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Scene and Unscene: Revealing the value of the local music scene in Savannah, Georgia

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Throughout human history, music has been central to the fabric of society. Music is a powerful form of communication, it helps us relate to one another, make sense of the world, and commemorate moments together. Yet, music is often perceived as an extraneous element in a local economy (Markusen 2003), and the occupation "musician"—with the rare exceptions of those who achieve mainstream recognition—often conjures images of the starving artist or delinquent idler. What if the value of a local music scene could be made clear from an economic and cultural perspective? What is the value of a local music scene in establishing an identity of place? How can a city facilitate the conditions for a local music scene to exist and thrive? Although music plays a key role in a city's creative and cultural life, a local music scene is too often overlooked as a driver for economic and community development. Through ethnographic research, this study uncovers the collective needs and vision for the future of the local music scene in Savannah, Georgia and proposes a framework for action.

PROLOGUE

Twelve years ago, I made a decision that would forever change the course of my life. I was two years into my undergraduate studies in visual communication at the University of Kansas. I found myself spending my leisure time with a group of people that played music together. They were students my age, and they played guitars and banjos and mandolins and basses and drums and whatever else they could get their hands on. They seemed to have an intense connection with one another when they were in the moment of practicing their craft. They spoke a special language through their instruments and rhythms and vocal cords. Twelve years ago, I'd had enough of merely observing from the sidelines: I decided to be a fiddle player.

Music had always been a presence in my life. I started piano lessons at a young age; I learned the basic guitar chords before I was a teenager; and—like many young people—a major part of my identity, particularly in those formative teenage years, was always tied to my musical preferences. But by the time I decided to take on the fiddle, my motivations came from a deep desire to be a part of something more.

Despite having no experience with the fiddle or violin, I saved up a few hundred dollars, bought a fiddle from my local music store, and found someone willing to teach me some basics. I'd opened the first door, and each subsequent door opened up many new ones, to new worlds I never knew existed. Before long, I found myself at music festivals across the country. I found myself engaging with other people who shared my interest (or obsession, perhaps). Soon, I was on stage performing for audiences and even teaching others the skills that I had learned.

From 2003 - 2010, I worked as the Executive Director of the Folk School of St. Louis, a community music organization providing educational programs in traditional folk music. Through my work at the Folk School, I became a "connector" and key player in that local music community.

When I moved from St. Louis to Savannah, Georgia two-and-a-half years ago, I was struck by what seemed to be an absence of a music scene—or, at least, it wasn't easy for me to find. I began to realize how crucial a local music scene was to my relationship with a place. It is a primary way that I meet peers and interact with them. It is part of the way I express my own identity and understand others'. The scene may be embodied in the form of the exchange of sweat and energy at a live rock concert, or a gathering of musicians that assemble themselves in a tight circle to "jam" together, or a new and unexpected pairing of performers at an open mic night. In a world that feels increasingly impersonal, anonymous, and intangible, the music scene is an enduring palpable expression of the character of a place and its people. I don't want to live in a place without it. Surely, I thought, there are others like me, and perhaps music is more valuable to a city than is immediately apparent.

As the daughter of fervently urban-dwelling parents that work professionally in architecture and urban development, a fascination with understanding cities has always been a part of my psyche. Added to that, over the years, I've become keenly aware of the power of music to build a sense of community and—at the same time—the challenges that face musicians and the music industry. The intention of this study was to make a case that the richness of a city's culture and its perception as a desirable place depends, in part, on its ability to facilitate the conditions for a thriving local music scene to exist. The inspiration for this work draws from the work of others in the areas of social sciences (Bourdieu, Wirth 1938), social activism (Moyer et al. 2001), ethnomusicology (Turino 2008, Bennett and Peterson 2004), and urban planning (Jacobs 1961) as well as from my years of experience both as a designer and as a performing musician, musical participant, music educator, and local music community leader.

INTRODUCTION

Music Scenes

The concept of "music scenes" was first a subject of academic research in 1991 by Will Straw in his essay, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music." In academic discourse, music scenes refer to contexts in which clusters of musicians, fans, and other participants share their common musical tastes thereby collectively distinguishing themselves from others (Bennett and Peterson 2004, 1). Hence, scenes are often conceptualized in relation to a particular style of music, such as jazz, blues, country, hip-hop, folk, or a multitude of other genres or even more specific sub-genres. Sociologists Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (2004) take a high-level view of scenes, defining three basic types of scenes: local, translocal, and virtual. A local scene is clustered in a specific geographic area. A translocal scene refers to geographically scattered local scenes that communicate amongst each other and are united through a distinct form or style of music and lifestyle. A virtual scene is one in which geography has no bearing; the sense of a scene is created via the Internet, fan zines, and other forms of global communication. This study focuses on music scenes at the local level and defines the 'local music scene' as the whole collection of various genre-based music scenes that exist within the physical constraints of a city's metropolitan area.

