

Nocoastjazz

Charles Carson and Stephanie Doktor

Nocturne is one of my [Stephanie's] favorite jazz clubs. The venue features live jazz Tuesday through Sunday in a split-level, two-story room designed specifically to support acoustic music. Renowned, Grammy-nominated artists play there regularly.

*In January 2020, I make reservations to see one of the artists in residence, who perform two sets several nights a week for a month. The Jack Dunlevie Trio is playing a set dedicated solely to the music of Brad Mehldau. A well-known and respected jazz pianist, Dunlevie also debuts compositions of his own inspired by Mehldau. Toward the close of the set, he plays the first few measures of Radiohead's "Paranoid Android" from Mehldau's 2002 album *Largo*, and I screech and clap loudly. I am a disruption—most people are there on dates, where jazz creates a filmic ambience to pair with expensive wines. These couples seek a reprieve from the rustic, outdoor sports that occupy the leisure time of most who live near the Rocky Mountains.*

*Denver, Colorado, is a jazz hub tucked away in the US West, unknown only to those who do not tour regularly. Since the emergence of jazz in the 1920s, musicians traveling from the East Coast to the West Coast have stopped there for performance opportunities. In the 1950s, Fannie Mae Duncan opened the Cotton Club in Colorado Springs (sixty miles south of Denver), which became a premier showcase for national touring artists.¹ Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Etta James, and many more traveled through the state. Jason Moran's 2021–2022 art exhibit *Bathing the Room in Blues*—presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art in downtown Denver—featured life-size portraits of Duncan and her club.*

Moran's exhibit also included "STAGED: Three Deuces" (2015), a careful reconstruction of the famed club on New York's Fifty-Second Street, a club that was intimately connected to the emergence of bebop. Juxtaposed against this infamous venue are photos of the Denver neighborhood known as Five Points. Here, Black migrants established new communities in the wake of World War II, and Five Points eventually became known as "the Harlem of the West." Moran resuscitated the musical life of this urban district with photos of Leroy Smith's Rhythm Record & Sporting Goods shop among neighborhood spaces. Taken as a whole, the exhibit positions Colorado as an important locale on par with New York in the making of Black American music, drawing attention to the ways in which jazz flourishes in seemingly unlikely places.

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It's Saturday night in Austin, Texas. The streets are teeming with people, most of them likely heading from the latest trendy restaurant to the latest trendy bar. As usual, music is everywhere, pouring out of front doors and over patio fences and out into the street. You can't go more than a few feet or so without hearing the twang of a guitar, or the hypnotic thump of reggaeton, or a beer-soaked cover of Radiohead's "Creep." I [Charles] am walking briskly down Congress Avenue—the main artery through downtown that begins somewhere below the dammed portion of the Colorado River known locally as Town Lake and ends at the foot of the pink granite steps of the monstrously imposing Texas Capitol. I am headed to the Elephant Room, Austin's venerable jazz venue. Located in a basement below an upscale restaurant, the space is small, dark, and often crowded. Tonight, however, is exceptional. Tonight the line stretches up the steep and somewhat ominous set of stairs that mark the only entrance and out along Congress Avenue for almost a block. There are several hundred people waiting, seemingly oblivious to the thick heat of the Texas night and to the fact that the line does not seem to be moving at all.

I strike up a conversation with a couple who seems to have been waiting for a while. When I ask why they are so eager to visit the Elephant Room that night, they remark that they like the space and that it is a cool place to hang out. They have no idea who is playing; indeed, they seem unconcerned with this information. For them, this is simply a night out at a downtown bar. Once I make it inside, it becomes obvious that they are in the majority. For the most part, the people in the bar are unaware of the live music taking place across the room. Through the din, I can barely make out the tune being played, but I recognize the usual mix of University of Texas-Austin professors and alumni, Austin jazz stalwarts, and other regulars who comprise much of the clientele (and performers) huddled close to the stage. Half of the room is at a jazz performance; the other half is at a bar. This shift—from jazz bar to just plain bar—is good for business, but it also demonstrates the flexibility of these kinds of spaces, and the meanings they generate are just as pliable. In a city wherein live music is ubiquitous, it can risk becoming mere sonic wallpaper, something to pad the conversations taking place in a convivial social

setting. At the same time, the musicians and patrons who make up the Austin jazz scene rely on contexts like this to create and perform not only the music but also a vital form of collective identity. This is where jazz happens. Anywhere.

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It is in these spaces that we became intrigued by jazz's persistent centrality within American urban culture in unlikely places. These "scenes" are often characterized as operating somewhat independently of large, metropolitan locales such as New York and Los Angeles that have traditionally shaped the tastes and markets of jazz in the United States. They operate outside of/adjacent to/in spite of the traditional centers of jazz commerce and, by extension, the traditional boundaries of style. These places also imagine themselves in relation to jazz metropolises, even if they are geographically distinct from them.

