

## **Sounding Austin: Live Music, Race, and the Selling of a City**

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### **Abstract:**

How urban elites understand, promote, deploy, and order music in twenty-first century cities affects what kinds of musical practices and sounds are associated with a city. We look at Austin, Texas, where the city slogan is “The Live Music Capital of the World.” Despite the apparent inclusiveness of the slogan, it is deployed in ways that support existing racial and/or ethnic divides as well as musical differences within Austin’s music community. Austin first developed a reputation as a music city with progressive country in the 1970s, a reputation it maintains with help from a diverse and concentrated geography of performance venues, and a number of significant music festivals. We look at how and why particular members of the music community entered into the city’s growth coalition in the 1980s. Music, at first, was supported by the business community because it was thought to be essential to promoting the city’s quality of life, only later did it become the city’s main brand, central to distinguishing Austin in an increasingly fierce world of intercity competition. Our research suggests that Austin’s elites in the 1980s understood music in terms infused with particular racial and musical limits. Today, we found homologous representations in how music entered into the growth coalition and the way that elites--both within the City and the music industry--continue to imagine Austin’s musical sound. We argue that this connection between Live Music and Austin’s economic development often serves to erase or ignore the city’s racial, ethnic, cultural, and even its musical diversity.

“Music is how we sell Austin. ... Music is our brand.” Rose Reyes, the Director of Music Marketing at the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau.

## Introduction

In 1991, Austin, Texas adopted the slogan, “Live Music Capital of the World.” With Texas-sized hyperbole, the slogan built upon Austin’s reputation as a music city, highlighting the abundant live music performances happening every night. City council members, business community leaders, club owners and musicians all hoped the brand would help the city by promoting the local music business and supporting the growth of the tourist and hospitality industry. Over the past 20 years, the “Live Music Capital of the World” brand (now trademarked) has proved to be a remarkably effective at elevating Austin’s image as an entertainment center; a hip place to live, work, or visit; and as a central place for the music industry.

The following chapter examines what live music means in Austin today.<sup>1</sup> We argue that music’s role in Austin’s economic development, framed by the category of “Live Music,” often serves to erase or ignore the city’s racial, ethnic, cultural, and even its musical diversity. Although live music could refer to all music performed live, bounded by the conventions of each specific genre, we demonstrate there are implicit and explicit ways that musical practices are excluded from the category. Live music must be sufficiently local, so some kinds of music are shut out by their commitment to practices that fix music prior to performance, including classical music’s use of notation and dance DJs use of pre-recorded music. Other kinds of music are excluded because of assumptions about race and music and these limits are unmarked boundaries, usually unexamined. Both of these limits are homologous with the representation of Austin that has been promoted by urban elites within the growth coalition. We, therefore, trace how music entered into the city’s growth agenda, who is invested in music’s presence in Austin’s public image and why, and how elites today imagine the role of live music in Austin today.

Austin is an excellent case study for exploring contemporary issues of music, race, and economic development in the United States. Austin music has already been the subject of two major studies, Barry Shank’s (1994) *Dissonant Identities: The Rock ‘n’ Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* and Travis Stimeling’s (2011) *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin’s Progressive Country Music Scene*. These studies were groundbreaking, developing arguments that connect music, community, and geography. We build upon Shank’s and Stimeling’s work, particularly their attention to how music reinforces racial differences and performs an increasingly economic role in the city’s fortunes, but we do not focus on specific scenes or genres. Moreover, we examine Austin in a very different demographic context. Over the last thirty years, Austin, and Texas more generally, has been one of the fastest growing areas of the United States, attracting new employers and residents from around the world, but particularly countries south of the US.

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<sup>1</sup> The slogan of Austin’s Small Business Alliance is “Keep Austin Weird” is the city’s other unofficial slogan. It also inspired Joshua Long’s *Weird City: Sense of Place and Creative Resistance in Austin, Texas* (2010).

In 1980, the number of people living in Texas was estimated to be over 22 million; in 2010 it was over 30 million. In Austin, the population in 2009 was almost 2 million, up from 600,000 in 1980 (Robinson 2011). During the 1990s, the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) grew rapidly at almost 50%—the pace slowed to about 35% during the next decade—and the character the Austin's city limits changed dramatically (Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce 2012). The largest increases were in the Hispanic and Asians populations, each grew 35% and 6% respectively, accounting for over 70% of the increase (Castillo 2011). While this growth has made Austin a majority minority city, whites remain the largest group at just under 50% of the population. More telling about the changing demographics is the relative size of the African-American population, which has declined to just under 8%.

We begin by situating our study in current literature before a discussion of how Austin's elites have deployed the Live Music slogan in the service of intercity competition. In 1987, a proposal to create a downtown music district failed, and we consider why this happened. Discussions around the proposal changed Austin's political structure and led eventually to the Live Music slogan. From there we turn to how the geography of performance venues has changed over time before considering specific examples of how Austin music is, turning to two collections of music in Austin: the *Austin Chronicle's* recent book and the Austin Convention and Tourist Bureau's compilation CDs from the past 5 years. Finally, we examine the limits of live music in Austin, and the ways in which "Austin music" and Live Music are understood by city elites.

The material for this paper comes from many sources, including archival materials located in the Austin History Center and the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History on the University of Texas campus. In these locations we found documents from the City Council, Chamber of Commerce, the Austin Visitor and Convention Bureau (AVCB), and a large collection of papers from Ernst Gammage. Other sources include documents available on the City of Austin web site, Austin's daily newspaper the *Austin-American Statesman* and the locally owned, alternative weekly the *Austin Chronicle*. We have also completed ten in-depth semi-structured interviews with local Austin elites, including past and present members of the AMC, past members of city council, editors of the *Chronicle* and one of the founders of the South by Southwest (SXSW) conference. Like others, we focused on those people that engaged in institutions that carry weight in influencing local urban governance (see Logan and Molotch 1987; Stone 1989; DiGaetano and Klemanski 1999; Tretter 2008). Our in-depth, semi-structured interviews explored how these local elites understand what kinds of music are and are not "Live Music," complementing the accounts we have found in the archives and newspapers. We are particularly interested in how these Austin's elites have helped to produce and maintain the category of Live Music.