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Music and City

Throughout human history, music has been central to the social fabric of civilization. For those in the act of making music, dancing to music, or otherwise experiencing music with others, the experience can be a realization of an ideal world, where human-to-human connection gives a sense of merged selves—an experience "akin to what anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) calls *communitas*, a possible collective state achieved through rituals where all personal differences of class, status, age, gender, and other personal distinctions are stripped away allowing people to temporarily merge through their basic humanity" (Turino 2008). British sociomusicologist and rock critic Simon Frith explains that music "both articulates and offers the immediate experience of collective identity" (quoted in Florida 2002).

In Louis Wirth's "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (1938), a city is defined as "a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals." The heterogeneity and diversity natural to cities (Jacobs 1961) gives rise to a lack of *communitas* and collective identity, and an absence of "the bonds of solidarity that are relied upon to hold a folk society together" (Wirth 1938). If, indeed, music has the power to fuel a sense of collective identity, how might that power be harnessed to catalyze collective identity in a city?

The theme of Renewal in ethnographic praxis invites us to consider how looking at a place through a new lens may be the catalyst for change. Considering a local music scene's significance in the economic and cultural nexus of a place, how might a local music scene be renewed and be a vehicle for renewal? This study uses ethnographic praxis and design thinking to reveal the often hidden value of music, and to identify the conditions conducive to growth of a place-based music scene.

Context: Savannah, Georgia

The city of Savannah, Georgia is the research site for this case study. Founded in 1733, Savannah, Georgia is the current county seat of Chatham County. Savannah is situated on the Georgia coast, just south of the South Carolina border. According to the 2010 U.S. Census statistics, the population in the city limits is approximately 137,000, with the metropolitan area population estimated at 356,000. The racial composition is approximately 55% black, 38% white, 4% Hispanic, and small percentages of other races. It is a city that has historically struggled with racial and economic divisions.

Savannah has a busy seaport—the second largest on the eastern seaboard measured by container weight. Major corporations in Savannah are heavily based in manufacturing, including jet maker Gulfstream, construction equipment manufacturer JCB, International Paper Company, and Dixie Crystals sugar products. The city is home to small and mid-sized colleges and universities, including the Savannah College of Art and Design, Armstrong Atlantic State University, Savannah Technical College, and Savannah State University. With a historic downtown and riverfront and a close proximity to beaches, tourism is a major industry in Savannah.

Savannah's music scene – Conversations with Savannah musicians and music supporters often express dissatisfaction with Savannah's local music scene. In February 2012, Kayne Lanahan, CEO and founder of the Savannah Stopover Music Festival, wrote about Savannah's music scene on *The Creative Coast Blog*. As a response to grievances expressed by the community, she outlined some findings she has made over the course of her work in the music industry. Cities that have a reputation for vibrant

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music scenes also have many other vibrant scenes—such as a restaurant scene—which cross-pollinate, and are responsible for not only attracting people to the city, but also for keeping them there, she says. These cities typically reflect openness to new ideas and new businesses. Her list of conditions for a vibrant local music scene to exist include: a connected community of musicians and promoters, a record label, a recording studio, a prominent festival, a great local radio station, a local music blog, a forward-thinking municipal government, and access to capital for emerging music businesses. The post sparked intense debate on the blog, further demonstrating the relevance and timeliness of this study.

Yet despite barriers, Savannah has some powerful musical assets in its corner. In its tenth year, the Savannah Music Festival brings international world-class performers to town for three weeks each year. The Savannah Stopover Festival—which just finished its second year—is working to put Savannah back on the map for up-and-coming touring acts. Several local bands have had successes in national and international markets in recent years, including bands CUSSES, Kylesa, and Baroness, and newer bands are cropping up. Other efforts are taking place: a bi-monthly local songwriter showcase, an urban arts festival, a brand new day-long festival featuring local bands, some developing grassroots informal venues, and various small open mic nights, to name a few. Bill Dawers (2012), columnist for Savannah Morning News and blogger says Savannah's music scene is getting increasingly vibrant, but concedes that "we are far from our potential."

