing trust fund represent but a drop in the bucket of Austin's identified housing needs, they trickle in gradually, preventing the city from making major, game-changing decisions”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Craver, Jack. "Austin Could Use Rising Property Values to Create Affordable Housing." *The Austin Monitor* (Austin, TX), March 1, 2018. Accessed April 4, 2018. <https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2018/03/austin-use-rising-property-values-create-affordable-housing/>.

Casar emphasizes the theme of an overly cautious city government mentality, arguing that current tax policies have been unable to affect major changes for affordable housing.

Should Casar's policy pass in November's elections, City Council should consider allocating a portion of the funds raised to build units specifically for artists and others in the creative sector. Affordable housing is a crucial issue for the entirety of low-income workers in Austin, and while housing policies should not be entirely focused on artists, they should be taken into consideration given their link to the city's culture and branding.

One argument against this method of allocating affordable housing units specifically for musicians asks, "why do artists deserve their own affordable housing?" and "why should artists' needs trump low-income Austinites in other professions?" While this argument is valid and relates to how the United States works to take care of its low income citizens, there is a point to be made about the distributive justice of Austin's branding tactic. Because local musicians have helped create value for the city from both an economic and symbolic perspective, affordable housing for musicians could serve as a way to repay musicians for their historically underpaid labor. Since they see little revenue in proportion to the city as a whole, there is an argument to be said that musicians deserve something in return from the city – and this could be specially allocated affordable housing.

From a creative standpoint, a percentage of increased affordable housing dedicated to musicians and other industry professionals would also spur artistic collaboration between its residents. Living in close proximity to one another could

foster mutual support and idea generation for members of the creative class, and work the bridge some of the issues related with silo effects, which will be discussed later in this section.

Private Sector Support of Nonprofits

When asking Chepo Peña, a lifer in Austin's punk scene, about his experience with healthcare, he immediately hailed HAAM and SIMS, two nonprofits helping musicians with healthcare and mental healthcare, respectively. The Health Alliance for Austin Musicians, known as HAAM, paid for Peña's premiums when he was diagnosed with cancer, alleviating some of the costs on his road to recovery.

Explaining the need for HAAM's continued support, Peña elaborated on the relationship between Austin's branding and HAAM's services:

I've seen backlash from people saying 'Why do musicians get to have this? Why can't bartenders that work the clubs get the same thing? But the thing is, they're [Austin] making money off that slogan and we're the guys who are sometimes playing to nobody in these clubs. I think it's a wonderful thing that they [HAAM] do here, and people need to continue funding it.'¹²⁰

Peña echoes Pitts' sentiments surrounding the near exploitation of local musicians by this branding, arguing that the city's success due to the live music scene creates a need for organizations like HAAM. Thor Harris expressed similar ideas, as he has utilized both HAAM and SIMS for over twelve years, crediting the two organizations as beacons of hope in Texas' "really dumb, conservative desert."¹²¹

¹²⁰ Peña, Chepo. Interview by the author. February 2018.

¹²¹ Harris, Thor. Interview by the author. February 21, 2018.

In order to continue helping musicians like Peña and Harris, who lack the traditional form of employer-provided healthcare, nonprofits like HAAM and SIMS need increased financial support to meet the demand from musicians. Both HAAM and SIMS are unable to provide assistance to every musician that comes through their doors, and without increased support, the two organizations' funds could diminish. While both organizations have remained in Austin for at least 13 years, both "struggle to find the line between promotion about their strength and stability and professionalism and their ability to survive year after year."¹²² Both organizations hesitate to communicate just how viable they are given the demand, and given the chance that they may not survive from one year to the next.¹²³ One idea for increasing funding for both HAAM and SIMS could be imposing a tax on the hospitality industry, in particular hotels, which have historically benefited from music tourism. In 2017, the SXSW Festival alone generated 11,605 individual hotel reservations equating to 50,000 room nights for the festival's participants and nearly \$1.8 million in hotel occupancy tax revenues for the City. Backlash would certainly ensue, as this would represent somewhat of a "healthy musicians" tax. One argument against this tactic is that the United States' insurance policy is innately flawed, so why should Austin care more about musicians lacking health insurance and mental therapy in comparison to other professions in Austin? Millions of Americans fall below the national poverty line, so why should Austin's musicians be

¹²² Beliveau, Emmett. Interview by the author. February 15, 2018.