### **Geography and Music: Situating our Study**

Recent literature on music and geography has focused on place-making, economic competitiveness and sound. Within economic geography and urban studies, scholars have begun to look at the role of music, often live musical performance, in urban competitiveness (Gibson and Connell 2003; Gibson 2003; Gibson and Homan; Currid 2007;

Gibson and Connell 2007; Gotham 2007a; Mizzau 2008; Seman 2010). Popular music studies has a long history of studying the relationships between place and music, particularly in cities (Cohen 1991 and 2007; Forman 2002; Whiteley et. al., 2004; Bennett and Peterson 2004; Krims 2007; Wallach 2008; O'Meara 2007; Johansson and Bell 2009). The cross-disciplinary character of our work brings together the focus within geography on economic development and live performance and the increased interest in musical geographies within music studies. There is at least one overlapping concern shared by these disciplines: music making as a spatial practice that shapes the distinctive qualities of place.

Moreover, this chapters draws on new trans-disciplinary literature that focuses on music's expression of racial identities and argues that music plays a central role in negotiating, acknowledging, reinforcing, and articulating racial differences in the United States, particularly in cities (Lipsitz 1994; Stokes 1994; Lyons 2004; Gotham 2007b; Mann 2008; Lipsitz 2011). We build on this work, considering how Austin's urban marketing is tightly linked to the projection of particular musical sounds and images, and therefore hemmed in by specific racial limits. The actors involved in making music a central part of Austin's urban growth coalition shared an understanding of live music related to a set of values and a worldview about music traditions that operated with an unstated racial frame. Music, in this regard, participated in the reproduction of the dominant narratives of race and ethnicity, which we examine in the context of the city's growth-promotion efforts.

Our essay is well placed within the present collection of essays, drawing out connections between the economic restructuring of cities and how people consume musical culture. Here, music is connected to tourism and the city's attempt to attract other forms mobile investment, mediated by collective expectations about what kinds of experiences and musical publics people anticipate finding and hearing when they visit, move to, or invest in the city. We show not only the economic but political saliency of music, since the formation of seemingly neutral economic policy could not escape the strictures of the musical practices associated with certain cultural groups. While attempts by Austin's elites to make music the city's business was driven by an economic logic of growth supposedly free from any specific cultural traditions, the packaging and selling of culture was always framed around particular kinds of cultural understandings. The kinds of music that were sold, promoted, or imagined as Austin were always already filtered through particularly kinds of biases and lens. In the case of Austin, these ideas about music were shared by the elites who became members of the coalition that drove the urban growth agenda and later homologous with elites that continue to promote music as Austin's brand.

### **Place Branding, Intercity Competition, and Live Music**

Intercity competition, place-marketing and urban boosterism has a long tradition in the United States, dating back at least two centuries. Today, having a stable and reliable urban brand serves to sell the city in a marketplace where people are confronted with more and more competing places to invest their resources. Who can forgot I ♥ NY? (Greenberg 2008) The perceptions we have of a city, even one we have never been to, have been shaped by how these marketers project the city to the outside world. Increasingly, city marketing

campaigns attempt to use local images associated with a place's "quality of life" in their branding (McCann 2004). Sometimes residents resist incorporate such marketing ideas into how they imagine their city. People often make fun or discount of these associations, and in some cases outright contest how their city is being represented, even producing counter-representations (see Tretter 2009). Nevertheless, the specific qualities presented by city marketing campaigns influences how residents perceive the distinct, valuable aspects of their city, even residents who find such campaigns ersatz or kitschy.

3/12/12 8:53 AM

**Comment:** Does this address your comment?  
Eliot Tretter

What today is often called neoliberal urbanization is marked by a seemingly endless search to find, promote, and exploit other non-economic qualities that can enhance a city's comparative advantages. Cultural and natural amenities and other features of a city's quality of life figure much more in promotional campaigns and other marketing efforts: they are often central to a city's brand. Moreover, consumption of a city's quality of life is significant to a city's economic vitality (Short 1999). Unlike productive activities such as factories, many aspects of a city's quality of life cannot easily be moved, this includes natural features like mountains and beaches or cultural features such museums and established networks like those of artists (Harvey 2004; Currid 2007; Strom 2008; Tretter 2008). Music has figured increasingly into how mid-sized cities claim a distinct position in the market, competing against the larger cultural centers New York and Los Angeles. In the United States, New Orleans (jazz), Memphis (blues) and Seattle (grunge) have made music central to their marketing and branding (Lyons 2004; Gibson and Connell 2007; Gotham 2008). While these cities have found it is possible to market a specific sound and way of life, Austin's marketing has not become welded to any particularly profitable or exportable genre, style, or scene, despite the success of progressive country in the 1970s. Instead, Austin has banked it financial fortunes on the more inclusive, more protean and more amorphous category of Live Music as its city brand.

3/11/12 10:31 PM

**Comment:** A 'needle' approach? (The needle metaphor has been used about early conceptions of how media worked). Reason for failure of campaign is sometimes that people don't adopt the slogan and idea. elite may initiate and regulate but this is only part of the process.  
Fabian Holt

3/11/12 10:31 PM

**Comment:** a) any research or references to back up this assumption? b) has music become more important in place marketing? SXSW very important and not only as image, also as event attended by many people c) you mention startups earlier, many companies will not act without reliable statistic figures  
Fabian Holt

3/12/12 8:53 AM

**Comment:** From Eliot: There is a tremendous body of scholarship on this and I have added several sources but certainly not an exhaustive list. I don't know if there is evidence that music has become more important in place marketing except that quality of life and culture has become more important. I think this piece pushes builds on this literature.

