

*A tale of two scenes:  
Civic capital and retaining musical talent in Toronto and Halifax*

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**Abstract:**

While Toronto has been the major centre of the music industry in Canada for many decades recent interviews with musicians reveal some of the ways in which restructuring in the industry is affecting the choices that musicians make about where to live and work. In the era of the independent artist some smaller city-regions like Halifax (Nova Scotia) are attracting a growing number of musicians. This paper explores the ways in which musicians consider the economic dynamics and social dynamics of city-regions in making their location choices. Despite Toronto's advantages in size and economic opportunity, those in the music scene described it as an intensely competitive, expensive and difficult work environment that undermined their loyalty to the city-region. By contrast, respondents in Halifax talked about a supportive and collaborative community that welcomed newcomers, encouraged performance and facilitated creativity. While those who hope to achieve the highest ranks in the industry still head to the largest music cities, musicians who seek to make a modest living from their art may find city-regions high in civic capital (that is, supportive local social networks) and quality of life more alluring.

**Keywords:** music, civic capital, Toronto, Halifax, social dynamics

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In today's world, creativity is a necessity – a must have, not a nice to have. There is a direct link between a flourishing city and the vitality of its creative sector. (Imagine Toronto Report 2006)

Creativity and innovation have become important economic engines in North American cities. While traditional industries are adopting new technologies and production models, a growing number of cultural industries -- including design, new media, fashion, film and music -- are generating innovative ideas, products and sources of employment and wealth (Scott 2000; Leslie and Rantisi 2006; Markusen and Schrock 2006a, 2006b; Wojan et al. 2007). As a result, cities now compete to attract and retain the highly educated, mobile and talented individuals who catalyze these activities (Florida 2002a; Gertler et al. 2002).

In the contemporary marketplace, however, not all strands of talent are created equal. For instance, while software engineers and biochemists develop meaningful new products, musicians contribute to the economic and social prosperity of city regions in myriad ways (Florida 2002a). Musicians not only generate value from music-related products and add value to related cultural products, but they also help to attract and retain other strands of talent by producing dynamic and vibrant music scenes (Currid, 2007; Conference Board of Canada 2008). Illustrating the economic importance of a robust music economy, Hyatt (2008) reported that the retail sales of recorded music in Canada totalled \$703.7 million in 2006; the gross revenue in Canada for live musical performances in 2005 was estimated at \$752.8 million. Governments increasingly recognize the significance of the cultural creative economy, with its economic footprint of \$84.6 billion in 2007 (Conference Board of Canada 2008).

Musical talent contributes to the social fabric and attractiveness of city-regions by creating vibrant music scenes. Working in tandem with other cultural amenities, music scenes enhance the quality and authenticity of place; thus they play a role in attracting and retaining broader strands of talent. In Ontario, for example, 47 percent of individuals surveyed by Hyatt (2008) indicated that they had attended live musical performances in the previous year. As talent magnets, musicians and the scenes they create provide assets for cities locked in a global competition for talent.

Despite the important role that musicians play in city-regions, we know little about the specific factors that help to attract, incubate and retain these individuals. In the research reported here, we compare and contrast the music scenes in Toronto and Halifax to explain the locational preferences of musical talent. Although each city is recognized for its vibrant music scenes, the underlying causes for their development differ. Indeed, as the largest city in Canada, Toronto is the traditional home of music industry infrastructure and boasts the largest number of musicians and music venues. The regional hub of Atlantic Canada, Halifax has recently gained recognition for its dynamic music scene (Brooks et al. 2009). We explored the perceptions and motivations of individuals who participated in these scenes through interviews<sup>1</sup> conducted in 2007 and 2008. Our

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<sup>1</sup> We conducted 65 interviews in Toronto and 19 interviews in Halifax for a total of 84 respondents. Fifty-nine respondents were musicians, while the others included managers, producers, promoters, educators, label executives and venue operators; 57 respondents were male and 27 female. Interviews followed a semi-structured schedule and were recorded for transcription and analysis. This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under grant 412-2005-1001 (directed by

findings suggest that the conventional economic wisdom, which privileges large city-regions as migration magnets, cannot fully account for the locational choices of many of those engaged in the music sector in Canada. In the contemporary music industry, where digital technologies have altered traditional business models and organizational structures (Leyshon 2009), smaller communities may become increasingly attractive to musicians. Rather than favouring large cities, the economic dynamics of the music sector may privilege places with affordable accommodations and with abundant venues for live performance (Hracs 2010).

Our investigation highlights the key role of civic capital in the explanations that musicians give for the choices they make. According to Wolfe, “Civic capital consists of interpersonal networks and solidarity within a community based on a shared identity, expectations or goals and *tied to a specific region or locality*” (2009a, 184: Emphasis in original).

Halifax proved highly attractive to the musicians we interviewed because of its supportive and collaborative social dynamics. Traditional explanations of economic development emphasized the role of natural endowments, geographic position and access to markets in affecting growth trajectories (Storper and Manville 2006). In light of Richard Florida’s (2002a, 2005) and others’ interest in understanding the factors that motivate talented and creative workers to locate where they do, we find attention increasingly focussed on how the social dynamics of city-regions may influence migration outcomes (Wolfe 2009b). While it would be premature to signal the end of the dominance of Toronto in the Canadian music industry, our research identifies the significant challenges that Canada’s largest city has in retaining talented and creative workers in light of the competition from smaller, more socially cohesive scenes like Halifax.