¹²³ Beliveau, Emmett. Interview by the author. February 15, 2018.

taken better care of than other low-income workers? The response to this is similar to the distributive justice argument made for affordable housing. One could argue that these private sector businesses would cease to exist without in the absence of musicians, so a required yearly donation in the form of a tax seems justified. Additionally, these hospitality sector businesses are able to succeed in part because of the live music capital branding, which has worked against musicians' ability to afford healthcare.

Drive Revenue

Another problem local musicians are facing is earning revenue for their work. According to Don Pitts and the Austin Music Census, musicians' main source of income streams from live performances, and "anyone who's been keeping an eye on live performance on a local level sees that it's continuing to go down year over year."¹²⁴ Despite the fact that the majority of revenue from selling concert tickets reaches the musician, Austinites are not attending as many locally sourced shows as they once did. Gavin Garcia, chair of the Austin Music Commission, partially attributes this to the current youth and festival culture. He explained that while the under thirty age group consumes more music than ever, the millennial and Gen-Z age groups have turned their backs on evolving local bands since every artist imaginable is instantly accessible via phone. Venues thrived during Garcia's

¹²⁴ Flanagan, Andrew. "The Struggles of Austin's Music Scene Mirror a Widened World." NPR. Last modified February 24, 2017. Accessed April 4, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2017/02/24/516904340/the-struggles-of-austins-music-scene-mirror-a-widened-world>.

generation's youth in the 1960s, 70s, and even into the 80s, but Garcia says "these youngsters aren't built to pay to see bands who play so loud that they can't talk to one another. They will spend a lot of money on tickets to see festivals like ACL, but are then are out of money to see local live music right here in Austin's clubs."¹²⁵

There has been an obvious shift in the way music is consumed, and with live performances typically serving as the main revenue driver for Austin's talent, artists need to further expand their reach through other outlets in addition to live performances.

Twenty-First Century Business Skill Development

In conjunction with this shift in music consumption, developing business skills that better align with emerging trends in the 21st century economy would greatly benefit local musicians. In a world where streaming and downloads now matter more than record sales, musicians must adapt to a changing industry landscape that requires musicians to increasingly learn entrepreneurial skills in order to push their product into the hands of consumers. According to Don Pitts, the problem with Austin is that there are few resources for teaching musicians high quality knowledge about being musicians in the current economic environment. Instead, "Right now Austin has a 'so you want to be in a band' programming [...]. We're teaching them what we know from the 80s and 90s music industry, not the industry that's been disrupted by technology." Government policy has mirrored this in the past and created a mindset of "coddling musicians" rather than providing the

¹²⁵ Garcia, Gavin. Interview by the author. March 21, 2018.

resources for critical, business minded skills. While Austin's live performance scene continues to succeed despite technological disruption, The 2015 Austin Music Census showed that musicians are "starving" for more ways to make money in music, and Austin could alleviate some of these issues by teaching its musicians how to be entrepreneurs.¹²⁶

Amy Corbin, distinguished head talent buyer at C3 Presents, echoes these sentiments in her experience with booking smaller acts at Stubb's. She explains, "They don't promote. They expect me to do that. As a local band, you need to go out and promote. If there's five people in the band, you all need to each be getting 10 people to come to your shows. You've got to do the work. You need to be getting yourself over to KUT, passing out flyers, calling everyone you know."¹²⁷ Pitts added that while technology is helpful, it has also made bands lazy with regard to audience development. Bands and solo artists often see posting on social media as a sufficient manner of promoting their concert or new music, when in reality there is much more work involved. Developing an audience involves leveraging connections, reaching out to everyone you know, and gathering data on what has been working and what has not when they perform.¹²⁸ This higher-level data Pitts alludes to represents a shift not only in today's music industry, but also in big business as a whole. In a business world where the acquisition of a customer can be precisely

¹²⁶ Pitts, Don. Interview by the author. February 14, 2018.

¹²⁷ Corbin, Amy. Interview by the author. April 6, 2018.