We believe the jazz being made in these spaces is both significant and under-theorized. Because New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and, to a lesser extent, large areas such as San Francisco, Philadelphia, and New Orleans are celebrated for the development and sustenance of jazz, the areas in between grapple with their lack of being on the grid. As the marginalized, those outside of these metropolises understand not only the geographical caste system of jazz—where New York and Los Angeles are rendered superior—but also how to effectively navigate that caste system in their hometowns.² Whether it is the hustle mentality required to maintain a "scene" (defined below) in a small town in North Dakota or the constant feeling of trying to prove oneself as legitimate as jazz musicians on the coasts, these individuals shed light on the inner workings of jazz in America. Sometimes the former is talked about in terms of "paying dues," where musicians work tirelessly in lesser-known locales, often playing more commercial music that satisfies the audiences that sustain small restaurants and bars. As Kimberly Hannon Teal notes in her study on the relationship between contemporary jazz and space, many musicians rely on these smaller clubs to subsidize their brief time in larger cities.³ We are interested in these processes—how important they are and what they say about jazz, especially as the music reverberates between and beyond New York and Los Angeles.

Scenes do not create themselves. They are the result of myriad negotiations, interventions, and improvisations between a variety of actors across numerous contexts, and they address a wide range of needs. Here, we draw on the work of Andy Bennett and Richard Peterson, who define scenes in the following way: "We view a local scene to be a focused social activity that takes place in a delimited space and over a specific span of time in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans realize their common musical taste, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using music and cultural signs *often appropriated from other places*."⁴ In this way, the jazz metropole is constructed by processes outlined within external scenes (and

vice versa), and these practices get “*recombined and developed in ways that come to represent the local scene*.”⁵ Many approach the centrality of scenes like New York or Los Angeles as being *sui generis*, but the practices that we see as essential to jazz-making are in fact developed, rehearsed, and shared in the context of smaller scenes. These processes of jazz socialization often go unmarked in favor of narratives that reinforce the hegemony of the major scenes. Drawing on standpoint theory and critical race studies, we assert that the epistemologies of these marginalized spaces are rich in content about the current state of jazz.

To interpret and value these musical contexts, we coin the neologism *nocoastjazz*, which encompasses the sounds and their attendant geographical contexts reverberating beyond the major jazz metropolises, like New York City and Los Angeles. We see nocoastjazz as constituted by three primary factors: (1) the scene’s relationship to place—specifically, the cultural, social, economic, and even geographic contexts; (2) the scene’s relationship to genre—or the relationship to varied musical styles and repertoire that motivate and sustain a given city’s jazz community; and (3) the scene’s relationship to its audience(s), which addresses modes of consumption as well as economic considerations for artists within the scene.

The reception of jazz metropolises is deeply rooted in discourses of modernity; that is, they derive their central position within jazz—their power—from their relative proximity to what is seen as new, innovative, authentic, relevant, and, therefore, “modern.” Discourses about these cities are teleological in nature; evolutionary narratives place these metropolises in the center as the inevitable and necessary culmination of everything that came before. At the same time, nocoastjazz scenes are often seen as being stuck in an ontological feedback loop in which they are always in the process of becoming (yet never being) “modern.” Or, at other times, they are placed outside this discourse altogether, forever unable to access the kinds of “modernity” that permeate the broader jazz narrative. Yet these scenes are vital in sustaining the power of the metropolises, as they validate tropes of labor (“paying dues”) that musicians arriving in the metropole rely upon for their own legitimacy. Nocoastjazz calls this assumption into question by problematizing the place/space-ness of jazz scenes as well as the discourses that perpetuate this inside/outside binarism.

The term nocoastjazz can be defined by geography—often marking differences in place, practices, style, and demographics (of both artists and audiences) that depart from what we might expect to see and hear in the jazz metropole. As a concept, however, nocoastjazz decenters exceptional discourses stemming from mass-mediated representation of the music and its scenes within the jazz metropolises. Our term is indebted to queer theory in that it removes forms of normalization and reshapes ideas about canons, historical narratives, and understandings of music/style and identity. We contend that if we really want to understand jazz and place we must value the labor and epistemological expertise of musicians working in marginalized cities. Quantitatively

speaking, the greatest amount of jazz activity is not happening in New York and Los Angeles but rather in those interstitial spaces between and beyond. Theoretically, if knowledge emerges from one's social position, then those who have to work to put their places on the jazz map possess at least as much valuable knowledge as those who reap the benefits of an established jazz infrastructure. This focus on positionality within nocoastjazz explicitly challenges the universalization of narratives of jazz, *writ large*. As the relationship between scenes and their spaces are complex and contingent, nocoastjazz could happen in Manhattan just as "mainstream" jazz happens in Akron, Ohio.