We begin the article with a brief review of changes in the music industry that are currently affecting musicians’ choices about where to live and how to work. Then we proceed to describe the results of our research in Toronto and Halifax, profiling three elements: the scale and function, the economic dynamics and the social dynamics of the city-regions. In the final section we reflect on the significant differences in the music scenes and suggest that while musicians see Halifax as an appropriate place to call home, musicians view Toronto as a stepping stone with limited long-term attractiveness in light of other opportunities available to them.

### **The Changing Dynamics of the Music Industry**

In the digital era of independent music production, the spatial preferences and patterns of musical talent are in flux. Traditionally, musical talent was tied to major record labels at established sites of music production (Scott 2000; Stein-Sachs, 2006): Toronto in the Canadian context, and New York, Los Angeles and Nashville in the American context. Until the late 1990s, the concentrated nature of hard infrastructure, including recording studios, positioned these centres as black holes for musical talent: ambitious musicians headed to the big scenes in large numbers. A one-way flow typically led successful musicians up the entrenched hierarchy of music cities. Musicians discovered in the periphery relocated to the regional or national hub, where corporate executives made

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Dr DA Wolfe). We are grateful to Aaron Pettman and Rebecca Butler for assistance with interviewing, and to the many participants who agreed to interviews.

decisions and mobilized all-important hard infrastructure for the music production process. As with many industries, Toronto became the home-base for the Canadian branches of the major record labels. Before the late 1990s, the spatial patterns dictated by recording contracts superseded individual locational preferences. While Halifax functioned as a successful incubator of regional talent through the decades, musicians relocated to Toronto or to another major music city to develop a recording career once they signed with a label. During the 1990s the advent of compressed musical files, or MP3s, facilitated a new regime of music file sharing (Leyshon 2001, 2003). As sales and profits fell, music companies consolidated and down-sized (Carniol, 2005; Leyshon et al. 2005). In the wake of industrial restructuring, the Canadian Independent Recording Artists' Association (2010) estimates that 95 percent of musicians in Canada now operate independently of major or indie record labels. With digital technologies, contemporary independent music production has become essentially placeless, leaving musicians free to live and work almost anywhere. The flows of musical talent have become more fluid as a wider range of city-regions are becoming viable hubs of music production. Musicians and other creative workers are "emoting with their feet" in ways that favour some city-regions over others (Florida 2002b; Wojan et al. 2007). Although Toronto remains the dominant cluster of musical activity, digital music production has allowed other Canadian cities (including Montreal, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Hamilton and Halifax) to attract, incubate and retain musical talent.

Although the MP3 crisis<sup>2</sup> proved disastrous for the major labels, digital technologies have furnished musicians with the tools to become truly independent. Musicians can now record in home studios with personal computers; this has significantly reduced the cost of producing CDs. Recording, editing, mixing and mastering digitally recorded music has become easy enough for many musicians to do on their own. One Toronto musician we interviewed for the research explained:

As digital technology developed... things became more affordable. \$3000 will buy you a really good computer, software, a bunch of equipment and way more tracks, so you can do multi-track recording and all that kind of stuff. So I think because it made recording more affordable, more people are able to do it on their own. People became less dependent on the label deal, or the big-money contracts. You didn't have to sell your soul for that \$20,000 to make the record or whatever. You can actually do whatever you want at home by yourself. (8 July 2008)

In effect, digital technologies democratized the production of music by making traditionally expensive and specialized activities accessible to a much wider range of musicians (Leyshon 2009). Distribution through the internet and advertising through social media such as Facebook and MySpace gave musicians the means to promote their work to audiences near and far.

Technology has not only freed musicians from dependence on major labels but has also created a new geography of music production. While many musicians still choose to live and work in major music centres like New York and Nashville, technology gives

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<sup>2</sup> The MP3 crisis refers to the introduction of file sharing networks such as Napster, which facilitated the widespread practice of illegally downloading copyrighted music files in MP3 format. This practice constituted a structural shock to the North American music industry, which over time resulted in a dramatic industrial and spatial reorganization of the music industry.

them the choice to produce, market and distribute their music from anywhere. As a Toronto-based music producer told us,

I would agree that musicians are no longer tied as they once were to the major centres of music production and the major labels... Now you can make music from anywhere, even the far north. Last summer I was up in Moose Factory. We did a gig out there in an Aboriginal community and we met some people that have a little studio and [are] recording music in their basement. Because they have the internet they don't have to go to a city or a major center to record or to distribute their music to the world. (8 July 2008)

As the range of places musicians can conceivably live and work increases, what factors influence their locational choices? In the next sections we compare and contrast what musicians and others in the music industry said about Toronto and Halifax as places to be a musician.

### **Comparing Two Scenes**

Given recent changes in the music industry, independent musicians have gained the freedom to choose where to live and work, but what factors and underlying conditions help city-regions to attract, incubate and retain musical talent? We describe differences in the scale and functions of the Toronto and Halifax music scenes before discussing how the economic and social dynamics of the city-regions affect the choices musicians make.

