

Making Music Cities: Live, Local Labor and the Paradox of Local Music Economies

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The “Music City” is a true 21st Century paradigm “a shared realization that cities across the globe enjoy an often-huge economic dividend from the creation, performance and reception of music.” This claim comes from the Music Cities Summit, a gathering that maps discourses of creative economy onto local, live music. This “new” model is built upon classical political economy theories and a presumption that music’s value is directly tied to the economic and symbolic capital it can produce for a city. While aspiring music cities enact policies intended to foster musical performance, they may not produce the appropriate resources, infrastructure, or policies to support working musicians. This paradox is the starting place for exploring the gap between the ideal of the music city and the realities facing musicians in those spaces. Taking Austin as a case study, I first trace the origins of the “music city” paradigm to the parlors of Vienna, and consider historical discourses of music as leisure. Then I place classic and Marxian political economy theories in dialogue with contemporary creative economy rhetoric around music cities. City government reports and whitepapers are brought into dialogue with Music Cities Summit guides and local musician interviews to examine the ways in which the music city is experienced by musicians and how local communities work to create a more sustainable music city.