

**Permission to be loud: Struggling with urban  
development contradictions in the  
Vancouver Music Strategy**

**by**

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Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Urban Studies

in the  
Urban Studies Program  
Faculty of Arts and Sciences

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Spring 2021

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## Abstract

The *Vancouver Music Strategy* seeks to prescribe a framework for supporting the local music ecosystem. A top priority is to increase the accessibility and affordability of publicly and privately owned spaces for those historically underrepresented in the city's commercial music industry. The strategy also focuses on how music complements tech- and innovation-focused redevelopment projects in neighbourhoods with affordable rehearsal, studio and performance spaces. This research was guided by the question, *how does the Vancouver Music Strategy seek to reconcile the apparent contradictions of urban economic development and spatial justice that are embedded within it?* Findings highlight a persistent disconnection between broader development goals and residents experiencing the disappearance of the city's musical backbone. Urban economic development and spatial justice are not sufficiently reconciled, despite a righteous appeal to social equity and planned City-sanctioned spaces. For many, a sense of belonging, socio-economic diversity, and the sound of Vancouver is at stake.

**Keywords:** music strategy; music space; economic inequality; displacement; public engagement; right to the city

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my little brother William Tate Campbell (1985-2010) for teaching me that life is short.

## Acknowledgements

I am incredibly grateful to all the formal and informal guidance and insight I received throughout the process of developing, researching and writing this thesis; my fellow classmates for their great questions and feedback; all the professors and teaching assistants that helped me get this far into academia when it hasn't always felt like a natural fit; and certainly, to numerous folks from the broader music community that I have learned so much from, I truly hope that we can gather in loud, dark spaces again soon.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Eugene McCann for his keen interest in the project from the beginning, his willingness to supervise a student outside the Department of Geography, his patience and humor, and for being willing to meet in the park, at a safe distance, when face-to-face progress reports were important for moving forward mentally and physically. He kept me focused on answering the main question and nudged me when paralyzed by the complexity of cultural planning.

I would like to thank Dr. Karen Ferguson for guiding me through the development phase of this project and her input on its final version. Her wit and honesty motivated me to produce a thesis that is both academically and personally fulfilling.

I would also like to thank Dr. Meg Holden for her early inspiration in undergraduate Geography courses, encouraging me to pursue Urban Studies and for helping me realize that 'music' was a legitimate urban research topic.

I am completely indebted to the respondents that were willing to participate in the research, particularly at a time that the very purpose of music spaces, why they exist, how they exist, where they exist and our local governments' commitment to preserve or provide them, was under increasing pressure due to COVID-19 restrictions. Without the time that they dedicated to discussing all the work that has been done prior to the *Vancouver Music Strategy*, to make sure a music community can continue to thrive in Vancouver, this project would not be rooted in peoples' actual experiences and would be confined to a theoretical critical analysis of a host of aspirational documents and statistics. I learned more than I can meaningfully incorporate into the scope of this document, as much of what I heard reached well beyond the research questions.

Beyond my academic circle, I am infinitely grateful to the support of my partner Emma Garrod for her unwavering commitment to listen, read, provide feedback, listen, buy food, pay rent, and listen throughout the entire process for this project. Her immense love holds this work together. Both of our families have always done whatever they can to support my goals.

## Land Acknowledgement

This research project takes place on the colonized land of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Reconciliation and decolonization between the nations and local government is ongoing and arts and cultural planning is an important approach for improving social equity and spatial justice for Indigenous peoples. Its importance is prevalent even in the renaming of the *Creative City Strategy* to *Culture|Shift: Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture*, of which the *Vancouver Music Strategy* is a large piece. The new title was created by local Indigenous artist Debra Sparrow and is intended to capture the significance of blanket weaving as foundational to historical Indigenous economy, ceremony, law, and sense of belonging, “re-establishing Salish culture in Vancouver’s public realm and countering colonial erasure” (Culture|Shift, 2019, 7).