#### The scale and function of the city-region

Not only is Toronto the largest city-region in the country, it has the biggest music scene as well. Traditionally, Toronto has attracted musicians from most genres from across the country. It remains the national hub for the music industry with significant publishing, managing and recording functions. In absolute terms it has the largest concentration of performance venues in the country. Consequently, Toronto remains a destination for many Canadian musicians hoping to make it in the industry. The city-region serves as a stepping stone to even bigger scenes: musicians looking for better opportunities may move on to cities such as New York, Los Angeles or Nashville.

Toronto has a range of competing cultural activities that offer patrons a wide array of options. Consequently live music competes with theatre, nightclubs, karaoke, hockey, basketball and other entertainment choices. Despite the size of the scene, the number of performance venues for some musical genres remains small; young musicians, in particular, find few all-ages outlets where they can perform. By attracting a large number of musicians, Toronto ends up with an over-supply of musical talent. With the market responding to conditions of surplus labour, the rewards decline for individual musicians, as one Toronto music manager we interviewed explained:

Toronto is the anomaly in the rest of this country as far as how the business of art is conducted. The simple fact is that in Toronto, we have a plethora of talent, and all of that talent you can go and see for the same price as the beer you drink when you get there. This undervaluation drives me insane... I will never promote a show that is a five-dollar show, because I believe that the audience expects a \$5 show. (20 March 2008)

Given the widespread gentrification of parts of the inner city, once occupied by artists and musicians (Slater 2004; Hracs 2007), musicians live wherever they can find affordable housing: increasingly that takes them to suburban locations (Hracs 2010). Moreover, the size of Toronto, the demands of independent music production and increasingly hectic schedules combine to limit the ability of musicians to network and form communities. As a musician explained,

I sometimes wonder if I should network more here in Toronto to do more of this other work in Toronto but the other part of my reality is that I have a family that is important to me too. I want to spend time with my children and my wife. I work long hours as it is... The work that I have is mostly evenings, so the idea of taking another evening off from my family and going somewhere else to do networking starts to seem problematic. (28 April 2008)

Those playing in different musical genres rarely encounter each other. Thus, the scale of the Toronto city-region limits social integration within the music scene.

Until the 1990s Halifax had a regional music scene that drew talent from across Atlantic Canada. After the success of bands such as Sloan, Halifax became a destination for Canadian grunge rock bands. In the wake of industrial restructuring following the digital revolution, Halifax has emerged as a boutique national music scene attracting independent artists from across Canada and beyond (Grant et al. 2009). With a population on the order of one-tenth the size of Toronto's, Halifax has a reputation as a live music city. A musician interviewed in Halifax put it this way:

It's a social town; it's a drinking town; it's a university town. It's historically a navy port town that has always had live music in the pubs. That's always been a part of the fabric here. (11 June 2007)

Musicians looking for a city-region where they can find places to play come to Halifax to refine their performances in front of appreciative audiences<sup>3</sup>.

Musicians noted that strong connections with the arts community enhance creativity in Halifax. Here musicians can bridge musical genres that in many cities remain quite segregated. The small scale of the city centre creates conditions within which those in the music community see each other with great frequency and are able to form cross-cutting social networks. One musician explained,

It is easy to move from field to field, in that it is smaller scale. It is --I say this kind of flippantly-- easy to do... three-quarters of my networking and business comes from just walking down the street. I get a good chunk of my gigs this way. "Hey, how're you doing? Want to play with us tonight?" Or "Somebody is looking for someone to do this." I get work walking down the street: that's really positive. (13 August 2007)

Halifax remains a regional hub for musical talent in the Maritimes but has also become a destination for Canadian talent. Music producers commented that while bands used to go to Toronto to get noticed now musicians come to Halifax to get recognized. Indeed, several respondents reported that musicians often come to see Halifax as home and continue to return to the city-region for renewal and inspiration even if they go away in search of success.

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<sup>3</sup> While respondents highlighted the variety and abundance of performance venues in Halifax, many also complained that the number of venues seemed to be declining, and the city needed more good quality venues (see Haggett 2009; Morton 2009).

### The economic dynamics of the city-region

Musicians often have high educational levels but low wages. Hill Strategies (2004) reported that in 2001 while the average employment income in Canada was \$31,757 the average earnings for musicians and singers were \$16,090. Consequently, the 31,000 or more musicians in Canada may choose to locate in city-regions where they can optimize their earning potential and chances for success.