¹²⁸ Pitts, Don. Interview by the author. February 14, 2018.

measured, companies rely heavily on “big data” to analyze which marketing schemes work and which do not. In a sense, musicians and bands in Austin, according to Pitts, need to adopt some of this business mentality in analyzing what tactics are acquiring fans in order to further grow their fan base. In a recent conference he attended, Pitts listened to a lecture preaching the following formula: if a band develops 9,000 fans, it can survive. Valid or not, garnering the attention of at least 9,000 fans requires data, and gathering this data requires a band asking tough questions such as, “Hey did our show suck or not?” according to Pitts. His key piece of advice to local musicians is to understand their audience, each segment that comprises it, and what motivators drive each segment to attend a live performance.¹²⁹

One area where emerging local artists might need help is learning the ins and outs of copyrighting their songs. According to Pitts, few musicians know how to make money with their work online due to a lack of knowledge of copyright mechanisms and platforms for copyrighting. Workshops on the popular licensing platform, Sound Exchange, would be beneficial for the many artists who know little about how the industry works with regards to the Internet.

While the idea of business skill development could be interpreted as blaming the victim of Austin’s branding, this topic for improvement arose from multiple interviews as a way for individual musicians to potentially increase revenue in light

¹²⁹ Pitts, Don. Interview by the author. February 14, 2018.

of the City's inability to affect swift change concerning affordability. Rather than waiting for cultural policy planning to take effect, skillset development has the potential to give artists a much-needed boost in income.

Alleviating the Silo Problem, ALL ATX, and The Horizon of Austin's Local Music Industry

Most issues previously discussed throughout can partially be attributed to a larger issue of a silo effect plaguing Austin's music industry. In contrast with Nashville, which is often compared to Austin due to its similar size and prominence of music, Austin does not possess the quintessential industry layout or a concentrated area where music businesses exist. Instead, Austin's music community is much more entrepreneur-heavy, and a solution involving mimicking the infrastructure of cities like Nashville will most likely not work in the short term. Mayor Adler echoes this sentiment, explaining "I've said this many times, that if we're going to preserve music in this city, we have to figure out what the vertical is. L.A. has that and Nashville has that, but we can't try to be them. We have to develop what it is that we are."¹³⁰ Throughout the ten interviews conducted for this project, eight interviewees expressed concern for the communication between professionals in every corner of the music industry. From music policy shapers, to higher ups at C3 Presents and SXSW, to venue owners and beyond, a lack of cohesion and central leadership exists between all parties involved.

¹³⁰ Swiatecki, Chad. "Pols, Industry Vets Join Forces to Lead Austin Music Economy."

Amy Corbin explained, “It’s become a little more disconnected and not so centralized [...] When you disconnect, artists don’t have that ability to get together and collaborate.”¹³¹ Corbin is currently involved in a new initiative working to bring together music industry professionals and create transparency across the industry. This initiative, titled All-ATX, serves as “a collective of some of the city’s most entrenched business and government leaders [that have] set its sights on keeping Austin’s music community from being priced out of existence.”¹³² Founded in January 2018 by affluent entrepreneur Gary Keller of Keller Williams Realty, All-ATX is a 32-member coalition of professionals working in the music industry, music-related non-profits, and government officials. Initially, Keller established All-ATX as strictly a nonprofit to raise money for charities like HAAM and SIMS, but more recently, All-ATX is working to create a central voice for the music industry. While public information apart from the non-profit aspect of All ATX is limited, its website suggests that helping musicians will probably sit at the core of the revamped organization’s premise:

All ATX is striving to make Austin the place that provides professional musicians with the resources needed to not only succeed in their craft, but to also maintain a healthy livelihood. All ATX helps Austin musicians with education and affordability solutions so that Austin continues to be “The Live Music Capital of the World.”¹³³

¹³¹ Corbin, Amy. Interview by the author. April 6, 2018.

¹³² Swiatecki, Chad. “Pols, Industry Vets Join Forces to Lead Austin Music Economy.”

¹³³ All ATX. "About." All ATX. Last modified 2016. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://allatx.org>.