In this loose association of people that make up the Savannah music scene (or "unscene" by some estimations), can a coalescence of organizations and efforts reveal an emergent scene with the potential to create a dramatic shift?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Through primarily ethnographic methods, the research is focused on identifying existing assets and barriers in Savannah's local music landscape, defining the collective desired state, and demonstrating the value of working toward the desired state. In other words: *What does the Savannah local music scene have? What does it want? Why does it matter?*

Participant Observation

Personal experience as a member of an active Savannah-based band for over two years provided an insider perspective and deep immersion into the local music scene, as well as familiarity with music scenes in other cities that I visited for music-related purposes. I also spent one month working full-time at the headquarters of the Savannah Music Festival, the region's largest music event, and four days working as a volunteer for the newer Savannah Stopover Festival, in order to get a behind-the-scenes perspective. As an avid consumer of live music, I used an ethnographic eye in my participation as an observer at local and non-local music events and venues. As a member of an online discussion group of Savannah musicians and a frequent consumer of local music blogs and news, I gained yet another dimension of insight. The combination of these forms of participant observation gave me a holistic overview of the context.

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Interviews

Interviews with key players—especially musicians, music event organizers, and promoters—in Savannah's music scene provided rich data for analysis. I conducted official formal interviews with six Savannah-based musicians of a range of types, the two organizers of Savannah's largest music events, a newspaper columnist and music blogger, and with the program coordinator for Savannah's Department of Cultural Affairs. I held less formal discussions with a host of others—including additional musicians, venue owners, community organizers, residents, and music fans—which also directly contributed to the findings.

Interviews were held in various places in Savannah, depending on the preferences of the interviewees. My interview with Dare Dukes took place in the quaint courtyard of a coffee shop. This was the first time I'd met Dare, a middle-aged, dark-rimmed glasses-wearing, confident and poised indie songwriter and non-profit grantwriter, who was transplanted to Savannah from New York during the last decade. Dare's answers to questions were thoughtful and articulate; it was evident he had put thought into these issues before.

Anna Chandler, a multi-instrumentalist indie musician in her twenties, also met me at the same coffee shop courtyard. Cool and casual with an edgy swath of eyeliner, Anna was straightforward and sincere in her conversation.

Angel Bond, lead singer for rising Savannah-based rock band CUSSES and operator of informal music venue No Control, met with me on the front porch of her home just outside of the downtown area. Angel greeted me with a smile and a hint of sweet southern drawl that I didn't expect to come out of this rebellious rocker with a bold coiffure and commanding stage persona. Like the aforementioned interviewees, Angel was forthcoming and seemingly enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on some of the questions.

I met Jason Bible in his music studio room in his small house on the east side of town. Jason is a country/rock/rockabilly musician that makes his living playing music. The room was loaded with music gear—instruments (both functional and decorative), recording and mixing equipment, a computer, effects pedals, and posters. His dog, Hank (named after one of Jason's musical heroes) displayed a keen interest in my presence there. Jason's wife, who was in the next room making a music accessory for Jason—a belt to hold harmonicas like ammunition—encouraged Jason to wrap up the interview after about two hours. He was generous, if a bit ambling, in sharing his thoughts on the Savannah music scene. There was a sense of urgency in the house, as Jason and his wife were expecting their first baby in just a few weeks.

My meeting with street musician Gustavus Frazier was impromptu; we were both waiting for hours at the casting call for *CBGB, The Movie*, about the legendary New York punk rock venue. Gustavus, an upper middle-aged black man, sat next to me, and—despite the loud and crowded room—we struck up a conversation, becoming fast friends. Although the casting call did not specify for musicians to bring instruments, Gustavus brought his acoustic guitar, confident he could woo the casting director to give him a role based on his guitar skills. (We kept in touch after the casting call; neither of us got a part.)

Laura Pleasants, front woman for well-known metal band Kylesa, met me at her house near downtown—a house she rents with roommates in order to save money. Laura is in her 30s; she sported a sleeve of tattoos, frayed shorts, and a bit of a hard edge that generally comes along with the territory of metal music. But her warm and personable side cut through quickly; we sat on a couch in

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the living room and talked for over an hour, during which time she grew more comfortable with me and really began to take an interest in the project.