In response to the devaluation of recorded music, independent musicians now focus on live performances to make money. Musicians in Hyatt's (2008) study earned 3.4 percent of their income from selling CDs and 48.5 percent from performing live shows. Interestingly, however, the size of the local consumer market is only one factor affecting the ability of musicians to make a sustained living. In Toronto, for example, the finite number of venues and employment opportunities produces intense competition between musicians. As one musician put it,

Getting paid for gigs is a treat because there are so many musicians now and bands in the city and the majority of them are half decent so there is a lot of competition, but nobody's paying. You go to the club and they say "Yah, you are going on at this time but don't expect any money." (7 June 2007)

The sheer number of bands competing for gigs in Toronto means that venue owners can control the value of live music. The options open to musicians in Toronto are to pay-to-play (typical for new musicians just trying to get on stage), sharing in a percentage of ticket sales (a risky proposition for musicians who struggle to maintain consistent fan bases in the saturated market), getting paid at the discretion of the owner (based on alcohol sales the band generates) or a minimum guarantee (more established bands can ask for a minimum between \$150 and \$300). A Toronto musician told us,

It is common to not get paid or to have to pay to play which of course makes no sense at all. Now (after three years) we are getting paid more consistently but it is a maximum of \$50 or \$60 dollars divided amongst the members in the band. That does not even really cover the cost of equipment and rehearsal time. Usually it will buy you dinner for that night, and maybe the gas to get to the show. (20 March 2007)

In the face of less than ideal options, many musicians accrue large personal debts, struggle to pay their bills, and ultimately consider leaving Toronto or abandoning the industry. Many rely on flexible, part-time work in unrelated jobs to cover their living expenses. Abundant alternative employment opportunities have been the saving grace of the Toronto city-region for many trying to pursue careers in music while still paying their rent. As a Toronto musician explained,

If you're going to make a living as an artist, you pretty much need to be in a big city. If you're going to be a freelancer you need a thick labour market... The variety of work available is also important. (3 July 2008)

For its relatively small size, the Halifax city-region has a large number of live music venues where musicians get paid for performing (Haggett 2009). With six universities and major east coast military facilities in the city-region, youthful audiences are abundant and receptive; in the summer tourists take seats in the pubs and coffee shops, or donate to buskers on the waterfront. A range of music festivals bring performers and audiences to the city throughout the year. A music manager in Halifax remarked,

Out of any province in Canada, this province –one of the backbones of its culture is its music. I really believe that and I hear that all the time – on street corners, down on the waterfront, everywhere – music is just so prevalent. (6 August 2008)

Finding well paying supplemental work to help cover living expenses can prove challenging in Halifax where economic opportunities may be fewer. Also, by comparison with salaries paid for things like teaching music in larger centres like Toronto and Vancouver, salaries in Halifax prove low. One musician told us,

In my academic work I am the lowest paid in the country. Having a post-graduate degree and making \$18 an hour, when my friends in Vancouver are making money like \$35 an hour doing the same thing with fewer qualifications, is really frustrating. (13 August 2007)

The Province of Nova Scotia has established funding programs and support services for the music sector in the last decade. These initiatives provide assistance for musicians to go on tour, to develop material and to improve their business skills for self-management. Several respondents interviewed in Halifax pointed to the key role that provincial funding and support has played in helping local musicians remain in the region while exporting their products nationally and abroad.

Another key economic factor affecting musicians' choices about where to live and work is whether they can find affordable and appropriate space. The availability of affordable and artist-friendly living and working spaces is a crucial factor which helps to attract, incubate and retain musical talent. Musicians often allocate their limited earning power from live performances to the costs associated with independent music production. These costs include equipment, transportation, rehearsal space and recording fees. Indeed, while the musicians in Hyatt's study (2008) reported earning average incomes of \$24,837, they spent one-third of that income on expenses such as instruments and transportation. During our interviews respondents complained of out-of-pocket money they had to spend on various music-related expenses. As one Toronto musician noted,

One year I did my taxes and I claimed these music related expenses on my taxes and I think I spent about \$8000 that year on equipment. When you sit there and work it out, when you are working part-time or minimum wage jobs then you think, "Where is all my money going?" (4 April 2007)

Musicians in the Toronto city-region often reported paying for rehearsal space, recording time and putting on shows. Inflation in accommodation and production costs in Toronto has hit musicians hard. As this musician explained,

The biggest cost for us is rehearsal space; we rent space for \$1,300 a month. Everything for the band to try to establish yourself is ridiculously expensive. Albums and recording is crazy: the minimum is \$10,000 per album. We have put on shows in Toronto, and one of them cost us \$4,000 to put on. We knew



we weren't going to get the money back, but we did it to get our name out there. (18 May 2007)

Of course, at the same time as musicians have to invest limited revenues in their work they have to find suitable residential accommodations. Although Toronto has traditionally offered a stock of affordable live/work space to musicians, musicians suggested that rents are increasing rapidly and many musicians find themselves priced out of the downtown core. One musician said (15 May 2007), "When I first moved to Toronto from Guelph in the 1990s I got a room for \$150 a month right on Queen St. But that would never happen now." Another musician lamented the loss of an apartment to gentrification:

I lived in a very roomy apartment for 24 years and it was so spacious, and had a great view, and really cheap rent. But we finally had to leave that and move into this tiny house because the owners decided that they wanted to renovate and raise the price. (9 June 2008)

As many musicians relocate to the suburbs they face added time for commuting to gigs in the city or they refocus their interest on suburban venues (Hracs 2010).

Musicians are well aware of the relative costs of housing and rehearsal space in other Canadian cities. Many of our respondents contrasted costs in various places, often pointing to Montreal as the least expensive of the cities with a substantial music scene; language barriers may limit the interest of English speaking musicians in moving to Montreal. Respondents indicated that while they want to locate within a music scene, they take costs seriously in considering their options.