### **Music in Austin's Economy, its Government and the Growth Coalition**

Music, particularly live music, is envisioned in variety of different ways, depending on the particular function people value in live music. In Austin, there are at least four points of view: (1) musicians and fans value live music in terms of particular musical sounds and cultures; (2) the music industry understands live music as a unique kind of performance with particular kinds of economic value distinct from recorded music; (3) people with cultural policy focus see music in terms of its economic and cultural value for a cities quality of life; (4) and the broader business community values music as means to support a generalized growth agenda, particularly the redevelopment of downtown Austin. Below we focus especially on how music policy as a subset of a city's cultural policy becomes a part of its industry policy and is shaped by the agenda of the city's growth coalition. Later in this chapter, we return to music cultures.

Austin wants to be the "Live Music Capital of World" and it no longer attempts to be a primary locus for the music industry, or to make Austin a place where musical equipment or instruments are produced. While elements of the music industry's infrastructure are present to a limited extent, there is not a substantial concentration of recording studios, entertainment lawyers, and A&R representatives. Instead, city elites have focused on how

live music serves an auxiliary function, something that can help draw more service or high-technology firms into the city. While bars and festival can be important sources of revenues (Frith 2007; Holt 2010), the economic value of music for Austin ultimately lies in its connection to other economic activities that fuel the city's growth. Therefore, city government does "not judge the quality or type of music," as *Austin Chronicle* editor-in-chief and SXSW co-owner and founder Louis Black emphasized several times in our interview. At best, as Florida, Mellander, and Stolarick have shown in their study of music scenes, there are significant economic and social returns for musicians from geographical agglomeration and all a city government can try create an infrastructure to support a viable a collection music venues and live musicians living in close proximity to one another (Florida, Mellander, Stolarick 2010).

In contemporary Austin, live music is considered a positive addition to urban life and economy. Although music makes for a more vibrant quality of life in the city, and has numerous community benefits, these are not prominent in the official conversations within Austin. Both the of most important organs of the city government, the Music Division and the Austin Music Commission (AMC), measure music's significance in the city in quantitative terms and sort these contributions into three categories: the music industry, music community, and Austin musicians. Treating the cultural policy as part of the city's strategic growth policy, city elites emphasize music's economic returns and how music as well as cultural amenities in general enhances the city's competitive advantage. "To this end," Grodach noted, "[the city government in 2002] moved the Cultural Arts Division (CAD) from the Parks Department to the Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office (EGRSO), the City's newly established economic development agency" (Grodach 2012: 87). Similarly the Music Division, the primary agency of the city's executive branch of government for handling musical affairs, is within EGRSO and promotes Austin musicians, nurtures the music business community, enhances Austin's "liveability" through music, and oversees the city's sound ordinance (COA 2012c). Moreover, the Music Division has become a lab for supporting and enriching firms, entrepreneurs, musicians, and others in the music industry through programs including Leadership Music Austin, Music Business Accelerator, Artist Career Accelerator, Music in the Parks, and Export Austin Music. Separately, the AMC is City Council's liaison to the music community and gives advice to the City Council on "music economic development issues," which becomes the basis for the executive branch or Music Division's rules and policies about music (COA 2011).<sup>2</sup>

The AMC and Music Division serve different branches of Austin's local government, which is called a city-manager form of government. Characterized by a weak Mayor and City Council and a strong independent executive run by a City Manager, the Mayor's principal power is his or her ability to convene the elected City Council and interface with the City Manager, who runs the bureaucracy (MacCorkle 1973). Nominated and appointed by the

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<sup>2</sup> Many of the recommendations of the AMC rely on studies commissioned by the City Council that have shown the direct and indirect economic contribution of the music industry, such as *Austin Alive* (2007), *The Role of the Cultural Sector in the Local Economy* (2005), and *The Role of Music in the Austin Economy* (2001).

3/11/12 10:31 PM

**Comment:** Fabian, I'm not sure I understand your comment. The Florida article with Mellander and Stolarick in 2010 focused on music scenes. It argued that there are still significant economic and cultural returns to geographical agglomeration. I don't know which 2002 piece you are referring to. The 2010 piece has not been widely criticized.  
Caroline O'Meara

3/11/12 10:31 PM

**Comment:** I agree but this aspect of Florida 2002 has been critiqued so perhaps you can try to clarify: Is it more specifically marketing? And who are making the connection, where, and how?  
Fabian Holt

Council, like a corporate CEO appointed by the board of directors, the Manager and the various agencies, division, and departments of the city government are designed to be shielded from day-to-day electoral politics. The Council, in directing the Manager to do certain tasks, often relies on the reports and recommendations of the numerous City Commissioners appointed to a large number of City Commissions tasked with policy areas such as music, housing, etc. The City Council can adhere to, reject, or modify any ideas from a Commission before sending the Council's recommendations on to the Manager.

Business groups in Austin have a lot of influence in how both the City Council and Manager makes decisions, in part because most of the economic power is concentrated in hands of private citizens. In order to get anything done, business leaders must be consulted on important decisions. Additionally, the city-manager form of government is designed to benefit the business community by muting the ability of less organized and more geographically fragmented groups from influencing the workings of the local government (Bridges 1997). The main organization of advocacy for the business community is the Chamber of Commerce. For most of the 20th century, the Austin Chamber dominated local politics, operating through informal and formal networks with the local city government to become the leading advocate for urban growth (Bolmfalk 1968; Orum 1987; Tretter Forthcoming b).