I met with Rob Gibson, Executive Director of Savannah Music Festival, on the dock behind his well-appointed home on the banks of the Isle of Hope outside of town. He was my first interview for the project, but the fine wine he served helped calm any nerves.

Kayne Lanahan met with me at her office, the headquarters of the Savannah Stopover Festival, located in the heart of the downtown historic district in Savannah. We sat at a makeshift conference table in the open space of the office, the two other regular employees within easy earshot until they left for the day. The wall was covered with large sheets of paper, displaying to-do lists and deadlines in thick colored marker. Kayne was thoughtful in her answers. The fact that I volunteered for the Stopover Festival earlier in the year, I believe, gave me a little bit of leverage in encouraging her to commit her time to me.

Blogger and all around "Man About Town" (as his newspaper column title suggests) Bill Dawers met me over a long Sunday lunch at a local "shabby chic" coffee shop. Probably no one in town has put more critical thought into Savannah's music scene than Bill.

I interviewed Debra Zumstein, Arts Programs Coordinator for the City of Savannah Department of Cultural Affairs at her office in the downtown area, housed in "S.P.A.C.E." (Savannah's Place for Art, Culture, and Education). It was a very quiet Friday morning at the office, which was spacious with a hodge-podge of well-worn furnishings.

A plethora of less formal discussions also shaped my understanding of Savannah's music scene, its character, its actors, and its potential: a new resident who stumbled upon my jam session in the park and told us of his surprise and disappointment with a scanty music scene in town; a legendary bluegrass and country fiddler who reminisced about his heyday when Highway 80 in Savannah was dotted with roadhouses where he played every night; a restauranteur and bar owner who spoke of the challenges bar owners face with the open container laws downtown; a member of a Canadian band in town to play a show who described his band's strategy for touring success; a community organizer who is often fielding complaints about the music scene; a musician and real estate professional hoping to open a new music venue to fill the void of mid-sized venues; a street musician just out of rehab; a disgruntled record shop owner; and many others.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Model Music Cities

Interviewees' responses to the question "What cities have thriving music scenes?" were plotted on a U.S. map and combined with results of three other studies conducted since 2010 on top cities based on their music scene (Figure 1).

Using interviewee responses cross-referenced with the four sources (Figure 1), a list of top three music cities[1] in three categories—small cities, medium cities, and large cities—were compiled to be used as comparators (Figure 2).

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[1] This is not meant to be a definitive list, but rather a set to be used as comparators.

FIGURE 1. *Top Music Cities in the U.S., according to four sources.*

SMALL MUSIC CITIES <1 million population MSA	MEDIUM MUSIC CITIES 1 million - 3 million population MSA	LARGE MUSIC CITIES >3 million population MSA
Athens, GA	Austin, TX	New York, NY
Asheville, NC	Portland, OR	Los Angeles, CA
Charleston, SC	New Orleans, LA	Chicago, IL

FIGURE 2. *Based on findings in Figure 1, a set of top music cities in the U.S., grouped by Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) population, for use as comparators.*

A Local Music Scene as a Social Field

Sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002) provides a framework for understanding social phenomena through his three main interlocking "thinking tools:" *field*, *capital*, and

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habitus (Maton 2008). According to Bourdieu, interactions occur within social *fields*; these interactions can be seen as a game with the players vying for accumulation of *capitals* (Bourdieu 2005; Thomson 2008). He identified four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic (as well as several sub-types), positing that it is "impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory" (Bourdieu 2006).

In conducting analysis of the data I collected, I took the liberty of building from Bourdieu's framework in order to understand the social phenomena of a local music scene. Scholar of Bourdieu, Patricia Thomson (2008) notes that Bourdieu's field theory "must be understood as a scholastic device—an epistemological and methodological heuristic—which helps researchers to devise methods to make sense of the world." In organizing the plethora of information, I found that the insights could be organized into distinct, yet interrelated, areas. Taking cues from Bourdieu, I named the areas in terms of the "capital" they represent in the field of Savannah's local music scene.

Physical capital: the role of space in enabling a music scene – Although Bourdieu does not identify a specific capital for elements of the built environment, in analyzing data it became clear that it was important to call out this form of capital. Nearly all interviewees in this study commented that the absence of mid-sized venues in Savannah poses a major barrier to the growth of a music scene.