While Toronto is losing some of its musical talent to smaller peripheral towns and larger international music centres, Halifax is attracting and increasingly retaining musicians from across the country. The affordability of housing and studio space and the vitality of the artistic community in the north end of the city proved especially important to many respondents. A Halifax music producer explained his good fortune.

I've got a studio here. I have about 1400 square feet here... The actual rent is about \$1000 a month. In another city, that would be pretty hard to do... It's a perfect mixture of the size of the community where it's still cheap enough that you can live here affordably. (3 August 2007)

Some respondents noted that housing costs were climbing in Halifax, and gentrification was appearing in the districts popular with musicians. They evaluated their choices, however, in terms of what they knew about other cities. In Halifax, reasonably successful musicians can afford to buy a home from which they tour. When asked about the potential of living and working in Toronto, most musicians in Halifax expressed reservations. As a musician noted,

I just don't know how people afford to buy a house in a place like Toronto: it seems insane. I mean I feel so fortunate to have scraped it together here... But I don't know, I think it would seem like your mortgage would be paralyzing in a place like Toronto. (11 June 2007)

According to respondents, musicians residing in Halifax fell into two classes: (1) those working to develop their talent, supplementing their income with other activities and considering relocating at some point to enhance their options; (2) those working as full-time musicians, earning a reasonable living and eager to retain their creative freedom in Halifax. For the former, Halifax is a comfortable incubation site that comes to feel like

home. For the latter category of musician, moving to Toronto in the hope of signing with a major label would entail sacrificing artistic control. In this context, musicians who choose a middle-class life in a city-region that those living in central and western Canada perceive as less economically dynamic make a cultural and political statement.

In comparing the economic dynamics of the music scenes in Toronto and Halifax we find that musicians can expect to earn similar incomes from music in the two cities, but with the lower cost of housing in Halifax musicians find it possible to devote themselves to their art. Part-time jobs are easier to find and more essential to paying the bills in Toronto, leaving some musicians with less time to practice and perform than they would like. Moreover, while Toronto has more performance venues in absolute terms, the competition for opportunities to play proves more intense than the situation in Halifax. Oversupply of musicians in Toronto undermines the already precarious pay scale for performers. While the lure of lucrative record contracts once pulled and kept talent in Toronto, the contemporary realities of the recording industry are rapidly reducing Toronto's economic advantage. As musicians evaluate their options for where to live and work, smaller cities like Halifax are gaining an edge.

#### The social dynamics of city-regions

In assessing the social dynamics of Toronto and Halifax, musicians repeatedly commented on two significant factors: the extent to which the local community values music and the extent to which music scenes are permeable and supportive. Indeed, many respondents indicated that they wanted to live and work in a community that values and supports music. Beyond their obvious need for patronage at live performances, musicians want to feel like important contributors to the vibrancy and overall quality of the communities in which they choose to live. Moreover, the nature of the environment within the music scene affects the social integration of and quality of the work environment for musicians.

Almost everyone interviewed in Halifax attested to the local community's respect for music. Respondents indicated that Halifax has a tradition of live music that some ascribed to its history as a military and university town, and its recent experience as a tourism destination. One respondent characterized Halifax as a "pubby" town; another called it a party town. While bar crowds in some communities can be rude to musicians, respondents told us that audiences in Halifax appreciate the bands and singers who play for them. As a music manager said (15 August 2008), "The fact is that people respect music and culture in this city, in a way that doesn't happen in a lot of cities... It's a way of life here, I guess." Respect from audiences has helped the city-region to attract and retain musical talent.

Musicians find themselves easily able to integrate into the local community in Halifax. One musician told us,

When I compare Halifax to say, Vancouver, and maybe to a certain extent Toronto, Halifax is much more socially permeable. In Halifax it is very easy to move from one circle to the other. It is very easy to meet people you need to meet. That really is Halifax's strength. "Oh, I know somebody who does X", or "I don't do X, but my friend so-and-so does. Talk to them." In that sense it is very good. (13 August 2007)

Although those not born in Nova Scotia remain described as come-from-aways, most are readily embraced into social networks through work, recreational activities or various associations.

A common theme in the Halifax interviews pointed to lifestyle factors associated with the city-region. Many musicians talked about the beautiful setting, laid-back pace of life, and limited traffic. They appreciated the ability to walk to work and to focus on their own artistic production, as a musician explained:

The advantages of being in Halifax are that it's obviously cheaper. The rent is cheaper and the cost of living is cheaper than Toronto. The relaxed nature of a smaller city is just better. You don't spend all your time on the street in a car. You don't spend all of your time in the subway. You can be home; you can be thinking and writing. It's just a lot easier to get things done artistically. That's the difference that I find. (18 August 2008)

In contrast with the support musicians found from residents in Halifax, several respondents in Toronto complained about the public lack of respect for music and musicians. Some described a disturbing trend whereby they see music being treated as a commodity rather than a cultural experience. Because music in Toronto competes with an ever-growing range of lifestyle amenities, some consumers undervalue the services provided by musicians. One musician explained:

I think people have too many alternatives in Toronto. People get blasé about it, because when I was growing up in Ottawa it didn't matter what kind of music was coming through, if a band was coming through everybody went out.