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## List of Acronyms

DIY	Do-it-yourself
RTC	Right to the city
VMS	Vancouver Music Strategy
VMES	Vancouver Music Ecosystem Study

## Glossary

Commercial music	Mainstream or currently trendy music designed to sell products and create profit (e.g., cars, alcohol, streaming subscriptions, licensing and plastic discs). Key players include Sony Music Canada, Universal Music Group and Warner Music Group.
DIY (do-it-yourself) music space	Rooted in an ethic and need for self-sufficiency, often functions on the fringes, in a space between the commercial and non-profit music industries. Venues are often non-compliant with zoning bylaws and liquor regulations but are particularly inclusive of amateur musicians and historically excluded groups, identities and underground or experimental musical genres.
Grassroots music	Common, folk, and quotidian practices of music embedded in culture and daily life; in contrast to elitist, professionalized and top-down and commercial evaluation of music.
Rehearsal space (a.k.a. jam space)	A space for both informal and formal practices of improvisation, experimentation, writing and performance of musical arrangements
Musician	Anyone who plays a musical instrument (voice is an instrument), including amateur and professional composition, improvisation and performance
Music industry	Companies, individuals and musicians that earn an income from the sale of music in the form of performance, streaming, albums, publishing, licensing. The industry includes lawyers, sound engineers, managers, journalists, radio broadcasters, teachers and musicians.
Non-profit music industry	Organizations that promote or present concerts, workshops, fundraisers, economic development and other events, with a specific mandate and are sustained by government subsidy or private donations, compensating for commercial viability (e.g., Vancouver Opera, Vancouver Classical Music, Music BC, Vancouver Jazz Festival)
Presenter	Anyone who promotes, facilitates, manages a musical performance, both amateur and professional.

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

Do we have to continue to argue for music, that it has a place? And yet we do because it doesn't have a place (Kadota, interview, May 8, 2020).

I always come back the fact that all I would need, and the type of people that I work with would need, is just an affordable space and to be able to be left to do it (Lyons, interview, May 11, 2020).

In a city somehow known as one of the most *liveable* places in the world and one of the most expensive *places to live* in the world, DIY and grassroots music culture and space in Vancouver exists on one of the lowest rungs on the ladder of municipal responsibilities, well below maintaining view corridors and permeable brick pathways. Certainly, the imminent climate crisis, economic inequality, housing, homelessness, and reconciliation with local Indigenous nations demand increasing time, money and resources. Yet, music is also one of the most effective ways for communicating ideas, connecting with one's own or other communities, expressing one's identity, and generating a sense of belonging in the city, and the world. These social benefits could help mitigate societies' wicked problems, or at least provide some rays of hope in an increasingly disenchanting world.

Historically in Canada, music has been supported by the private sector, primarily through the sale of physical albums, ticketed events, and licensing to movies, television and advertisements or through Federal and Provincial granting bodies such as FACTOR (The Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings), Canada Council for the Arts and Creative BC. As financial incentives for the sale of physical albums have all but disappeared in recent years (due mainly to online streaming) and granting bodies have less pie to share with more artists and organizations (due to arts funding budget cuts) musicians have little reason to consider becoming professional artists, and even less reason to imagine ever becoming 'stars' through traditional avenues. Only recently, due to COVID-19, have musicians considered additional constraints that restrictions on forming or sustaining a musical group and performing live to audiences could have on their artistic practice in the future.

While the commercial music industry navigates a radical restructuring of its notoriously exploitative business model, and the large scale, non-profit music industry depends more and more on subsidy and service to wealthier audiences, thousands of musicians in Vancouver are making music in ways that do not easily fit, nor seek, either of these two historical approaches. These musicians, and their audiences, are rapidly being displaced to make way for more profitable, more palatable, mediums of creativity, innovation and technology.

The City of Vancouver's first music strategy, among numerous goals, seeks to address the moral shortcomings of, and policy limitations on, the commercial music industry, increase access and affordability to publicly and privately owned spaces for all genres and identities, particularly if they are historically underrepresented in 'city building'. At its core, the strategy is intended to compliment parallel plans for the redevelopment of specific areas of the City, often the light industrial or commercial zones where local music and art currently flourishes. Through the act of public engagement, centered around social equity, significant changes in cultural space infrastructure are justified as representative of the local music community's needs, despite the City's capacity, jurisdiction, or political will to address the root of the issues that lead to displacement, such as limited access to land ownership, triple-net-leases (tenants are responsible for paying rent, insurance and property taxes) or broader societal economic inequality.

