

Civic Capital and Talent Flows in the Music Industry Comparing Toronto and Halifax



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ISRN 12th Annual Conference, Toronto, May 7th 2010

Presentation Outline

Why Investigate Music?

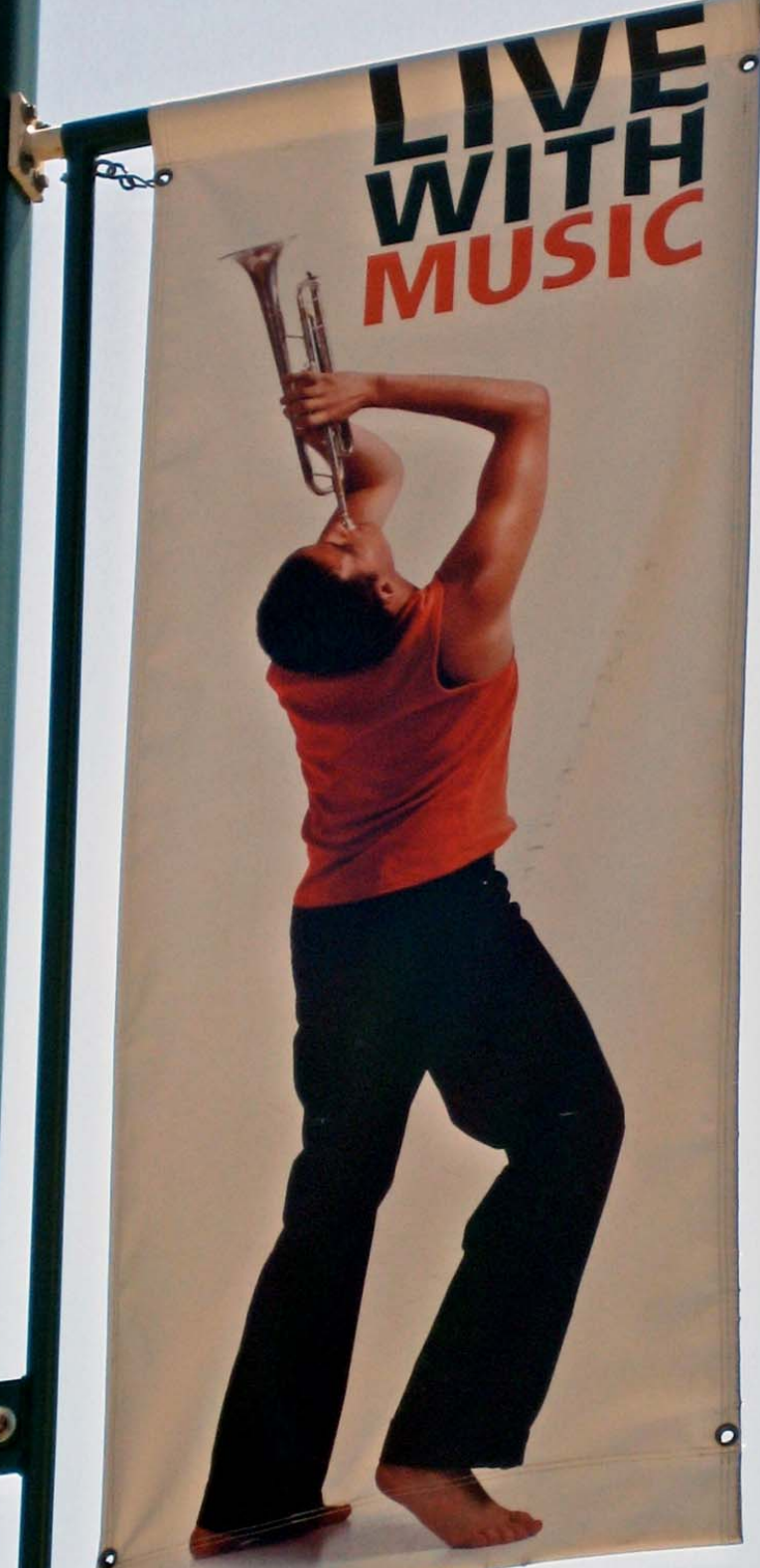
The changing dynamics of the music industry

A Tale of Two Scenes: Toronto and Halifax

Comparing Scale and Function

Comparing Economic Dynamics

Comparing Social Dynamics



Why study musical talent?

Biochemists and Poets: not all strands of talent make similar choices or have equal impact on others

Multiple Roles: Musicians create cultural goods/services AND contribute to building vibrant urban scenes

Talent Magnets: understanding the residential choices and employment trajectories of musicians can help explain the flows of some other talented people

What economic, social and spatial factors help cities to attract, incubate, and retain musical talent?