People here, maybe they are too cool to clap, but unless you are really well known they just sit there with their arms crossed. (6 June 2007)

Musicians find it dispiriting to play to audiences that show little interest in their work. As one musician noted (4 April 2007), "In Toronto sometimes I feel like the general public does not appreciate the amount of hard work and dedication it takes to be a musician and the hardships. I mean they look at us like we are bums! But they don't understand." Even members of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra reported experiencing a lack of respect from audiences.

One Toronto musician who had relocated from Halifax recalled the support for music he experienced in his youth.

I got into music because Halifax had a really great city school music program... Where I went to school everything was really well funded. We had a vibraphone, a whole set of timpani, four grand marimbas. Everything you need for a full orchestra. It was really rare and unparalleled. All my research indicates that while I was in high school we were the only high school percussion ensemble in North America. That always blew my mind in Halifax because I thought how can we have a bigger string section than Toronto, or music program than Toronto? Halifax only has 300,000 people whereas Toronto has millions. (22 October 2007)

Toronto has gone to great efforts to brand itself as a diverse and creative city that values talent. Its brand helps to attract musicians from other parts of Canada, North America and Europe. Evidence offered by Toronto musicians, however, suggested a different reality whereby performers experience disinterest and disrespect in a city that prides itself on openness and culture. On the one hand, these conditions may discourage

musicians from staying in the city. On the other hand, however, musicians appreciated the social diversity in Toronto, access to a wide array of cultural and entertainment activities and a good transit system.

Another important social dynamic is the extent to which musicians in the city-region cooperate with each other. Faced with dwindling employment opportunities, low incomes, the need to secure functional live/work space and the demands of independent music production, some musicians choose to cooperate while others compete for opportunities. In other words, the risks associated with independent music production can either strengthen the solidarity and collective resolve of music communities, or pit individual musicians against one another.

Our interviews in Halifax suggested that the city's music scenes are extremely supportive and that the degree of personal competition among musicians remains low. As one musician put it (18 June 2007), "Generally speaking it's an incredibly supportive and nurturing community, unlike some cities where there may be more of a competitive thing happening. Here it is incredibly nurturing, I think." Respondents often contrasted the music scene in Halifax with conditions in Toronto or Vancouver. For instance, a music promoter said,

I mean Halifax is, like, so in the 60s... I mean that's a broad generalization, and it's probably a bit optimistic. But Jill Barber moved back here from Toronto because it was so dog-eat-dog, and she just didn't feel like the people there: everybody was her competition. And I think people like to be part of this community. They want to move here because they feel like they're a part of something. (23 July 2007)

Rather than viewing other musicians as direct competition, musicians in Halifax spoke of the value of reciprocal exchanges of knowledge, resources and support. Collaboration and community building has given Halifax a national reputation for encouraging creativity and apprenticeship. A music promoter provided a compelling anecdote:

Well, there's a lot of creativity here. The music is the best it's ever been right now, and people are very collaborative in their approach to creating art. So there's this great story...printed in *Halifax Magazine*, where someone interviewed David Myles and he's talking about how he moved to Halifax from wherever he came from, Ontario or PEI or something. He was recording at the Sonic Temple, and the engineer kept saying, "I need someone to come in and do some slide guitar on this." He was like, "Oh that sounds cool." The next day a guy shows up: it's Joel Plaskett! Joel plays slide guitar, for no money, just because the engineer said "Joel, I have this song and it really needs some pedal steel", or whatever, you know? And he was like, "Well, alright then, if the song needs that, it needs it." Then all of a sudden, this whole parade: Jill Barber's coming in, Matt Mays is coming in, and all these great players are coming in. They're all doing it for nothing. We're doing it because the art is what matters. (23 July 2007)

The accounts of musicians in Toronto paint a starkly different picture. In Toronto's music scene, musicians experience employment risk in an increasingly individualized way. Reports of networking, sharing resources and cooperating proved much less prevalent. Indeed, in addition to exacerbating the poor working conditions for musicians in Toronto, musicians suggested that the competition produced by overcrowding in the

scene is eroding the traditionally supportive nature of the industry and contributing to social segregation and exclusion. Intense competition diminishes the collegial atmosphere amongst musicians and leaves individuals less inclined to share information about employment opportunities and knowledge of risk mediation strategies (including government grants). A Toronto musician argued,

There is a lot of cliquishness in Toronto's music scenes... I have found certain scenes very insular and difficult to break into... I found that insularity to be largely manufactured. There were people in the city that would say "I don't like you because you are this kind of person, or you play a certain kind of music."  
(6 June 2007).

As digital technologies increase the spatial freedom of independent musicians, a key determinant of locational choice is the degree to which a city-region allows musicians to plug in easily. In ideal circumstances, musicians want to arrive in a new location and quickly access performance venues, networks, collaborative initiatives and sources of employment. In Toronto, musicians found it difficult to penetrate local scenes. As this musician noted, newcomers cannot get a foot in the door.