Currently, All-ATX is developing its first “graduating class” and creating goals for its next round of graduating members.¹³⁴ The first class is participating in monthly, daylong meetings from November 2017 through May 2018, and each member will nominate a professional to join the next class. The goal of the class programming is that after a few years, hundreds of people will be working to tackle industry challenges together, given that previous class members serve as members for life. After creating their voice with this first graduating class, broader goals for the incoming classes involve building a music technology economy, expanding publishing and songwriting sectors in Austin, and supporting music venues that are near closing.¹³⁵

Given that All-ATX comprises many industry workers from the private sector, it should be more successful in actually implementing strategies related to their goals. Corbin explains, “there have been a couple of organizations who have tried [similar strategies], and I think this has the legs to be that right group. There’s real money behind it.”¹³⁶ Unlike cultural plans made by City Council, a group like this possesses the capital and the focus to affect tangible change.

Directing back to proposals, All-ATX should consider finding office space that could operate similarly to a WeWork building by housing industry non-profits, recording and rehearsal facilities, and areas for music industry networking. An area that encourages collaboration and mixes industry lifers with newcomers could act

¹³⁴ Beliveau, Emmett. Interview. 15 Feb. 2018.; Corbin, Amy. Interview. 6 Apr. 2018.

¹³⁵ Swiatecki, Chad. “Pols, Industry Vets Join Forces to Lead Austin Music Economy.”

¹³⁶ Corbin, Amy. Interview. 6 Apr. 2018.

as a “YMCA for all things music,” in efforts to reduce the silo effect, help musicians develop 21st century business skills, and foster new ways to drive revenue for musicians.

Final Thoughts: The Artist’s Plight in Today’s Economy

The issues musicians in Austin face serve as just one of endless examples of those affected by problems within local policy planning and branding, creative economies in cities, systemic issues within the United States, and most broadly, the worldwide plight of the musician. Globally speaking, the musician serves as a vanguard example of employment and even existence as they sit at the leading edge of changes in economic trends and the nature of work. In the case of creative economies within cities, the average musician, among the group of low-income wage earners, is one of the first to feel changes in the economic tide. Ignoring the Beyoncé’s of our age, musicians by and large have never been marked by steady income, and this continues today as they strive to navigate a shifting industry in the digital era. The problems being experienced by Austin’s local musicians are also being experienced by musicians at a national and global level as streaming and antiquated copyright law have altered the industry environment. Credited both as saving the music industry and causing its demise, the streaming model dominating music consumption today presents difficulties as record labels are experiencing a net profit while artists and songwriters struggle to receive proportionate royalties

from services like Spotify.¹³⁷ Whereas the introduction of file-sharing nearly destroyed the music industry business model and cut its revenue in half 20 years ago, services like Spotify and Apple Music brought two years of consecutive growth for the industry, something that had not happened since 1999.¹³⁸ Record labels like Universal Music are experiencing staggering profits from streaming services, while artists earn less than a penny per stream.¹³⁹ Artists grapple today with licensing their music to streaming services in order to reach their audiences despite disproportionate returns. Conversely, live performances constitute the majority of a musician's income, as the live concert industry grows due to the millennial consumer's shift in spending on experiences and as musicians dig into this growing market.¹⁴⁰ Simultaneously, young consumers are streaming more music than ever while also spending more money than ever on live performances, yet the average musician continues to struggle financially. The current musician's income is created by a patchwork collection of sources, with each source dependent on sensitive industry economics surrounding streaming and live performance. And while

¹³⁷ Wlömert, Nils, and Dominik Papies. *On-Demand Streaming Services and Music Industry Revenues — Insights from Spotify's Market Entry*. Vienna U of Economics and Business, 2015. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/>.

¹³⁸ Nicolaou, Anna. "How Streaming Saved the Music Industry." *The Financial Times* (London), January 16, 2017. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://www.ft.com>.

¹³⁹ Sanchez, Daniel. "What Streaming Music Services Pay (Updated for 2018)." *Digital Music News*. Last modified January 16, 2018. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://www.digitalmusicnews.com>.

¹⁴⁰ DiMartino, Dave. "Live Nation Leads the Charge in Concert Business' Booming Revenue." *Variety*, February 8, 2017. Accessed April 28, 2018. <http://variety.com/2017/music/features/live-nation-concert-business-1201979571/>.

musicians have the capacity to generate revenue from these multiple sources, most musicians struggle to make a living given cultural industry employment that has historically been marked by discounted labor.