With nocoastjazz, we build on Travis Jackson's ethnographic study of 1990s New York (*Blowin' the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene*, 2012), which considers venues, musicians, and listeners as well as radio stations, the recording industry, and educational institutions to examine the historical and spatial elements of a jazz scene.⁶ We also build on the work of Michael Heller's *Loft Jazz: Improvising New York in the 1970s*, in which he defines this unique historical moment as a "dense network of musician-run performance venues established (mostly) in and around the former industrial buildings of lower Manhattan."⁷ Additionally, the edited collection *Central Avenue Sounds* (Bryant, 1999) presents oral histories of jazz in Los Angeles from its inception to the 1950s that trace the origins of the scene back to at least New Orleans in an effort to demonstrate its centrality in the historical record. Nocoastjazz considers what is between and beyond these major urban centers, while at the same time, it is indebted to the foundational work of these scholars and musicians. Recent studies on contemporary music by Dale Chapman (*The Jazz Bubble: Neoclassical Jazz in Neoliberal Culture*, 2018) and Kimberly Hannon Teal (*Jazz Places: How Performances Spaces Shape Jazz History*, 2021) wholly shape our theorization of nocoastjazz in that we cannot immerse ourselves within local scenes without considering their political economies and how place/space formulates ideas about jazz canons and their legacies.

Finally, our neologism draws explicitly on Nichole Rustin-Paschal and Matthew Morrison, whose respective concepts *jazzmasculinity* and *Blacksound* capture the ineffable nature of complex and ever-shifting racialized constructs and their attendant processes. Rustin-Paschal's term speaks to the inseparability of jazz and masculinity while Morrison tends to the "sonic and embodied legacy of Blackface minstrelsy" in US popular music.⁸ Equally as important, these terms index broader understandings of jazz—its musical aesthetics and identities that we hear as integral to the architecture of nocoastjazz and that often elide stylistic distinctions and their imprint on identity. Nocoastjazz also tears open stereotypes about what, and who, can constitute a jazz scene. In recent years, new jazz studies scholars have begun deconstructing narrowly defined definitions of jazz in favor of more open and inclusive ones.⁹ A concerted focus on issues of power and identity have revealed how ideologies of race, gender, and class continue to mute conversations about more commercial forms of jazz.

Despite these advances, post-bop fusion narratives, though forged with the intention of opening up the stylistic boundaries of jazz, often isolate crossover genres from “pure” jazz, while at the same time making specious claims about jazz’s relationship to other popular forms prior to and during bebop’s formation. Even one of the leading jazz college textbooks cannot mask its contempt for popular music, making the claim, for example, that smooth jazz has nothing valuable to offer listeners. Such narratological moves are predicated on racialized and gendered conceptions about what types of Black musical expression are allowable.¹⁰ Discourses of mastery, virtuosity, and “genius” are often set against those of “commercialism” and are tacitly buttressed by unexamined tropes of hypermasculinity.¹¹ Nocoastjazz integrates critiques of these systems in an effort to dissolve frivolous divisions between jazz as culture and jazz as commerce.

Nocoastjazz argues that these spaces, rife with contradictions about what constitutes jazz, open up a more capacious understanding of this particular stream of Black American music. In many cases, these settings make palpable the commercial potential of jazz at the same time that they both challenge and uphold jazz canons, conscripted by critics and scholars. Performers negotiate between audience demands—which might include a preference for vocal over instrumental music, standards over originals—and their own desires for more experimental or improvisational instrumentally oriented music. In addition, barriers to entry at jam sessions or “jazz nights” yield a competitive marketplace, where mentorship and an “ethics of care” are often subsumed under displays of rugged masculinity. These gendered binaries (vocal vs. instrumental, commercial vs. artistic, standards vs. originals, and mentorship vs. competition) are invoked to rehearse tropes of masculinity in live performance in jazz scenes that are deeply informed by an anxiety about their relationship to prominent, nationally renowned scenes.

Given the circulation of these discourses among audiences, performers, critics, and scholars, we are interested in the following questions: What does it mean that these performers regularly voice concerns about the commercialization of jazz even while their livelihood depends on regularly paying gigs and music sales? What does it mean that these ideas circumscribe boundaries for musical inclusion/exclusion, thus shaping local understandings of what constitutes jazz and the jazz subject? And what does it mean when these agents are often white cismen? As a way of exploring these questions, among others, we ask how well-worn tropes of Black masculinity, Black suffering, and who can count as a jazz subject become the ideological tentacles that give these communities and their sounds symbolic meaning. The fall 2022 issue of *Jazz and Culture* begins with a detailing of our experiences immersed in nocoastjazz. These scenes have helped us critique conceptions of gender, race, class, and sexuality that firmly dictate political economies of jazz.

Salt Lake City, Utah (Doktor)

I was skeptical when I moved to Salt Lake City to take a job in jazz studies at the University of Utah. Skeptical for a variety of reasons, but the fact that the words “jazz” and “Utah” are rarely uttered together in reference to anything other than a professional basketball team was certainly one of them. Though jazz programs are steadily becoming a staple in many music departments across the globe, I wondered what the Beehive State, known for its cultural homogeneity, had to offer faculty, students, performers, and fans. As it turns out, quite a lot. By the end of my first year there, I wrote an article for the Utah Department of Tourism called “How To Hear Live Jazz Every Night of the Week.”