An enduring feature of American cities, including Austin, is the presence of a so-called urban growth coalitions, a group of local elites from the private and public sectors that implement strategies to increase a city's or region's economic development. While growth coalitions can be found in formalized organization such as the public-private partnership the Dallas' Citizens Charter Association, more often the group, as is the case in Austin, is built from formal and informal networks of these local elites and the many individuals whose roles rotate between the two (see Tretter 2008; Tretter Forthcoming b). Usually dominated by a core group of members that are attached to real estate interests, growth coalition members often include various combinations of people and organizations such as tourist bureaus, planning authorities, local city councilors, labor organizations, local developers, the media, and representatives from business advocacy groups including the Chamber of Commerce. What drives these disparate, sometimes competing, groups and individuals together is an often-unstated consensus that urban growth needs to be promoted and developed strategically. The actors take for granted that growth needs to be coordinated by private citizens, working in partnership with the local government, because these people know how to figure out the best way for the city to remain competitive and prosper.

### Music in the Growth Coalition

Members of the music community have been active members of the city's growth coalition since the mid-1980s, when the Chamber of Commerce established the organizations Austin Music Advisory Committee (AMAC) and Austin Music Industry Council (AMIC) to evaluate and promote the music industry in Austin (Shank 1994: 193-208; see also Conti 1996). Both of these groups were led by members of the music community, although musicians

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**Comment:** and developed strategically? Not surprising, this is the job of economic agents at the institutional level of the city  
Fabian Holt

3/11/12 10:31 PM

**Comment:** Good word choice. The point, however, is that it is not only within the formal institution of government it is a private-public arrangement that is formed among actors inside and outside of the local government.  
Caroline O'Meara

tended to have a minority role. The Chamber's efforts were supported by the findings of a major study commissioned by the Chamber of Commerce and endorsed by the City's government around the same time, *Creating the Opportunity Economy*. The report suggested that "quality of life" was essential to the Austin's long-term business strategy, and pointed out that live music, as a form of local entertainment, could be linked more effectively with business and tourist promotional strategy (SRI International 1985). "Music is central to the quality of life here," noted Former President of the Chamber of Commerce Lee Cooke following the SRI report, "but it can also be central to Austin's economic development" (Davis 1985). David Lord, then spokesman for the Chamber, reinforced these ideas and suggested music helps attracts "conventions and tourists to the Austin area" (Lord 1985). Moreover, members of the music community embraced this idea, repeated in an influential report from AMAC in 1985 (*Austin Music: Into to the Future*), which noted how "Just as the music scene makes Austin a great place to live, it also makes it a great city to visit" (AMAC 1985).

Following these reports, music became more and more an object of concern for local elites within the growth coalition trying to cultivate Austin's music scenes and harness their potential economic value. One idea that explored by the City Council in 1987, through an ad-hoc committee, was to create a downtown music district modeled on Nashville's Music Row but with a greater emphasis on live music (COA 1987b).<sup>3</sup> The idea had been advanced a year earlier by a local concerned citizen, Joe Englander. He had prepared a working paper called *In Consideration of a Music Enterprise Zone/Cultural District (1985)* while working with the Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Austin group. Englander's proposal called for a "downtown entertainment district" as well as local government redevelopment incentives to exploit the existing concentration of musicians and clubs. The ad-hoc committee formed by the Council's resolution, was made up of members from a diversity of city organizations as well as three independent members, Englander, musician David Rodriguez and club owner Clifford Antone (COA 1987b and Austin City Council Minutes, August 25, 1987).<sup>4</sup> In February 1988, the Music District Ad-Hoc Committee released a report with several recommendations, including and a plan for the establishment of a music district.

Figure 1. A map of Central Austin, including proposed music districts and some venues

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<sup>3</sup> COA 1987b repealed a similar resolution from the previous month, see COA 1987a.

<sup>4</sup> The Economic Development Commission, the Downtown Commission, the Historic Landmark Commission, the Cultural Affairs Task Group, the Austin Music Industry Council (AMIC), the Texas Music Association (Austin chapter), the Austin Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts, the Austin Federation of Musicians, the Music Umbrella of Austin and SXSW, Inc. Complete committee membership was Gammage (AMAC), Sharon Judge, Randy McCall (Austin Federation of Musicians), L.E. McCullough (writer and musician), Andy Murphy (composer and studio engineer), David Rodriguez (musician), Roland Swenson (*Austin Chronicle* and South by Southwest), Laura Toups (civil engineer and consultant), Susan Walker (Jerry Jeff Walker's wife and Manager), Clifford Antone (owner of the blues bar Antone's), Englander, Robin Mick (public policy researcher), and Shannon Vale (lawyer).



The proposal drew immediate criticisms from minorities in Austin who believed they were being shut out of any potential benefits of a music district. The Committee first recommended that a music district should be created in the eastern half of downtown from East 12th St. to IH-35 and Congress Avenue to Town Lake (now Lady Bird Lake). This excluded any streets in East Austin, at the time the heart of Austin's Black community. In a letter we found in the papers of Ernie Gammage, one community member listed specific suggestions about how the historically African American community east of IH-35 would benefit from an extension of the district boundaries. "We can agree," the author concluded, "that the Black Community has had a substantial impact on the Music Industry nationally and locally. The East Austin's position in Music District and Music Industry must be reconsidered in your proposal (sic)" (Weir 1987). Moreover, the Black Community, unlike members of the ad-hoc Committee did not recommend targeting only "live music venue opportunities" for economic development but instead suggested that a range of community places such as the Carver Branch Cultural Center or Doris Miller Auditorium could be developed because they would "have a more immediate impact on *our* economy" [emphasis added]. Critics also noted that none of the committee members were African American. Council Member Max Nofziger, who co-sponsored the resolution to create the committee, responded it was "an unfortunate oversight" that no members of the African American community were appointed to the committee. Others noted that none of the representative organizations had substantial minority membership. Linda Lewis, then Chairperson of the black community's non-profit radio station KAZI 88.7, said that she worried "that the city may be defined as a one-music town instead of incorporating jazz and other music forms from ethnic groups that are not represented on the committee" (Brooks 1988). After the criticism, the plan was later to include one block of 11st east of IH-35, see map (Music Commission District Committee Draft Proposal, 1988).