> It's definitely been challenging because we tend to only have venues that are about 200 capacity and then we jump up to about 1100 … and there's not much in between. And most of the touring acts that have some name recognition need and want to play the kind of 300-600 size venue, which we don't have. (Kayne Lanahan, interviewee)

Additionally, due to certain regulations, Savannah has a shortage of venues that admit patrons under the age of 21—a significant potential audience group. Anna Chandler, local musician, said her biggest problem with Savannah's music scene is the inaccessibility of live music to audiences under age 21:

> I think that being a college town, for one, it's outrageous … When you do have that age group come out, they are the most excited about it, they are the ones that are going to make mix CDs, they are the ones that have their parents' money and are going to buy your merchandise, and, like I remember being in Greenville and indie bands come through and you cling to that so intently, that becomes *your band.* But that age bracket is just totally cut out of it [here] … It's just really hard for your scene to grow if you don't have that audience, they aren't even allowed to be there.

Touring performers often skip over Savannah, even though it is located close to a major interstate and would be a convenient stop on Southeastern tour routes. The venue problem is one of the major deterrents; touring musicians tend to opt for shows in other cities in the Southeast that have cultural amenities like mid-sized venues and admittance for underage audiences. According to Angel Bond, lead singer for Savannah band CUSSES and operator of small informal venue No Control, "We get skipped because we don't have [mid-sized venues]. A mid-sized venue would *crush it* here."

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A recent article by Michael Seman, University of Texas doctoral candidate in urban planning and public policy identified specific music venues in Austin, Seattle, and Omaha as "legendary music venues that fostered scenes later embraced by local leaders as catalysts for economic development." His article went on to state that "despite these successes, there's little formal research into how these venues emerged or what economic value they truly hold. At a time when cities are competing for the highly skilled, mobile workforce that wants first-rate cultural amenities, this seems a notable oversight" (Seman 2012).

It is notable, too, that each of the cities recognized as a top music city (Figure 2) have at least one mid-sized music venue. Even in the small music cities, those venues are nationally recognized. Athens, GA has the 40 Watt Club and the Georgia Theater; Asheville, NC has The Orange Peel; Charleston, SC has the Music Farm. *All* of these venues allow patrons of the 18 to 21 age group.

As a local community organizer remarked in conversation, *venues act as a physical manifestation of the local music scene.* They enable interaction between audience members, between audience members and musicians, between musicians, and—importantly—between local musicians and non-local touring musicians (a subject discussed in the next section).

Finally, data revealed a desire for more visible, outdoor music and public spaces conducive to visible, outdoor music. Kayne described her wish of being able to walk around town on a Saturday afternoon and there would be stages with live music gatherings. "We have such a good climate here, and we have so many beautiful outside spaces," she said.

Social capital: symbiosis and diversity in the ecosystem – Not only do venues and audiences attract touring bands to a city, but local bands in that city are needed in order to attract touring bands. And, symbiotically, touring bands are needed to spark development of local bands. Indie musician Dare Dukes summed it up: "I think one of the things you need for a thriving arts scene of any kind is an infrastructure for cross-pollination between local artists and national artists." Laura Pleasants of the internationally-known Savannah-based metal band Kylesa explained that these relationships were instrumental to the development of her band:

> We had this underground network … I knew all these people in these other towns who were in bands, and I knew who were the popular bands in each town. "Okay, that band draws, let's play with them, and if they ever want to come to Savannah, we'll trade a show." So that's how we used to do it. And it worked well.

Others supported this notion, including a musician in a young touring band from Canada, who described his band's touring strategy as being reliant on relationships with other bands.

Throughout this study, I've taken note of perceptions expressed about the Savannah Music Festival. It undeniably brings world-class musicians to Savannah for three weeks each year. Local musicians do not typically perform as part of the festival. Thus, the infrastructure for cross-pollination among local and national musicians is not part of the festival, which is a point of tension for some residents. One local art and music advocate even described efforts to host an anti-Savannah-Music-Festival event, which would showcase only local musicians.

There is a wide array of types of musicians in Savannah, which was an important insight. Musicians can be classified based on multiple axes: hobbyist vs. professional, workhorse vs. artist, local vs. national, and new vs. established. Musicians tend to fall in different places along a broad spectrum

of each axis, making for a diverse and complex ecosystem of musicians. This led to generating a typology of Savannah musicians and set of musician archetypes[2].