For those living in Salt Lake, there is little skepticism. The state is home to legendary saxophonist Joe McQueen (1919–2019), who moved there in the 1940s. Like Denver, Salt Lake is a throughway between the East and West Coasts, and McQueen played with Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Cab Calloway, and others. Until his death, McQueen played at the Garage on Beck—a mechanic shop turned outdoor venue. This is just the tip of the iceberg in an ocean of extremely talented jazz musicians—some undergraduate and graduate students, some locals, and some recent transplants. With multiple jam sessions peppered across the city, the scene is flourishing, and for some musicians, there is no shortage of gigs. A true Salt Lake gem is the Sunday night Jazz Vespers, a winter series at the local Unitarian church. Each evening, the Vespers quartet, run by saxophonist David Halliday, plays arrangements of songs made by legendary musicians such as Stevie Wonder, Prince, and Janis Joplin. The winter weekly tributes draw such a crowd that people come an hour early to stuff themselves into church pews like sardines. Personal space does not matter when the music is this good.

Salt Lake’s public network of jazz places, people, and sounds is largely operated by white cishet men. They organize jam sessions, lead the city’s most prominent trios and quartets, direct college programs, fund concert series at prestigious theaters, and manage shows at nightclubs. The scene’s racial and gender homogeneity brushes up against the music’s historical roots and its complex relationship to Black originality/masculinity. White and hegemonic (hetero)masculinities work to compensate for racial difference and perceived musical (masculine) inferiority. Rugged individualism, misogyny, and gatekeeping architect this iteration of nocoastjazz, revealing the extent to which whiteness is expressed through gender and sexuality.

The few jazz musicians who have managed to exclusively gig and record for a living can be found bragging on social media about how “hard work” pays off. With little regard to the precarity of laboring bodies in local music scenes, these men encourage younger musicians to tough it out. To the tune of “bootstrap capitalism,” cismale mentors, unwittingly or not, suggest that failure to make ends meet through

music is the performer's fault. They did not grind hard enough, shed long enough. This neoliberal lexicon is backed by the recent rise of gig economies, where workers of all types sustain their livelihood through additional forms of part-time employment with little to no benefits—a “side hustle,” so to speak. What was strictly the domain of artists is now the new normal, making bootstrap capitalism seem less exceptional, exploitative.

The hustle mentality is gendered. To “grind” is to act out an unyielding (non-domestic) work ethic as a marker of one's *individual* value. If neoliberalism is a set of “political economic practices” that define “human well-being” in terms of “individual entrepreneurial freedoms” divorced from state-sponsored social programs, then professional success is indexed by extrication from the social realm. As Margaret Thatcher famously decried, “There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women.” For political theorist Wendy Brown, this governing rationality of late-stage capitalism “[assumes] a masculinist comportment and sphere of activity” in part because it disavows the very thing that sustains it—the persons and practices that make and sustain human life.”¹² Women and their labor of care “*are* the invisible infrastructure sustaining a world of putatively self-investing human capitals,” she writes.¹³ Rugged individualist ideologies in jazz scenes presume a male subject whose hard work alone transforms his musical skills into a financially stable career.

A gendered approach to mentorship extends beyond distilling exploitative labor values. Many of these men coach their students using the rhetoric of “tough love.” Leaving young players to sink or swim in the middle of a solo and publicly shaming some of them for using iReal Pro (an app featuring lead sheets and backing tracks) during jam sessions are just some of the ways this masculinist pedagogy materializes. In these examples, suffering is a form of “paying dues.” Behaviors associated with femininity such as compassion and support (musical or emotional) are excised. So too are the women themselves. Very few female players thrive in this scene with the exception of a number of vocalists. Here, the voice as a fundamentally feminized, embodied way of making music is especially audible.¹⁴ The few women instrumentalists I encountered in Utah (a bassist and two pianists at the time I lived there) oscillated in and out of the scene(s) as active participants, and not without the psychological toll of regular sexist microaggressions.

Gender-based gatekeeping circumscribes the scene's musical style as much as it does the demographics of its players. Much has been written about efforts to divorce jazz from popular styles, but little jazz scholarship has considered the gendered implications of these efforts.¹⁵ As Scott DeVeaux has argued, despite jazz's persistence in the mainstream marketplace, many critics, scholars, fans, and musicians insist on categorizing it as art music. An “implicit entelechy,” as DeVeaux calls it, yields organicist narratives about the progression from early jazz to bebop by emphasizing “the gradual shedding of utilitarian associations with dance

music, popular song, and entertainment, as both musicians and public become aware of what jazz really is, or could be.”¹⁶ Idyllic depictions of the musical genius suscite this quixotic narrative, and, as Guthrie Ramsey argues, the figure of the male genius in jazz is fastened to archetypes of Black masculinity. Commercial aspirations betray this archetype and his music. When set in opposition to art, popular music is repetitive, profane, aesthetically weak, and overly sentimental, as it appeals to the lowest common denominator in a desperate attempt to yield profit. Some of popular music’s descriptors have also been leveraged to evidence women’s putative difference from men.¹⁷ Even some women musicians have been interpreted as performing in/as acts of prostitution, selling their bodies rather than any real or “authentic” musical product.¹⁸ Masking monetary motivations, then, strengthens music’s connection to men. For white jazz musicians, the inability to be a racially authentic jazz subject compromises the integrity of their gender. However, racial difference contours not only gender but also sexuality. Against imagined Black (hyper)sexuality and potency—a stereotype inherited from Reconstruction—white men’s jazz lacks virility.¹⁹ Anxiety about white impotence founded the juridical and ideological underpinnings of Jim Crow segregation, which in its most violent articulation comprised lynching rituals concluded by castration. Jazz proffers a less savage ritual to demarcate white power and challenge sexual effeminacy, especially in racially homogenous scenes.²⁰ Circumscribing jazz as noncommercial (not feminine) affirms virile jazz musicalities.