Municipal music strategies, in general, are not new and have been emerging over the last 15 years in some of the Western world's favorite music tourism destinations such as Melbourne, London, Berlin, Austin, and Seattle; cities that share Vancouver's renowned unaffordability. Where the *Vancouver Music Strategy* (VMS) is perhaps distinct is in its ambitious and laudable articulation of mitigating social and spatial inequity by highly prioritizing inclusion, diversity, reconciliation, and specifically, public engagement (for real) as an antidote to the historical exclusion, white supremacy, colonization and paternalism of Canadian governments within the cultural industries.

Through optimism, reparations, and consensus-building the *VMS* seeks to articulate and facilitate a win-win scenario for every niche in the 'music ecosystem' while supporting parallel economic development, housing market, public health and environmental sustainability goals that are often at cross-purposes with preserving

valued cultural spaces. Respondents in this research, many members of the music community, and academics would argue that such policies tend to benefit those already in positions of financial and social privilege (e.g., property owners, large corporations, and the younger generation from wealthy families) far greater than any perceived benefits to the lower-income pockets of local arts communities, even exacerbating inequalities as an unintended consequence (McCann, 2008). This apparent contradiction, between the goals of various City plans and the priorities of the *VMS*, is baffling to some Vancouverites and exciting to others, with one's position often reflecting where one's personal interests lie on the continuum between corporate/commercial and DIY/grassroots musical objectives and their respective communities.

Discussions about music, space and place are prone to tangential journeys through history, labour practices, sub-culture, authenticity, technology and personal experience. This thesis seeks to stay the course in answering sincerely, but with a healthy skepticism, its key question:

- How does the Vancouver Music Strategy seek to reconcile the apparent contradictions of urban economic development and spatial justice that are embedded within it?

And two sub-questions:

- Who is being displaced in Vancouver's music ecosystem (and by whom)?
- Who was represented in framing the recommendations for the strategy?

In doing so, I strive to provide enough context to understand Vancouver's specific, current challenges in accessing and sustaining affordable space to create, record, and perform *all* genres of music. However, my research focuses more specifically on the less visible community of musicians and audiences that elude, consciously and unconsciously, the categories they must fit in to become 'professionals' in the commercial or non-profit music industries. Often minimized, but equally important, are those who require the space to make music as part of their everyday lives, with their families and friends, and for their own or their communities' mental health.

Through the research and development of this thesis it became apparent that a strong contextual understanding would enable a better appreciation of the tensions present in Vancouver arts and culture sector, further shaken by the response of



government and citizens to COVID-19 regulations and the Black Lives Matter protests in the Spring and Summer of 2020. This period, coinciding with data analysis, exposed the importance of space, self-expression, connection, belonging and amplified the radical systemic change demanded by social justice movements. The viability and sustainability of DIY and grassroots music spaces has been further challenged through its sudden inaccessibility, hopefully sending a jolt into the broader society's tendency to take these spaces for granted.

## 1.1. Objective

The focus of this research is on how the City of Vancouver developed a plan to include *all* the diversity of Vancouver's local music community, but specifically historically underrepresented groups, identities and genres. However, the City is simultaneously using 'music' to attract new business and investment near or directly in areas of the city that currently provide affordable and accessible space to create, produce and perform music for people that prioritize music's cultural and social value above its economic development potential, many of whom would identify with the very groups, identities or genres the City seeks to protect.

As noted above, this research is driven by the question, *how does the Vancouver Music Strategy seek to reconcile the apparent contradictions of urban economic development and spatial justice that are embedded within it?* There are also two sub-questions: *who is being displaced in Vancouver's music ecosystem (and by whom)?* and *who was represented in framing the recommendations for the strategy?* These questions arise from the assumption that people in the music community (musicians, presenters and audiences) have a right to live and work and play in the city regardless of income or cultural affiliation. Moreover, they acknowledge that well-intentioned cultural planners in the City's Cultural Services Department have set several aspirational goals that aim to leverage music as a community development and social justice strategy, with preserving and providing physical space being a primary objective. Yet, tangible examples beyond inclusive engagement are limited and few, leading to further questions regarding the City's capacity to meet its stated vision.