We conducted 84 semi-structured interviews (with musicians and intermediaries, primarily using the Theme II Guide)

65 in Toronto and 19 in Halifax



Changes in the Scenes

Prior to the 1990s musicians eager to advance their careers went to cities with significant music industry infrastructure: Toronto was a destination while Halifax was not

The internet has restructured the industry, leaving most musicians independent, and changing the spatial dynamics of location choices

How have these changes affected music scenes in cities like Toronto and Halifax?
How did Halifax come to be seen as a destination for a growing number of musicians?

Comparing the scenes: Scale and function

Toronto

Strengths: Large number of musicians; many venues; record labels, agents, managers

Challenges: Over-supply of talent; limited opportunities to interact

Implications: Suburbanization of the scene; musicians looking for cheaper options



Comparing the scenes: Scale and function

Halifax

Strengths: Party town with live music tradition (universities, military, tourism); frequent encounters with other musicians; crossing genres

Challenges: Distance for touring; limited options for career growth

Implications: Good location for developing talent



Comparing the scenes: Economic dynamics of the city-region

Toronto

Strengths: Relative abundance of flexible part-time employment outside music

Challenges: Relative paucity of paying venues; gentrification and inflation in housing costs



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'. [Toronto Musician]

Comparing the scenes: Economic dynamics of the city-region

Halifax

Strengths: Large number of live venues that pay; affordable space; provincial funding programs

Challenges: Few flexible part-time jobs; high cost to tour from Halifax



Illustration: Jeff Haggett

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. [Halifax Music Manager]

Comparing the scenes: Economic dynamics of the city-region

In the new music industry, some musicians can be successful while living in the periphery and touring across the country or the world.

Incomes for musicians from music are similar in Toronto and Halifax, but costs are lower in Halifax; musicians in Halifax can aspire to home ownership



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.

[Halifax Musician]

Comparing the scenes: Social dynamics of the city-region

Two significant factors of concern to those in the music industry:

- (1) The extent to which the local community values music and musicians
- (2) The extent to which local music scenes are permeable and supportive for newcomers



Comparing the scenes: Social dynamics of the city-region

The extent to which the local community values music and musicians

Toronto: Musicians feel they get no respect from audiences or the public

Halifax: Musicians feel appreciated; see the community as respecting cultural activities

People here, maybe they are too cool to clap, but unless you are really well known they just sit there with their arms crossed. [Toronto musician]

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. [Halifax Music Manager]

Comparing the scenes: Social dynamics of the city-region

The extent to which local music scenes are permeable and supportive for newcomers

Toronto: Scene is competitive and insular; hard for newcomers to navigate

Halifax: Scene is socially permeable and supportive; newcomers are mentored and engaged

There is a lot of cliquishness in Toronto's music scenes...I have found certain scenes very insular and difficult to break into
[Toronto musician]

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. [Halifax musician]

Comparing the scenes: Social dynamics of the city-region

Toronto: Musicians in Toronto and in Halifax spoke negatively about the social dynamics of the music scene in Toronto as cut-throat and exclusionary

Halifax: Musicians in Halifax credited the social dynamics of the scene as critical to their location choices; collaboration is intrinsic to scene

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. [Halifax music promoter]

Toronto as stepping-stone; Halifax as home

High civic capital attracts musical talent

Toronto: In terms of the music scene, Toronto is high in human and social capital, but low in civic capital; this undermines the loyalty of musicians to place

Halifax: Those interviewed described high levels of civic capital in Halifax; civic capital builds commitment and enhances creativity

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).

Toronto as stepping-stone; Halifax as home

Music scenes develop reputations

Toronto: While Toronto is still the centre of the music industry in Canada, many musicians describe it in negative terms; mobile musical talent can move

Halifax: A growing cluster of singer-songwriters and bands have moved to Halifax to pursue creative options in a supportive location

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. [Halifax musician]

Toronto as stepping-stone; Halifax as home

The advantages of large city size or economies of scale may not apply for musical talent today

Toronto: Its hegemony is being challenged by economic and social dynamics that limit its attractiveness

Halifax: Musicians see its size and pace as an advantage to facilitate social connectivity and affordability



Final notes

- City size is not an advantage for a large proportion of musicians, given the current economic dynamics of the industry; venues and audiences are critical
- Musicians consider social dynamics along with other factors in deciding where to live; civic capital matters
- Musical scenes develop their own cultures that cannot be predicted by objective measures (of economic performance, diversity, etc.)



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