Salt Lake’s most prominent players curate jazz as art music through both sonic and visual signifiers. In 2018, the Rabbit Hole Lounge opened in the basement of one of Salt Lake’s most popular music venues. The manager, who fashions himself an impresario (a descriptor he used on social media), created “the only jazz ‘Listening Room’ in Salt Lake City.” Victorian-meets-modern dictates the design. Canopy loveseats with dark velvet fabrics sit next to button-tufted leather sofas, leather booths line the exposed-brick walls, and a large wrought iron chandelier hangs above the audience. The lights are so low, it is impossible to read the menu. The basement hails the likes of Carl Allen, Cory Christiansen, John Riley, Jay Lawrence, Rosana Eckert, Joe Saylor, Art Lande, Kobie Watkins, and Alan Michael—all who fit squarely within more modern takes on straight-ahead jazz. The impresario can be seen shushing people during performances, demanding that people listen in silence as if they are in a concert hall. The irony of this demand is not lost on audience members aware of the music’s roots in dance and noisy, social spaces.

The Rabbit Hole closed in February 2021. Nocoastjazz scenes move in and out of visibility, transmuting in response to sometimes less stable economies. Will Straw theorizes about these dynamic yet amorphous collectives, writing that “a scene’s tendency to escape comprehension is not (or not simply) a result of the exclusively or impermeability that might, at different points, be seen to characterize it.” Instead,



Figure 1: The Rabbit Hole Lounge (Salt Lake City, Utah), view of stage and audience. Photo by Mila Tau. Permission to reprint granted by Kelly Salmans.



Figure 2: The Rabbit Hole Lounge (Salt Lake City, Utah), view of stage featuring Corey Christiansen (guitar), DeSean Bryant (drums), and David Halliday (saxophone). Permission to reprint granted by Kelly Salmans.



Figure 3: The Rabbit Hole Lounge (Salt Lake City, Utah), view of stage featuring David Halliday (saxophone) and Corey Christiansen (guitar). Photo by Mila Tau. Permission to reprint granted by Kelly Salmans.

its network of places, people, and sounds “mobilizes local energies and moves these energies in multiple directions—onwards, to later reiterations of itself; outwards, to more formal sorts of social or entrepreneurial activity; upwards, to the broader coalescing of cultural energies within which collective identities take shape.”²¹ In Salt Lake City, the primary stakeholders maintain power in volatile local markets. Despite changes in a group’s personnel and a venue’s management (or existence), the scene’s essence remains a white heteromascularity that readily negotiates political economies of jazz linking the “real” to Black male genius. Excising commercialism, women, and an ethics of care promises to preserve white masculinity when playing Black music draws acute attention to the fraudulence of whiteness. But “real” jazz is also linked to New York and Los Angeles. In nocoastjazz, anxiety about legitimacy is not only marked by race but also by geography.

Austin, Texas (Carson)

Austin, for the most part, is not known as a jazz town. Despite the claims—and indeed there are many—of Austin being the “Live Music Capital of the World” (TM), and despite the fact that Austin, too, boasts live jazz on every night of the week, the city has never claimed a major jazz reputation, even in comparison to its larger neighbors of Dallas and Houston.²² The import of Austin’s jazz legacy stretches back to at least 1931, when a performance by Louis Armstrong at the luxurious Driskill

Hotel directly inspired a young, white, soon-to-be constitutional scholar named Charles Black on a civil rights journey that would eventually lead him from a being freshman at the University of Texas at Austin to a Yale Law professor and contributor to the *Brown v. Board of Education* legal team.²³ This story, reverently recounted in Ken Burns's *Jazz*, demonstrates not only the racial and cultural significance of jazz but also the complexities of the social, political, and legal impact that the music has had upon the United States. Instead of celebrating this legacy, blues has largely supplanted jazz in the Austin musical imaginary. Building on the heydays of the 1960s to the 1980s, the city has carefully curated a historical narrative that foregrounds a broad definition of the blues, which can range from the country-rock infused style of Jimmie and Stevie Ray Vaughan to the New Orleans-flavored pianism of Marcia Ball to more contemporary crossover artists like Gary Clark Jr. In recent decades, this broad definition has emboldened new generations of performers who—drawing on the city's long association with notable singer-songwriters like Jerry Jeff Walker, Townes Van Zandt, Janis Joplin, and Willie Nelson—have helped to make the city a hotbed of (increasingly corporatized) indie pop. Artists like Spoon, Shakey Graves, Black Pumas, and even the aforementioned Gary Clark Jr. all fit in this category.