While the proposal failed in part because of protests from the minority community, the objections from local business owners proved much more devastating. In a letter to Ernie Gammage, Greg Forest of The Music Office, complained about many aspects of the plan: it would only benefit land owners that were located in the zone, there were few music industry people involved with the committee, and the tendency of the recommendations to favor national companies (Forest 1987). Committee-member Randy McCall (from the Austin Federation of Musicians) also complained that he didn't "see any reason to give downtown developers a break and cloak it in this 'music industry' hide. I don't see how that's going to of any benefit to the musicians" (Shahin 1987). However, thanks in part to these discussions, music became permanently ensconced in Austin's growth coalition agenda.

The most prominent result of the Music District Ad-Hoc Committee was the Austin Music Commission, established in 1989 at the recommendation of the Committee. From the beginning, the role of the AMC has been to serve the city and the City Council, only indirectly addressing the concerns of most Austin musicians. The City Council's original mandate to the Commission was to "enable musicians to have successful careers while remaining in Austin." This goal was elaborated in 1992, to "[enable] Austin's musicians to achieve national status in the practice of their profession while remaining in Austin" (COA

1992).<sup>5</sup> A tension has long existed between musicians and the city; as seen above, Randy McCall was an especially vocal voice against the committee's mandate.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, McCall shared the worldview held among Austin's political and musical elites (the other members of the Music District Committee and the AMC). In this perspective, Live Music can encompass a wide range of styles, but it also has unseen (unheard) and invisible (silent) limits.

### Comment placeholder

#### Progressive Country, *Austin City Limits*, and South By Southwest

When members of the music industry began to join the urban growth coalition, many of them had had strong affiliations with progressive country. Other coalition members were fans of progressive country although they were not in the coalition as music industry representatives.<sup>7</sup> Progressive country was the first music culture in the city that self-consciously looked beyond Austin for meaning and success. The national success of progressive country artists, including Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, led young local entrepreneurs to imagine Austin as a new center for the American music industry (Stimeling 2011). Although these initial efforts faltered, generations of Austin musicians have worked to place Austin on the international music map, with varying degrees of success. In our interview with Margaret Moser—long-time *Austin Chronicle* writer and former member of the Music Commission—she lamented

Austin's had the opportunity over the decades to stand up a number of times and say, "Hey, we're doing this as good as anybody else right now." They did it in the early 70s with progressive country ...New Sincerity in the 80s was another one. Even Blues too, a lot of the Blues resurgence that happened in the early 90s came straight out of Austin because of Stevie and the folks (Moser 2010).

In the 1970s, Austin was a small city in a big, mostly non-urbanized, state, with the music of the cosmic cowboys accompanying Austin's early expansion. While no single music scene in Austin has eclipsed progressive country's dominance, the variety of music making in Austin has expanded along with the city.

The heart of the progressive country scene was the Armadillo World Headquarters, located just south of downtown, and its closure in 1980 was just one of many changes in Austin music geography. Later, a dense network of bars and other venues emerged downtown,

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<sup>5</sup> During the 1990s, the Music Commission also facilitated communication between Austin Music Television and the council.

<sup>6</sup> He called it an "unnecessary and inherently costly means to establish yet another bureaucracy with a nebulous purpose in a city which seems to be plagued with such" (McCall 1988)

<sup>7</sup> Some coalition members, like Gammage, were professional musicians, but they did not serve on the coalition in that role.

3/11/12 10:31 PM

**Comment:** General reflection here? Is it possible that majority music can serve economic role and that revenues from that could be shared with others (from a cultural policy perspective)? Could minority music also be integrated without losing city competitive advantage? I am thinking that losing competitive advantage would involve less commodification but also have negative effects on the overall urban economy?  
Fabian Holt

3/12/12 9:09 AM

**Comment:** I certainly think it is possible to add other kinds of music. The problem, or question as it were, is why these kinds of music are not associated. Although, it is possible that Austin, as one of whitest cities in the US, sells its whiteness to attract certain kinds of people. If that were true, then it might lose its competitive edge. We speculate a bit on this in the conclusion.  
Eliot Tretter

forming today's clustering of music and nightlife activity along the Sixth and Red River Streets axis. The brothers and blues rockers Jimmie Vaughan and Stevie Ray Vaughan launched their careers in this area with the help of the nightclub Antone's, which claims to be the first club to open up on Sixth Street in 1975 (Antones 2012).<sup>8</sup> The punk bands of the early 1980s and the New Sincerity bands that followed them played in downtown clubs and warehouses as well as several locations near the University campus, in particular the blocks of Guadalupe Street know as "The Drag." Few of these venues survive today: Antone's has moved many times but remains an important club, the Hole in the Wall still sits on The Drag, and the BBQ joint Stubbs continues on Red River. One large and popular venue, Liberty Lunch, was torn down in 1999 because of pressures to redevelop the downtown warehouse district.

The economic framework of the music industry shifted alongside the changing genres and music communities. Many entrepreneurs in progressive country imagined the scene's future within the mainstream music industry of the 1970s even as Austin musicians cultivated an outsider stance (Stimeling 2011). In contrast, Austin's punk and post-punk bands were commitment to a post-punk Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach to music making (Shank 1994). This approach established alternative networks of musicians and listeners, some of which still flourish today. One significant legacy of this movement is the weekly alternative paper *Austin Chronicle* established in 1981; two of the *Chronicle's* founders (Louis Black and Nick Barbaro) also created SXSW Inc. in 1986 along with Roland Swenson.