As discussed in the Introduction, music, by nature, has potential to be rich in social capital. It has the capacity to inspire *communitas*. The interviewees in this study confirmed the hypothesis. The most common theme that emerged among all interviews was: *Music unites people.* How, then, might the unifying power of music be channeled toward empowering the local music scene?

Cultural capital: constructing the narrative of place – Dare Dukes says of recognized music mecca Athens, Georgia: "The nice thing about a place like Athens is there is this kind of lore about it. It's a famous music town, so there's a certain amount of caché that comes from being there." Kayne Lanahan echoed those sentiments:

> Athens has such a long history of it, going back to R.E.M. and the B52s and that's a market that literally has created some really mega star bands … It's still a market that creates a pipeline of new music and bands … I think that's just become sort of a badge, you know, once you've got one R.E.M., if you say, "Oh, I'm from Athens, Georgia," they're like, "Oh, that's where R.E.M.'s from" … I think it sort of self-perpetuates.

Many of the top music cities tend to have generated a particular music movement or genre, such that a style grew to be associated with the city. This was the case for Nashville and country music, New Orleans and jazz, Memphis and blues, Atlanta and hip-hop, Asheville and acoustic folk, and Athens and indie folk. This cultural capital has real impacts. For one, it provides a scene for local residents, entertainment for tourists while they visit, and a point of orientation for new residents and visitors. But it also creates a city that becomes a place of pilgrimage for fans in search of the "authentic" source of that music, and who will come from far and wide to hear its performance *in situ* (Stokes Jones, pers. comm.). Certainly, the cities that have achieved that kind of a status offer a wider array of music genres than the one with which they are primarily associated. But it is their observable distinctiveness that has given them an advantage.

So, what is Savannah's sound, and does Savannah need to have a distinctive sound if we want a recognized music scene? This has been a subject of much conjecture in Savannah's local media of late. In August 2012, blogger Savannah Red said, as compared to cities like Nashville and Austin, "Savannah's sound seems to be much more fragmented and diffuse which, to me, seems less able to be understood by the masses." Others argue that diversity makes the scene more interesting and is one of Savannah's greatest musical assets. Some would say genre divisions have become irrelevant in this era of music. Still others believe that Savannah *does* have a distinct sound.

Economic capital: reifying the value of music – In 2001, the city of Austin, Texas, one of the medium-sized model music cities, completed an economic impact assessment of their music scene. They determined that the music industry in Austin at that time generated:

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[2] Not included in this paper

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> $616 million in economic activity
> 11,200 jobs
> $11 million in tax revenues
> (TXP, Inc. 2001)

According to Wendy Morgan, director of music marketing for the Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau, "music is how we promote this city. It is a major role-player in [Austin's] local economy" (Smith 2002). Other model music cities, Chicago for one, have conducted similar economic studies (Rothfield et al. 2006). If Austin's figures were extrapolated to Savannah's population, it could be said that a music scene in Savannah could conceivably generate:

> $175 million in economic activity
> 3,186 jobs (2% of all jobs in the Metropolitan Statistical Area)
> $3.13 million in tax revenues

Musicians themselves tend to fare low in terms of economic capital. It probably comes as no surprise that it is very difficult to make a living as a musician in Savannah or anywhere, except in the case of the small percentage of artists who achieve mainstream recognition or, perhaps, work full-time with an active orchestra. A majority of Savannah musicians must work other jobs—usually part-time—in order to meet their financial needs. Typically, the job of a musician does not provide benefits that a typical full-time job would provide, like health insurance and other benefits. In 2010, the Future of Music Coalition conducted a study that found that 33% of all musicians lack health insurance—more than double the national average; 86% of the uninsured musicians attribute it to their inability to afford insurance (Thomson 2010). Kayne Lanahan, music promoter and organizer of Savannah Stopover Music Festival, says health insurance for bands and musicians is a top priority because "it's impossible for them to get. It's super expensive." For Savannah musician Jason Bible, it has recently become an even more dire need:

> I think that every city that has musicians in it should take care of their musicians and not treat just them like peasants or steerage, you know? … I'm about to have a baby, and hopefully play music for a living with a child. The only problem with that is the insurance. I can't afford a family premium insurance rate. That's the most important pressing issue for me that the city could do … [but] the city government [in Savannah] would never EVER EVER allocate any money towards it. They'd be looking at it as "they're all drug addicts and junkies, why would we take care of musicians?" It's that whole stereotype that has not gone away.