Yet, despite this openness, the jazz scene in Austin has yet to achieve the level of respect it perhaps deserves. The city boasts a thriving jazz scene that highlights the importance of locality in fostering a sense of place and space. Much of this is related to the processes of *festivalization* that shape the landscape of the contemporary music scene in Austin. Derived from the field of tourism studies, festivalization is a *post-touristic* concept that highlights how cities cultivate “regulated environments of constant festive events” for both residents and visitors alike.²⁴ Within the current neoliberal context, the economic dominance of popular music has resulted in an increased investment in the processes of festivalization on the part of urban planners, city managers, the hospitality industry, and the larger music industry as a whole, as “the locus of control is shifting away from the civic and local toward the market and global.”²⁵ Ironically, this focus—which places less emphasis on niche genres like classical or jazz—perhaps enables local jazz scenes to persist, and in some cases to thrive, as they often exist at the fringe of the economic and development goals of city leadership.

This is especially true in the case of nocoastjazz scenes like Austin.²⁶ The relative marginalization of the local scene potentially enables greater flexibility for artists within space and places and between genres. If we take a broad look at what might constitute “jazz” in Austin, we see the variety of shapes it can take. Owing to the myriad live music events in town, on a given night you can see a mix of more traditional straight-ahead sets, jazz-influenced pop shows, musical theater performances, Middle Eastern jazz fusion groups, postpunk experimental noise collectives, indie free improvisation jam bands, Brazilian *chôros* ensembles, salsa groups, and the list goes on. And this doesn't even take into account the city's thriving art and theater

scenes, many of which draw on jazz in various ways. For example, the Austin Project, a group of artists, scholars, and activists in support of women of color, centers a jazz aesthetic as a “method for social reconstruction” in writing and performances.²⁷ While all of these might not fit the rigid definitions of jazz that you find in more prominent scenes, many musicians move more or less freely between these gigs. It would be nothing to see a violinist playing at the Austin Symphony Orchestra on a Thursday night, backing up a national touring rock band on Friday, playing a private house event with a tango group on Saturday, and sitting in with a trad jazz combo during Sunday brunch. This kind of fluidity is at the heart of nocoastjazz.

Though these kinds of performances are present at numerous venues on any given night, at present the Austin jazz scene is anchored by three venues, each representing a particular approach to the presentation of jazz in the city. These approaches are not wholly exclusive, however, as the relative size of the scene—not to mention competition with the popular music genres discussed above—necessarily demand a certain amount of flexibility in order to attract, retain, and cater to the Austin music-going public.

For decades, the Elephant Room was the center of the Austin jazz scene. Located in the heart of the city on Congress Avenue (where it is accessible to both locals and tourists alike), the venue opened in 1991 and offers live jazz every night of the week. Typically, it features the widest range of jazz styles of any venue of the city, though the repertoire still tends toward straight-ahead post-bop styles, ranging from solo piano to combos to big bands. The musicians who play here tend to represent the old guard of the Austin jazz scene, so the level of the performances is usually quite high.

However, reflecting the demographic shifts taking place in Austin over the last decade, the audience makeup at the Elephant Room has changed in recent years. Whereas crowds used to be made up mostly of jazz fans who came to hear local musicians, more recently it has shifted to a broader general audience out for a drink, ranging in age from about early thirties to midfifties. Given the layout of the room—a long, dark, windowless rectangle with the small stage at one end—it can be difficult to find a spot with an unobscured view of the bandstand. Indeed, on busy nights, like most weekend nights, it can be difficult to even *hear* the music, as the throngs of patrons stretching up the stairs and out the door are mostly coming for the ambience and the affordable drinks as compared to other downtown establishments. On a typical Friday or Saturday, it sometimes isn't worth paying the five- to ten-dollar cover charge unless you can secure one of the limited number of seats up near the band, lest you end up surrounded by groups of friends out for the night, talking at full voice, seemingly unaware of the performance taking place at the other end of the room. While this is a jazz-specific space, similar such jazz experiences are to be found across the city, as several bars and lounges offer jazz on a rotating basis throughout the week.



Figure 4: Elephant Room (Austin, Texas), view from the bandstand. Photo by C. Carson (May 19, 2022).

In contrast to the open, “all-purpose” environment of the Elephant Room, Monk’s Jazz Club prides itself on its reputation as a space meant for those serious about the jazz experience. Founded as a “popup, jazz centric listening room” [*sic*], Monk’s has existed in a number of venues over the past several years, from an art studio and “makerspace” to a craft coffee/bicycle shop/vintage clothing store, to its new permanent home in a warehouse in Austin’s now fully gentrified East Sixth Street. The project is the brainchild of local pianist Collin Shook and “strive[s] to offer the alternative to loud bars and high dollar performance halls, providing a clear environment to listen intently.”²⁸ Monk’s features musicians who offer fresher takes on post-bop styles, mostly featuring new compositions often by younger artists. Before each set, Shook makes an announcement politely reminding audiences of the no-talking policy. For the most part, audiences comply. The first few events attracted a rather sizeable percentage of chatty east Austin hipsters (presumably attracted to the novelty of a pop-up jazz venue in their neighborhood as well as the promise of twenty dollar all-you-can-drink cocktails), but most of them have moved on (or been purged by the no-talking policy). By now, the forty or so patrons who regularly attend



Figure 5: Monk's Jazz Club (Austin, Texas), view of the stage and listening room, with limited seating for forty people. Photo by C. Carson (May 9, 2022).

these intimate BYOB events have been trained to listen intently, and the sets often have a quiet intensity to them. Monk's highly controlled context is perhaps the least welcoming for patrons who are not already invested in jazz. The more challenging repertoire of high modernist originals alienates those not willing to invest the time and effort into developing an ear for the music. As such, it polices the identities of audience members—visitors and locals alike—purging those not willing or able to adhere to the clearly demarcated vision it has created for itself and its clientele, all while providing an important space for musicians to experiment with the boundaries of jazz.