SXSW has become the single biggest contributor to the city's national and international reputation as a live music Mecca, and the music portion of conference has long relied on the concentration of venues in downtown Austin near the conference center. It started as a regional music industry conference, but by SXSW's third year the conference had blossomed into a major meeting of music industry professionals and the bands eager to be heard by them.<sup>9</sup> The musicians and the music industry benefit from the cluster of musical venues in the city's downtown, and the clubs as well as other real estate interests benefit from the 10-day conference. SXSW now spreads out well beyond the downtown area, as unofficial concerts and parties occur all over central Austin.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to SXSW, a number of other music festivals play a significant role in Austin's modern image, although few are as reliant on the exploitation of Austin's urban geography as SXSW. Today, the most prominent rock music festival is Austin City Limits Festival (ACL Fest), named after its partner the *Austin City Limits* public television show. ACL Fest has been held every fall since 2002 on the grounds of Zilker Park, slightly south

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<sup>8</sup> Antone's moved many times since then—including outside of the downtown area. It is currently located at the corner of Fifth Street and Lavaca in downtown Austin.

<sup>9</sup> Including SXSW Film and SXSW Interactive, the conference(s) now spans the entirety of the University's spring break week, and actually begins the Thursday *before* classes end.

<sup>10</sup> The official SXSW features a proportionally large number of Austin-based artists, but it has never made promoting Texas music and musicians part of its mission. In our interview with Black, he expressed frustration that local musicians do not understand that SXSW's core function is not about promoting local bands.

and west of downtown. Other music festivals started in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including Fun Fun Fest (2006 -), Pachanga Fest (2007-), Chaos in Tejas (2005-), and the Austin Urban Music Festival (2006-). While the bulk of SXSW activities happen in clubs and bars in the downtown core, many of these festivals are held on city-owned land in central Austin right outside of the downtown core, including Auditorium Shores and Fiesta Gardens.<sup>11</sup>

While these festivals support local service industries, particularly in the hotel and retail sectors, they also create new opportunities for entrepreneurship in the local music industry. SXSW began as a regional event, outlasted other music industry conferences, and has a huge international reputation. The Popkomm Festival discussed in the book's Introduction is one example of a music festival and conference organized similarly to SXSW, but with less long-term success. ACL Fest began as a collaboration between the public television show *Austin City Limits* and local music promoter C3 Presents, capitalizing on Austin's existing reputation as a musical city. It brings in millions of dollars to the local economy, and more than half of attendees come from outside the Austin metropolitan area. The city promotes this and other events through the convention center's web site, [austintexas.org](http://austintexas.org), boasting of the economic role that ACL Fest plays, alongside other natural and cultural amenities of Central Texas (ACVB 2011).

3/11/12 10:31 PM

**Comment:** Is this a fair summary?  
Caroline O'Meara

### Representing Music in Austin

Two curated selections of Austin music demonstrate how music in Austin is embedded within an often-unnoticed limits, some racial and others musical. The first is the *The Austin Chronicle Music Anthology* with selected samples from thirty years of *Austin Chronicle* music reporting, the second is the content of five CDs distributed by the AVCB and available for purchase on a website run by Double Stereo (ACVB 2012a). The *Chronicle* considers both live music performances and recordings by Austin artists, but the tracks on ACVB CDs reference live music that a visitor might hear on a visit to Austin (or, in some cases, live music that one might have heard in the past). Reviewing the kinds of music and performers included in these two sets of material reveals some of the unmarked exclusions made in the presentations of Austin live music to both outsiders and insiders.

We looked at how the musicians describe their music, categorizing their sound by the genre term they prefer. In situations where an artist might classified their music as a hybrid sound, for example "blues rock," we used the primary genre, determined by which term was modifying the other. In Austin, blues-rock was a significant style in the late 1980s and 1990s. The local literature about Stevie Ray Vaughan and his contemporaries describes blues-rock as a kind of Texas blues, and we placed all Austin-based blues rock under the genre blues. In other cases, the artists used several stylistic terms to describe their music, but they all belonged to the same genre, usually rock (Latin, alternative, punk) and sometimes country (progressive, outlaw). For bands active or recently active, the source

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<sup>11</sup> See City of Austin 2012a and 2012b. SXSW now holds events at Auditorium Shores as well, and Chaos in Tejas is hosted by the clubs on Sixth Street.

for our data came most often from their web site and/or Myspace page. In addition, the articles in the *Anthology* often included the musicians discussing their own music.

The *Austin Chronicle Music Anthology* (Powell and Freeman 2011) contains a broad range of music but necessarily excludes even more. The editors focused on music related in some way to Austin, including live listings, record reviews, band features, artist profiles and lengthier accounts of Austin’s music history. In the early years, coverage included primarily punk rock, Texas-based country artists, and blues-rock. Beginning in the 1990s, more and more articles on Austin and Texas music history appear, establishing a history of Austin music that stretches from African-American blues, to the psychedelic sixties, to progressive country. While the collection contains several lengthy articles about older African-American blues musicians, it includes little substantive coverage of contemporary black music (see Figure 2). This is reinforced by the statement from the publisher that the anthology includes “seminal artists ranging from Doug Sahm and Stevie Ray Vaughan to the Butthole Surfers and Spoon,” exclusively white male artists. As Figure 1 shows, the material included in the *Anthology* clusters around rock and country.