To be sure, transplanting to Austin, New Orleans, or Chicago wouldn't solve the financial stresses of most musicians. But the fact that these cities committed resources to conducting economic impact analyses of their local music scene demonstrates a degree of consensus about the value of a music scene. Austin has services like the Health Alliance for Austin Musicians (www.myhaam.org) that addresses health care needs for their local musicians. New Orleans, according to interviewee Gustavus Frazier, a street musician, regularly demonstrates their sense value of their local musicians:

> I've seen New Orleans myself personally show gratitude to their local musicians because they help make New Orleans what New Orleans is. I don't know if Savannah, Georgia would ever notice if all the sudden there's nobody playing music on River Street or around the different squares or parks in Savannah. I don't know if they realize just how fortunate it is to have talented people on your streets and parks and squares to add to your city flavor.

The evidence in the sections above demonstrates that a local music scene *is* a driver of economic growth, but the attainment of economic value is contingent upon accumulation of *other* forms of capital as well. Capital is currency: it gives us power to act (or as Bourdieu would say, position in the field), but its effects mean nothing until our dispositions (*habitus*) enter the equation. In this case, a city's perception of the value of its local music scene—and subsequent behaviors toward it—determine its capacity to accumulate capitals and to translate them into action (or *practice*). For Savannah, as highlighted in the next section, this point is critical.

Habitus of a city: a local value system – Perhaps the most pervasive, yet the most elusive, barriers to the growth of a music scene in Savannah exist in the realm of the psychological and behavioral. Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* focuses on our behaviors, feelings, ways of thinking and being. Habitus "captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways" (Maton 2008). Using this lens, the significance of those intangible aspects of a city's values, attitudes, and behaviors become clearer.

In the previous section, Jason Bible talks about the negative stereotypes of musicians and Gustavus Frazier talks about a disregard for the value of street musicians in Savannah. In my impromptu conversation with the owner of a new record store in Savannah (and recent transplant to Savannah), he expressed frustration with the apathy he perceived. Savannah news columnist and blogger Bill Dawers posted on his blog *Savannah Unplugged* (2012): "Savannah's culture of apathy obviously presents all sorts of problems for ambitious cultural programming."

A common theme that emerged among the interviewees was a resistance to change at the governmental, regulatory, and legislative levels in Savannah. Musician Angel Bond said, "It's hard for the downtown associates to change. There's a lot of old school rules here that are very set in place. It seems like there are a lot of very cool things that could happen that don't happen."

By contrast, a *Savannah Morning News* column by Jake Hodesh (2012) of The Creative Coast in Savannah relays Jake's observations about Austin, Texas:

> Austin is cool. The culture, identity, culinary and music scenes and the overall vibe are great. The economic development goals are clear, concise and understood by the masses. The city is young, vibrant, energetic and cohesive. There seems to be a pervasive thread of "yes" running through all circles. I know this may sound crazy, but there is something transformative about this idea of 'yes.' What if we, Savannah, adopted "YES!" as our official motto?

How would a shift from a culture of apathy to a culture of "YES!" impact one of Savannah's biggest challenges, as described by Dare Dukes?

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> I think if you talk to anybody who is paying attention in any sector they will tell you one of Savannah's biggest challenges is how migratory the population is and how there's kind of like a brain drain, like the student population always leaves and never stays. And so there's kind of a tension … Tourism is one of the top three industries here, and there's this feeling that downtown has to be like a museum, and, if it's not like a museum, that somehow the tourism industry will be hurt. And so, I think, this is totally my perception, but I think there's a tension between THAT and local, messy, arts-based energy.

This study shows evidence that a local music scene has value—both economic and intrinsic—to its city. A local music scene has the potential to facilitate physical and social interactions between people, attract and retain residents, attract tourists, be a source of civic pride and shared narrative of place, and drive economic growth. But this potential can only be seen when music and musicians are perceived as valuable—as being part of the essence of a place—and thus, that "messy, art-based energy" that is a local music scene is not a point of tension for a city, but instead, a form of capital.