The city is very vibrant but it can also be very cliquey at the same time. I can see how newcomers find it hard to get into the business or to meet people to play with. It is all about the community: if you don't have the connections it is not an open door. (15 May 2007)

The exclusionary nature of Toronto's music scenes may hinder the ability of incoming musicians to join the local community. As independent musicians face enormous pressures to get their entrepreneurial operations up and running quickly, the lack of social connectivity may push some musicians to other scenes. In the age of social media, word spreads about which places welcome and which communities have little interest in new talent.

In sum, then, the social dynamics between the wider communities in Toronto and Halifax differ, as do the social dynamics within the music scenes. In these city-regions we found a resonance between the character of social relations within the local community and within the music scene: in Halifax respondents described both in positive terms, sometimes alluding to Maritime hospitality; in Toronto, those interviewed perceived social distance from local residents and competition within the music scene. Those in the music scene in Halifax pointed to the nurturing and supportive community of musicians as a key factor drawing talent to Halifax and keeping musicians in the city-region. Major markets like Toronto have more performance venues and music managers than Halifax, but they have not developed the social connectivity that engages musicians in Halifax. Musicians moving to Toronto do so with the hope that access to opportunities in the music industry will provide them with a chance at fame: in that context, others are their competition. By contrast, musicians move to Halifax to learn from each other and enhance their creative opportunities: in that context, other musicians are colleagues and friends.

### **Toronto as Stepping-Stone, Halifax as Home**

Toronto has high amounts of human capital (in talent), social capital (in associations) and industrial and management capital (in the infrastructure of the music industry), but is low in what Wolfe and Nelles (2008) and Wolfe (2009a) call civic capital. Civic capital

reflects localized interpersonal networks and social solidarity based on shared identity and expectations. It includes formal and informal networks between community members, between communities, or between the community and the state (Wolfe and Nelles 2008). While Halifax has less industrial and management capital than Toronto, it abounds in civic capital in its music scene. By developing a local culture that focuses on welcoming and integrating talented newcomers in the music scene and that fosters the popular celebration of live music and musical talent, Halifax has been able to attract more than its share of musicians to the city. Civic capital arguably plays a significant role in musicians' decisions to stay in Halifax.

Recent research on the music industry has identified the shift whereby the soft infrastructure of the digital era is replacing the hard infrastructure associated with major label music production in Canada. For independent musicians, knowledge about making, marketing and distributing music with digital technologies has become more important than affiliation with large capital-intensive recording studios and CD packaging plants. Moreover, since independent music production is a solitary and risky endeavour, musicians rely more than ever on social networks to access resources and supports. Like other entrepreneurs, musicians appear motivated to live and work in communities that offer high levels of civic capital. As Wolfe et al. (2008, 110) explain for high tech firms in Waterloo,

There is a strong emphasis on entrepreneurial activity in the region, and evidence from the interviews suggests that the civic capital in Waterloo is largely geared toward the promotion and support of this entrepreneurial activity. Firms do not interact by doing business with each other; rather, community networks are described as being built around mentoring and problem-solving types of relationships – the 'how to' of business, rather than the business itself. Historical research and interview results provide some insight into what elements contribute to the 'stickiness' or resilience of the high-tech cluster.

As musical talent is exceptionally mobile, Toronto and Halifax compete in an increasingly global struggle to attract and retain musicians. In the Canadian context, Vancouver has probably had the greatest success in holding onto Canadian-grown talent that has attained international fame. Successful bands like Broken Social Scene remained in Toronto while touring internationally, but others have moved on to larger centres where opportunities abound. Many more musicians give up on or adjust their ambitions, and sometimes decide that Toronto is not the place they want to stay. Despite its failings, however, Toronto continues to attract newcomers with stars in their eyes to replace some of those who leave. Our interviews produced limited evidence that musicians feel a loyalty to Toronto, and several indications that the flow of talent to the city may be subsiding.

With its independent producers and bohemian labour force Halifax has secured a reputation for creative freedom that attracts talented young musicians to a scene that supports experimentation and collaboration. Social media spread the word that the city welcomes musicians. Halifax artists like Joel Plaskett have become local exemplars of musicians who achieve national and international success without moving out. Like Toronto, Halifax loses some successful musicians to other cities with greater opportunities, but it has retained a loyal cadre of well-known artists committed to be successful in Halifax.

Our study of these two music scenes highlights the divergent roles played by scenes in different cities. Halifax has sufficient critical mass and diversity in its music sector to attract musicians in a range of genres. It has tight social networks within genres, but it also encourages social and creative mobility across genres (Morton 2008). Its small scale enhances social connectivity with those in other art practices and its cultural creed glorifies collaboration. In Halifax, the music scene plays a critical role in attracting students and young professionals in a range of employment forms by creating the perception of a lively urban environment (Grant and Kronstal 2010). While the city-region has less ethnic diversity than larger Canadian cities, musicians perceive it as a social space capable of generating quality and creative diversity.

Toronto has a different kind of diversity. The Toronto music scene reflects the divergent backgrounds of participants and the audiences for whom they perform. With artists and venues distributed across the large city-region, Toronto has more siloed or separated scenes. The lack of connectivity across musical scenes and between cultural industries limits opportunities for collaboration and creative engagement across the arts. Various creative practices in fashion, theatre and music may not easily share social space in the same way that they do in smaller communities. In Toronto, musicians find it challenging to move between different musical genres. Consequently, cultural diversity in the city does not readily translate to creative diversity to the extent it might.