Genre	Numbers	Percentage of total (178)
Rock	81 <sup>12</sup>	46
Country	43	26
Blues (including Blues Rock)	25	14
Folk	17	10
Jazz	5	3
Hip-Hop	4	2
Funk	4	2
Tejano	1	1
Ska	1	1
Electronic Dance Music	1	1

**Figure 2.** The genres and styles performed by bands in the *Austin Chronicle*

The *Austin Chronicle* and the ACVB have a mutually beneficial relationship. The *Austin Chronicle* shapes and reflects the tastes of one Austin public; the ACVB supports the hospitality industry that benefits from Austin’s association with live music and other leisure activities. In turn, musicians as well as the *Chronicle* owners Black and Barbaro benefit from the work of the ACVB and the Live Music slogan. Black expressed mixed feelings to us about the Live Music slogan: “When the city decided to call itself ‘live music capital of the world,’ I was opposed to that, and still am...In retrospect I was somewhat wrong in that the fact that the city did it actually carried some weight.” In its publicity for the *Anthology*, UT Press shows no such qualms and links the paper directly to the slogan while implicitly acknowledging how the *Chronicle* and SXSW Inc. has benefited from Austin’s growth machine: “since publishing its first issue in 1981, *The Austin Chronicle* has evolved alongside the city’s sound to define and give voice to ‘The Live Music Capital of the World.’”

<sup>12</sup> Five of the bands included here describe themselves as “Latin Rock.”

Released over the past five years, the ACVB CDs, contain a variety of genres similar to that represented in the *Austin Chronicle Anthology*. We use the methodology outlined above, with the addition of the tags on the ACVB web site (ACVB 2012b). The ACVB CDs were always conceived of as a representative collection. Only 36% of the tracks included are rock, compared to 45% of the numbers in the *Anthology*; instead of hip-hop, several R&B songs are included; and the percentage of blues artists is significantly smaller.<sup>13</sup> The CDs make a conscious effort to represent Austin music as diverse, but within preset limits, demonstrating some of the limits of how Live Music is understood in Austin. Only two bands play music *self-described* as stylistically Latino: Brownout’s Latin funk and El Castillo’s Latin rock.

Genre	Number	Percentage Total (70)
Rock	25	36
Country	12	17
Folk	12	17
Blues	5	7
Pop	5	7
Funk	3	4
R&B and Soul	4	6
Jazz	4	6

**Figure 2.** The genres included on CDs 6-10 released by the Austin Visitor’s and Convention Bureau

Neither collection reflects the diversity of music in Austin and Texas more generally. Texas’s population has racially and ethnically diverse origins, including significant numbers of Tejanos, Anglo-Americans, African-Americans, as well as communities descended from German and Czech immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hartman 2008). In our interview, Moser framed this diversity as the core central strength of Texas music, “we’re physically and geographically in one of the richest crossroads of the world for music in the world. Heavy black culture, white country culture, and Latino stuff makes for really powerful music.” From these diverse sources, comes the homogenization and standardization observed by Stimeling during the 1970s, when “predominantly white middle-class participants in the progressive country scene ... implicitly built upon a legacy of Anglo-Texan colonial dominance ... to transform the vibrant vernacular musics of the Lone Star State—and its equally diverse ethnic, racial, and geographic tapestry—into a unified and fairly homogenous “Texas music.” Live Music in Austin inherited this legacy.

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<sup>13</sup> The CDs include less blues for two reasons: the heyday of Austin-based blues-rock predates the first CD’s release by more than a decade and the *Chronicle* has had a sustained interest in documenting the early blues culture of Austin’s east side.

## The Limits of Live Music

The limits of Live Music came up repeatedly during our interviews and revealed the implicit and explicit assumptions Austin elites make when thinking about music in Austin. Our interviews often described Austin's music as "authentic" (Feferman 2010), "original" (Stein 2010), "rebellious" (Moser 2010), or "independent" (Reyes 2012). When pressed to give a definition to the sound most were hesitant to respond, although Brad Stein, former Chairperson of the Music Commission said:

The first words that I use to think of Austin music is original. Okay, so if you say its original then its tough to compartmentalize it... [It] is steeped in blues and country. Its probably indicative of just where geographically we are (Stein 2010).

More forcefully, David Murray, the head of the music Division at the City Council said, "Austin I think is in the Americana music movement. So I think Austin would be considered roots music" (Murray 2012). Louis Black (*Austin Chronicle* and SXSW), Michael Feferman (member of the Music Commission and C3 Presents employee), both voiced similar sentiments to Brad Spies (the current head of the Music commission, board member of Austin Music People, and SXSW Inc. employee), who expressed that "Austin music" should not and can not be constrained by genre. While he did not offer any examples of collaborating with more Hispanic groups or Hip-Hop when asked, he emphasized that the Austin music community is fundamentally inclusive, perhaps one could go so far as to say post-genre, especially in the context of his work with the non-profit Austin Music People (a partnership among the leading live music companies in Austin such as C3 Presents, SXSW, and Transmission) (Spies 2012).

Few of our informants were as comfortable discussing African American music as they were discussing Latino music. One exception was Moser, whose *Austin Chronicle* articles are a significant contribution to the history of African American Blues in Austin. Stein admitted "there is music that white people are playing and music that not white people are playing." In contrast, African American musician and former Music Commission member Terrell Shahid acknowledged the broadness of Austin music, but also was sure to note its exclusions: "people don't necessarily know about what jazz bands are playing, funk, R&B, hip-hop, things that are not ghetto but absolutely music driven by professionals" (Shahid 2010). None of the genres mentioned by Shahid are included in significant numbers in either the *Chronicle Anthology* or the ACVB CDs. Shahid also does not mention the blues.