The most recent addition to the Austin jazz scene is Parker Jazz Club. Opened by saxophonist Kris Kimura (and named after Kimura's son, who is, in turn, named after Charlie Parker), the venue occupies prime real estate on Fourth Street in downtown Austin. It lies just across from an upscale seafood chain, situated along a bustling block of trendy gay bars. As opposed to both the Elephant Room and Monk's, Parker hopes to attract a more urbane, middle-class crowd with money to spend but who still appreciates "real" jazz. A "white tablecloth," seated venue modeled after Iridium or Dizzy's at Lincoln Center in New York, Parker has enjoyed an explosion since its opening in 2018, hosting most of the city's jazz royalty as well as pop-ins by



Figure 6: Parker Jazz Club (Austin, TX), view of the stage, with curtains closed between performances. Photo by C. Carson (May 19, 2022).

world-class musicians touring through one of the city's large concert theaters—artists like Kamasi Washington or Wynton Marsalis.

Parker has self-consciously styled itself as an upscale jazz venue, charging a cover every night (almost unheard of in live-music saturated Austin) and by most accounts paying its musicians well. Parker features a variety of music, but the general focus is primarily on polished straight-ahead bop-styled instrumental jazz, some occasional trad sets, and a recurring eighteen-piece big band every week. The space has been curated in painstaking detail, including hand-glued custom acoustic foam lining the back walls of the stage, cutting-edge lighting, and a velvet curtain at the front of the stage that opens and retracts at the beginning and ending of each set.

Given the number and variety of its many jazz venues, Austin's jazz scene has become an important stopover point for musicians moving between the nocoastjazz centers of Dallas and Houston. Many of the new arrivals in town are younger jazz musicians, the ink still wet on their newly minted degrees from the revered program at the University of North Texas, some four hours north of Austin. These musicians can live here for a year or so, cutting their teeth on the ample supply of live performance opportunities—whether at one of the venues discussed here or at one of the dozens of other jam sessions, bars, coffee shops, or steakhouses in Austin or its

sprawling suburbs—before taking their chance on moving to a larger jazz center like New York. In this way, nocoastjazz scenes like Austin are a vital part of the national jazz educational, artistic, and commercial network.

Conclusion

In our interpretive descriptions of nocoastjazz in Salt Lake City, Utah, and in Austin, Texas, we have drawn out some central ideas shaping musical scenes outside of the jazz metropole—from the fluidity of musicianship demanded by local political economies to the way in which music styles regulate the identities of the subjects dictating these economies. The remaining contributions to this issue further interrogate how jazz sustains itself in places hidden by the metropole's towering effect on the jazz imaginary. Much but not all of this content tends toward contingent spaces within the United States. Despite this focus on the United States, we have theorized nocoastjazz as a capacious term that registers more global understandings of jazz we hope to see taken up in future research.

In accordance with our concept, we have prioritized alternative perspectives, sounds, spaces, and authorial subjects in this issue of *Jazz and Culture*. Much of what follows was written by nonjazz scholars, activists, and/or gigging musicians, and their racial, gender, class, and sexual identities radically dismantle stereotypes about who can create academic knowledge. Some of the authors also write in opposition to traditional modalities of scholarly discourse through poetry, creative writing, storytelling, documentary photos, and firsthand descriptions of venues, institutions, and programs. As such, we seek to value marginality as epistemological expertise that in its subversiveness offers up indispensable ideas, questions, and lines of inquiry about contemporary jazz.

Notes

1. For more on the significant contribution of women club owners to the development of jazz, see Kara Attrep, "From Juke Joints to Jazz Jams: The Political Economy of Female Club Owners," *Journal of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music* 8, no. 1 (2018): 9–23. For more on Fannie Mae Duncan, see the documentary "Fannie Mae Duncan," *Colorado Experience*, aired November 8, 2018, on Rocky Mountain PBS.
2. Even still, New Orleans itself is demonstrative of this "tiered system" of jazz scenes, as it is regularly fastened to the past as a marker only of jazz's origins. Despite the innovations of Jon Batiste, Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, Rebirth Brass Band, and the Rumble, among others, this musical capital is often regarded as fixed in time. It is a place where tourists pay to participate in the "preservation" of early jazz. Unfortunately, contemporary music scholarship, with the notable exceptions of scholars like Matt Sakakeeny and Sarah Suhadolnik, focuses almost exclusively on New Orleans as the "birthplace of jazz," unwittingly reinforcing this touristic view. Our ethnographic research and conversations with local musicians reveal the persistence of calcified stereotypes of brass band players on stage and in marketing materials. These outdated depictions of Black music rub up against organicist narratives of

musical progress implicitly used to describe the New York jazz scene. In this way, New Orleans itself is often set apart from more central urban locales we call the “jazz metropole.”