Our evidence suggests that Halifax is competitive on all three measures of talent building: attraction, incubation and retention. Musicians come to the city-region from across the Maritimes and the country, often committing to Halifax as their home base. As one musician said,

You start to see a trend. None of us are from Halifax. I mean I'm now in Halifax because I love it here and it embraced us. But short of Joel [Plaskett], he's from Clayton Park. Matt's [Mays] from Dartmouth but that's close enough. Lenny [Gallant] is from PEI. I think the Rankins are from Cape Breton. Then you think: Okay, well let me keep going. Jill [Barber] is from Port Credit, Ontario, and Jenn [Grant] is from PEI. I'm from Moncton; two of my band mates are from PEI and the other is from Quebec. (18 August 2008)

With its supportive social networks that embrace newcomers and offer them opportunities to apprentice with established artists and local producers, Halifax has experienced success in incubating talent and has generated buzz (Storper and Venables 2004) that other cities may envy. As a centre of independent and cost-effective production it represents a viable alternative to the traditional paradigm that favoured large cities with major recording studios. Music Nova Scotia has worked assiduously to help develop the sector and to promote opportunities for exporting music performances and products (Grant et al. 2009). With its relatively affordable living conditions and receptive community, Halifax has succeeded in retaining amazing musical talent. Many respondents noted that they prefer to continue living and working in Halifax; when factors force them to leave Halifax for a period of time, evidence suggested that these musicians return when they can.<sup>4</sup> One musician / booking agent explained:

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<sup>4</sup> Halifax respondents often described artists as living within the region even though other sources suggested that the musicians lived for much or all of the year in other cities. In other words, cultural lore about musicians staying in Halifax may not necessarily coincide with the location where musicians file their tax returns.

I think most of them relocate to shoot their music videos and do their records and tour to support their fans. I know a lot of the artists from here haven't left. They're all still living here. Matt's still around. Joel's still around. Wintersleep, The Rankins, Rita MacNeil. Anne Murray -- I think still lives where she's from. People don't tend to just forget about the east coast. I think that's the coolest thing about it. Artists go away because they have to go away and they're going for money because they have to pay their bills. And I think most of them almost always end up coming home when they can. (16 June 2008)

Unlike Halifax, which offers a viable home from which musicians base a music career, Toronto sees many of its musicians flow in and then flow out of its music scenes. Evidence from our Toronto interviews positions the city-region as a stepping stone for musical talent. The city has no trouble attracting musicians, but unsupportive community conditions and overt competition within the sector hinders Toronto's ability to successfully incubate and mentor musical talent. Moreover, as musicians tire of the competition, high cost of living and lack of respect from the wider community, many leave Toronto. In some cases the preferred destination is a smaller, more supportive centre like Halifax or a suburb or small town outside the city. As a Toronto musician noted,

The music scene in the slightly less populated areas, north of the city is getting to be really good... In the northern areas, the kids have less to do. There are fewer entertainment options for them. In Toronto there are one million things to do, so if there is a live band, those kids are gonna go. So you can sell tickets easier. The highest turnouts to any of our shows have all been in Newmarket and Keswick. (25 March 2007)

In other cases musicians want to move to a larger creative centre such as New York or Los Angeles, in search of the promise of greater opportunity. As one musician put it, People in Los Angeles are way more aware of the world market. In Canada, people think of making it in a little section of Toronto but it is so tiny: one neighbourhood within Toronto. But they don't really think big. If you go down to Los Angeles, first of all everybody there is looking for the next best thing. People here are a little bit complacent to that. I went down to Los Angeles and started playing, just solo piano and open mic: piano and singing. In two months I had played from more people in Los Angeles than I had in Toronto. There is buzz; they are more into creative and cultural activities... It is this Mecca of people from all over the world who are pursuing their dreams, who know that they have to come to Los Angeles to do it. It is a really, really incredible energy there. (26 October 2007)

While Toronto lures many would-be stars from the Canadian peripheries to its music scene with the hope of finding success, the dream proves hard to attain. Once reality sinks in, musicians may begin to reconsider their options. With the major infrastructure of the industry no longer the prime factor that independent musicians consider as they evaluate their choices, Toronto may be losing its lustre. Unlike Halifax, Toronto does not offer the ideal social dynamics for musicians who are content to make their music and a modest living within the new economic realities of independent music production. Unlike LA or New York, Toronto lacks the creative energy and attentive audiences that energize musicians. While several recent studies (Leyshon 2009; Florida and Jackson 2010) argue



that the music industry has become more spatially concentrated over time even as it has become more vertically disintegrated, our data identify a potential threat to Toronto's hegemony in the music scene in Canada. The continued attractiveness of particular city-regions to musicians depends upon the nature of the economic and social dynamics of those communities. Indeed, as digital technologies and independent music production furnish musicians with greater spatial freedom and control over their career paths, smaller centres like Halifax, which offer more supportive social and economic dynamics, have become increasingly appealing. Concomitantly, this spatial remixing may further reduce the music infrastructure in major centres like Toronto as it affects the ability of some large cities to attract and retain musical talent.

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