Our informants were more willing to discuss the place of Latino music in the public understanding of "Live Music." When we asked Brad Stein was asked about traditional Tejano music in Austin he admitted that there are "other types of music that I would frankly like to learn more about but maybe our general population isn't focused on it," distinguishing between his role as head of the AMC and his own personal interests. We talked to Rich Garza, Music Commission member, board member of Austin Music People, and the founder of Pachanga Fest. Garza started Pachanga as a Latin Alternative Music Festival, and he still focuses largely on that music. One example is Austin-based Grupo

Fantasma, whose 2010 album *El Existential* won the Grammy for best Latin Alternative album. Since the first festival, Garza has added more traditional Latino music, such as Mariachi, which has attracted a more ethnically and culturally diverse audience to the festival. Garza distinguished between three music communities in Austin, the general market, the acculturated Latino community and the “unacculturated” Latino community, speculating that “with the acculturated Latino community and the general market, there’s less of a gap there than there is with regional Mexican music, which is essentially country music from northern Mexico” (Garza 2010). More specifically, regional Mexican is the ranchera, norteño, banda, and other genres preferred by more recent Mexican immigrants; as a radio format, it has completely replaced Tejano music on Austin’s radio stations (Morgan 2011). Despite its presence on the radio, many Austinites don’t know about regional Mexican music. Current *Austin Chronicle* music editor Raoul Hernandez thought out loud about why “Anglos” in Austin remain unaware of it,

It’s there, their clubs whenever I go to the airport I’ll see the clubs. There are clubs that dot the east side. It’s mostly the music, but it’s also that thing that not that you’re not welcome, but you’re going to stand out. Like most Anglos I wait for it to get anglicized (Hernandez 2010).<sup>14</sup>

Hernandez’s quote is typical, in that he expresses an interest in this music alongside a frank acknowledgement of its absence from his worldview.

All of the people we talked to agreed that music somehow fixed, whether in notation on recording, cannot be sufficiently live and therefore is not part of the Live Music designation. This includes especially classical music, but also some forms of electronic music and deejaying. Each of these categories shares qualities often associated with the quality of liveness in Austin: acoustic instruments (classical music) and interaction with the audience (deejaying). Stein went to far as to say, “There has been some people that want to define music played by a DJ as live music because there is some performance element to...I think I know what music is and that’s creating sounds from instruments (Stein 2010.). Reyes also does not think DJs make live music, although she “thinks what they do is great....when I think of live music I think of musicians playing instruments” (Reyes 2012). The ACVB distributes a the “Austin Music Guide,” which, as Reyes noted, is a guide with maps and information about important live music venues, including such notable places as City Hall or Central Market Grocery store. It does only includes one reference to a venue associated with classical music in Austin, the Bass Concert Hall which hosts a broad range of events.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, no one interviewed independently mentioned classical music or expanded upon our questions about it. Austin ensembles like the Austin Symphony, the Butler School of Music’s Jazz Orchestra, or the Miro Quartet are not found on any of the ACVB CDs. While the

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<sup>14</sup> The music commission, and the city’s music office, is very concerned with sound regulations and their effects on residents, business, and future real estate development. However, these concerns focus almost exclusively on the downtown districts, and not the east side venues and communities mentioned by Hernandez.

<sup>15</sup> Some examples from the 2011/2012 season include the vocal group Wicked, Chanticleer, So Percussion, Mary Poppins, the UT Jazz Orchestra, Eddie Vedder and Jane’s Addiction.



*Chronicle* does cover these (and other) ensembles, none of those articles made it into the *Anthology*.

## **Conclusion**

Do the limits placed upon music strengthen Austin's competitive strategy? Would the integration of other genres weaken Austin's competitive advantage? We are not sure if these questions can be answered. Austin, like Portland and Seattle, is a very white city benefiting from a high "hipness" factor, a word often a code for whiteness. We can only speculate how the advantages provided by live music reinforce the idea of Austin's whiteness and hipness. We hope that a more inclusive vision of what constitutes live music in Austin can be imagined, a diversity of sounds, styles, and genres, as well as people who can successfully represent the city's full culture. Perhaps, there are limits to Austin's musical imagination, as some local cultural traditions will always define the edges of the representations, but these should not enforce an invisible boundary. Nevertheless we hope that groups form outside of the ruling growth coalition challenge the dominate narrative and continue to point out to members of the growth coalition how the similarity of their background colors their vision of music's role in Austin. Austin could easily benefit economically and perhaps culturally by emphasizing the contributions of classical musical, which is surely instrumental, but people should also be more attentive to making Live Music a more explicitly inclusive category. We wish to push urban theorists to see the cultural limitations and particularities of urban booster campaigns, often treated as merely variations on a theme park.

Moreover, we do detail the perspective of musicians and their listeners, focusing instead on elites who imagine music to have a particular economic value found in music's relationship to other kinds of economically profitable activities. That is why we emphasized the roles of the members of the music industry in Austin's growth coalition. Residents (including the members of the growth coalition) and visitors may value music and musical performance, but this does not automatically—or often—to translate into a viable livelihood for the artists themselves. Instead, companies like C3 Presents and SXSW Inc. profit the most from abundance of live music performances inside Austin's city limits. Other factions of the growth coalition, particular real estate interests, financially benefit from the city's musical reputation and how it draws people to the city. For music scholars unused to thinking about urban growth coalitions and the sometimes-competing interests of the music industry and the music community, this chapter provides one possible template.

Other chapters in this book consider how music operates in the creation of urban collectives, inside and outside of live music venues. In contrast, we consider how Austin's urban growth coalition shapes what kind of places—and therefore collectives—music in Austin can create. We are not arguing that audiences in Austin today are inherently different from elsewhere, a difficult task when the Austin MSA is one of the fastest growing and changing in the US. Rather, music scholars must consider what forces shape urban development and how this development contributes to collectives' understandings of mediation, liveness, and their relationship. As we discovered in our collaboration,

geographers and musicologists are trained to listen to very different voices and to notice the work of different urban actors. By attending to these differences, scholars can better understand the relationships between urban geography and the affective qualities people find in music.

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