3. Kimberly Hannon Teal, *Jazz Places: How Performance Spaces Shape Jazz History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 20.
4. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 8; emphasis ours. Bennett and Peterson build on the field-defining work of Will Straw who theorized “scenes” in the following: Straw, “Cultural Scenes,” *Society & Leisure* 27, no. 2 (Autumn 2004): 411–422; Straw, “Scenes and Sensibilities,” *Public* 22–23 (2001): 245–257; and Straw, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music,” *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (1991): 368–388.
5. Bennett and Petersen, *Music Scenes*, 8; emphasis ours.
6. Travis Jackson, *Blowin’ the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
7. Michael Heller, *Loft Jazz: Improvising New York in the 1970s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).
8. Nichole Rustin-Paschal, *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2017); Matthew Morrison, “Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (2019): 782.
9. Mark Tucker, “Musicology and the New Jazz Studies,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 131–148; Sherrie Tucker, “Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies,” *Current Musicology* 71–73 (Spring 2001–Spring 2002): 375–408; Robert O’Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett, and Daniel Ira Goldmark, *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and Its Boundaries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
10. Tammy L. Kernodle, *Soul on Soul: The Life and Music of Mary Lou Williams* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004, repr. 2020); Guthrie Ramsey, *The Amazing Bud Powell: Black Genius, Jazz History, and the Challenge of Bebop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Rustin-Paschal, *The Kind of Man I Am*; Brent Hayes Edwards, *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Vanessa Blais-Tremblay, “Where You Are Accepted, You Blossom”: Toward Care Ethics in Jazz Historiography,” *Jazz and Culture* 2 (2019): 59–83.
11. Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Rustin-Paschal, *The Kind of Man I Am*; Ramsey, *Bud Powell*.
12. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 99 and 106.
13. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 105.
14. Lara Pellegrinelli, “Separated at ‘Birth’: Singing and the History of Jazz,” in *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, edited by Nicole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker, 31–47 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Marie Buscatto, *Women in Jazz: Musicality, Femininity, Marginalization* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 17–74.
15. For example, see Ake, Garrett, and Goldmark, *Jazz/Not Jazz*.
16. Scott DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography,” *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 543.
17. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Susan C. Cook, “R-E-S-P-E-C-T (Find Out What It Means to Me): Feminist Musicology and the Abject Popular,” *Women & Music* 5 (2001): 1–4; Tony Grajeda, “The ‘Feminization’ of Rock,” in *Rock Over the Edge*:

Transformation in Popular Music Culture, ed. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders, 233–254 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Robin James, “Feminist Aesthetics, Popular Music, and the Politics of the ‘Mainstream,’” in *Feminist Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art: Critical Visions, Creative Engagements*, ed. L. Ryan Musgrave (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2022).

18. It is this very premise that undergirds the reception of popular music that makes it difficult for teenage girls (Britney Spears, Miley Cyrus, etc.) to navigate the music industry as they grow older. See Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age, and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Popular music scholars have long argued that authenticity discourses function to set commercial musics such as rock outside of capitalist exchanges. See, for example, Simon Frith, “‘The Magic That Can Set You Free’: The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community,” *Popular Music* 1 (1981): 159–168.
19. Angela Y. Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Capitalist Setting,” *Black Scholar* 9, no. 7 (April 1978); Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 199–239; and Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 164–277.
20. Much has been written about white men’s use of Black musical culture as an expression of sexual potency. See, for example, Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2007); and, more recently, Judith A. Peraino, “Mick Jagger as Mother,” *Social Text* 124 33, no. 3 (September 2015): 75–113.
21. Will Straw, “Cultural Scenes,” 412.
22. For more on the “Live Music Capital of the World” moniker, see Caroline Polk O’Meara and Eliot M. Tretter, “Sounding Austin: Live Music, Race, and the Selling of a City, in *Musical Performance and the Changing City*, ed. Fabian Holt and Carsten Wergin (New York: Routledge, 2013), 66–90.
23. Charles L. Black, “My World with Louis Armstrong,” *Yale Review* 69, no. 1 (1979): 145–151.
24. Fabian Holt, *Everyone Loves Live Music: A Theory of Performance Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 231.
25. Greg Richards, *Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 270.
26. One notable exception would be the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival (“JazzFest”), which remains a central piece in that city’s tourism strategies. However, even the content of this festival has expanded beyond the traditional boundaries of “jazz,” which, as discussed above, only serves to further highlight New Orleans’ own marginalized status with respect to the jazz metropole. It is, quite simply, the exception that proves the rule.
27. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, “Making Space: Producing the Austin Project,” in *Experiments in a Jazz Aesthetic: Art, Activism, Academia, and the Austin Project*, ed. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Lisa L. Moore, and Sharon Bridgforth (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 7.
28. <https://www.monksjazz.com/>

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