The plight of the musician, a plight also shared by visual artists, dancers, writers, sculptors, and the majority of the creative sector, is “a vow of poverty,” says Thor Harris. “It’s a terrible way to make money and always has been.”¹⁴¹ Scholar Matt Stahl explains that this vow of poverty stems from the autonomy musicians experience in their craft. Essentially acting as their own boss, this flexible model of working allows musicians to largely determine when they create, where they create, and how often they create. Additionally, the consumption of music is highly subjective, as tastes vary among consumers and the presence of a fan base drives the continuation of this ability to work autonomously. The recording artist, in particular, serves as a paradox between autonomous control and control by an external entity, the recording label, and the level of autonomy experienced leads to discounted labor in the cultural-industry employment.¹⁴² Music as a source of labor in general is a heavily debated topic, as it can be viewed as both “a productive and unproductive labor.”¹⁴³ These forces surrounding autonomous labor and the distinction of music as a commodity have led to what some would argue is an unfair compensation of musicians today.

¹⁴¹ Harris, Thor. Interview by the author. February 21, 2018.

¹⁴² Stahl, Matthew. *Unfree Masters*. Duke University, 2013. EPUB.

¹⁴³ Peterson, Marina. "Sound Work: Music as Labor and the 1940s Recording Bans of the American Federation of Musicians," 804.

As musicians continue to experience an “incredible crisis,” as Neil Young puts it, in reproducing themselves and their work in the current economy, policy involving universal basic income could alleviate some of the income issues musicians face. Gaining traction in discussions across the world, universal basic income policy could help close the enormous wage gap in the United States and improve the country’s social mobility, the lowest among the richest countries in the world.¹⁴⁴ Universal basic income (UBI) would involve national governments giving its citizens essentially an allowance, either through direct payment or negative income tax, and is being considered as a solution to extreme poverty and the elimination of jobs via automation. Proponents of UBI can be found on both the left and right sides of the aisle, as conservative proponents enjoy the idea that UBI could decrease the need for welfare services and other government entities. Left leaning individuals see UBI as a way to even out the wealth among citizens and support that it somewhat eliminates the need for workers to seek out low-wage jobs. Many disagree with the policy, though, arguing that it could reduce the incentive to work and that employers could use UBI as a reason to pay even lower wages.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, while universal income poses a variety of questions and potential issues, it could be a solution to income disparity across the U.S. and alleviate affordability issues for individuals like the average musician. With UBI, musicians could be absolved of having to hold down an extra job and it could incentivize them to become more entrepreneurial in their craft. As technology continues to disrupt

¹⁴⁴ Ito, Joi. "The Paradox of Universal Basic Income." *Wired*, 29 Mar. 2018. *Wired*, www.wired.com. Accessed 28 Apr. 2018.

¹⁴⁵ Ito, Joi. "The Paradox of Universal Basic Income."

and change the economic landscape for all industries and income disparity grows, UBI poses as a potential solution for the plight of the musician.

As discussed throughout this analysis, the case of Austin's musicians is not a unique issue in Texas, the United States, or even the world. From an economic standpoint, Austin's musicians act as a microcosm for how knowledge-based cities in the U.S. deal with growth, how national public policy affects those of low income, and how the economics of music as labor work in the world. Above all, this analysis stems from a love of music and the culture cultivated in Austin through its enthusiasm for live music. Whether or not the live music capital title holds true, Austin must work harder to protect its musicians in order to continue being a music hub and home for creative individuals in general. While its title is experiencing a decline in accuracy, the city still maintains an honest appreciation for its music scene and needs to better utilize its available resources to protect this industry. Musicians have never been known for living an opulent lifestyle, but Austin's musicians deserve more support given the revenue earned from the city's branding.

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Katie Bryant was born in Nashville, Tennessee on October 26, 1995. She began her undergraduate career in the Plan II Honors Program at the University of Texas at Austin in August 2014. During her time at UT, she worked as a peer mentor and lead volunteer coordinator with the PlanTutoring program and studied in Sevilla, Spain during the spring of her junior year. During her senior year, she interned as a data analyst at C3 Presents in Austin. This summer she will move to New York and work for the Brunswick Group.