Insular Efforts

The inadequacies of Savannah's music scene have not gone unaddressed, nor have its assets gone unacknowledged. In fact, local music reviewer Bill DeYoung (2012) says Savannah's music scene is "currently the healthiest and most productive it's been in years." The Savannah Stopover music festival, which has put on two annual weekend-long festivals as of this writing, seeks to "put Savannah back on the map" for young touring acts. The Savannah Urban Arts Festival holds an annual event featuring local music. Squarefest, a brand new public, outdoor, all ages music event featuring a lineup of local bands, attracted over 2,000 audience members to its inaugural concert in August 2012, and the organizers aim for it to be an annual happening. Angel Bond, lead singer for local band CUSSES, along with another band member, have been running an informal all-ages music venue (although the venue has been temporarily shut down as of this writing due to licensing issues). Several individuals and small groups are in planning phases hoping to open a mid-sized music venue. In 2011, Graveface Records opened the only independent record store in Savannah. Many bars and restaurants hire local bands to entertain their patrons on the weekends. There are ongoing discussions and potential plans for the construction of an outdoor amphitheater.
There are musicians and bands that have made Savannah their home and are actively pursuing careers in music.

Despite these efforts, the scene is still often described as insular. Bill Dawers (2012) says "Savannah's tendency toward cultural insularity sometimes has marvelous results, but it can also foster defensiveness that encourages isolation. That defensiveness sometimes has prevented Savannahians from realizing just how special this place is and how much more we can do." Interviewee Laura Pleasants spoke about insularity in the Savannah music scene:

> I think the scene here is just very disjointed … instead of one big one, it's more like really small pockets … rather than everyone coming together and doing something. Everyone is just kind of doing their own thing. Which is, you know, probably pretty normal.

Debra Zumstein of the Savannah Department of Cultural Affairs noticed a similar condition in the arts overall in Savannah: there are clusters, but they are disconnected from one another. Yet, disjointedness and insularity are at odds with the single most common theme that emerged from this ethnographic research: *music unites people*.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN

As is the case with many problems that exist in complex social fields, a design-driven *solution* was not readily apparent. True, one could design a mid-sized venue for Savannah, design the business model for it, and open for business. This would be a big step in removing one of Savannah's major barriers. One could design a presentation to convince legislators to reconsider how people under age 21 are handled at music venues. One could design (another) live music event for the public that features local bands.

But there is not one problem, which, if fixed, would solve all. A social field like a local music scene is a problem in organized complexity. Jane Jacobs described cities in much the same way. Cities, she says, "do not exhibit one problem in organized complexity, which if understood explains all. They can be analyzed into many such problems or segments which, as in the case of the life sciences, are also related with one another." (Jacobs 1961) The real design problem, then, is *how can a place create lasting change?*

Throughout history, the real advancement of society has been achieved primarily through citizen-based collective actions, or social movements (Moyer et al. 2001). As Bill Dawers (2012) wrote: "No single person is in charge of creating a better scene. It's a collective goal that will be reached if passionate residents support each other's efforts. And a stronger scene would bring broad benefits to the city, even to those who never think of heading out to a club."

Plan for Design

This study led to an understanding of Savannah's local music scene as a complex social field and the forms of capital at play that must be addressed in order to elevate it. It shaped a vision of the desired future state of Savannah's music scene. It showed that the crux of a local music scene is its *people*, and that music has the innate ability to unite them. The findings informed a set of design criteria that are systemic, holistic, and participatory.

Building from theory and models for social movements and activism (Moyer et al. 2001), I will use this research to build the proposal for a "Music Scene Task Force" (working title), designing the tools to empower and mobilize a group of people united with a mission—united by music—toward collective action. "Fans, music writers, musicians, music professionals, venue programmers, and municipal leaders — we all need to do a better job of making connections between the disparate elements that make up our current scene and sound" (Dawers 2012). The design for this task force will offer the roadmap to making those connections, and directing the collective power toward action. The findings on types of capital and habitus in a local music scene will provide an organizing framework to make decisions about the types of people and roles needed in an effective task force, as well as provide the guidance and insight to build the agenda based on a systemic approach.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR EPIC

This study reminds us how ethnographic research in a complex social field reveals issues that may not be easily observable and cannot be captured through quantitative measures alone. EPIC (Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference) implies the application of ethnography in organizational structures. Although it is a loose association of people rather than a traditional organizational structure, a local music scene is a socio-cultural *organization*. As *organic* as it may be, it calls for *understanding* and *organizing* in order to advance.

This study looks at the music scene in the city not only as an organization within the context of the city, but also as an essential part of that particular city. This project demonstrates how an ethnographic approach helped to shed light on the powers and issues at play and build understanding of the day-to-day lived experiences of people and place. This understanding provides the framework for place-based action and becomes a catalyst to create sustainable, lasting change, even amidst a field of complexity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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