Throughout this thesis, I focus on the perspective of the DIY (do-it-yourself) and grassroots musicians, considering more marginal, and indeed disruptive, music genres

and their audiences, as well as the perspective of lower-income residents of Vancouver. While exclusion by race, ethnicity, gender and ability are essential barriers to overcome, focusing on socio-economic and ideological exclusion brings more attention to those less likely to have been meaningfully included in the City's commercial and large scale, non-profit music industry centered public engagement process, and re-asserts the most significant barrier to participation – money. In order to draw out this disconnection, my goal is to better understand the vision and approach that was presented in the *Vancouver Music Strategy* (VMS), examine who was and who was not reflected in its development, examine the origins of and how its data was collected, and interpret how the VMS aligns or conflicts with the City's other development goals.

Through this analysis, I aim to clarify the tensions and complexities of the City's goals of preserving, providing and ensuring access to safe and affordable music spaces for *all* of Vancouver's music community while enabling rapid urban growth, under a rebranded creative city strategy in the areas of the City that currently house the bulk of Vancouver's vital DIY and grassroots music spaces. I focus primarily on East Vancouver, because that is where most of the spaces are, due to relatively lower rent from housing and workspace. It is worth noting, in contrast, that the few City-supported music spaces, which are intended to ease displacement, are in wealthier neighbourhoods on the West side of the city in neighbourhoods, like Kitsilano or in Downtown, near Yaletown.

This thesis is organized in a way that first examines, three bodies of literature as a conceptual framework for examination of the complex relationships between seeking to plan culture, the growth of the creative economy and the unequal distribution of opportunities and consequences of these pursuits. Next, a section on methods and methodology outlines my own positionality, data collection, approach to analysis and the impacts of COVID-19 on the research itself. Following brief sections contextualizing Vancouver, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the detrimental effects of COVID-19 regulations on music spaces, I summarize the *Vancouver Music Strategy* and the plans that preceded it.

The body of this examination is divided into two sections. The first examines the displacement of music spaces and the communities that revolve around them, both through the data that has been formally collected and then by applying a more 'local

participant' lens, with specific examples that add gravity to the community's concern. The second half examines how the City attempted to use public engagement and consultation to unify the music industry and community, seeking to develop a music strategy that was representative of everyone's interests despite the ideologically divergent views among different interest groups. While utilitarian, the act of consensus building is inherently exclusive of marginal perspectives, while often privileging elites (Marcuse, 2014; Fainstein, 2014). I show that while the prioritization of underrepresented groups in the engagement process is laudable, the goals of the VMS are vague, under-resourced, and non-binding in their commitment to addressing discrimination and inequality in the music industry, in music culture more broadly and in ambitiously seeking to preserve and provide music space, within the city's core, in the future. Likewise, it fails to challenge, and could even exacerbate the displacement of the physical spaces where music and culture are grown, long before they are harvested.

## **1.2. Conceptual Framework**

This thesis project brings together three intersecting literatures: Right to the City, Music Space and Culture, and Creative Cities. I combine these discussions to better understand the City of Vancouver's approach to preserving and proving music spaces while reconciling spatial injustice in a highly competitive property market, that privileges the 'highest and best use' of land above its cultural and social value.

### **1.2.1. Right to the City**

The first section of the conceptual framework highlights key arguments that consider various claims for a Right to the City (RTC) and citizen collaboration with the state.

In *The Just City* (2014), Fainstein summarizes the groundwork for a spatial justice, initiated by Henri Lefebvre in his original development of the RTC theory, defining space as "being constituted by social relations rather than... [only] its territorial, physical, and demographic characteristics" (2011, 1). Reflecting on the role of space in claims for the RTC, Fainstein (2013) also cites Harvey, where he explains a shift, away from a traditional Marxist analysis of the ownership of the means of production, towards

a better understanding of the relationships between space, social justice and urbanism, how power affects urban outcomes, and how spatial relations reinforce injustice.

Marcuse has identified several interpretations that Lefebvre and Harvey's work on the RTC have produced. Marcuse (2014) first clarifies that Lefebvre did not intend a legal right, to be enforceable by law, but a moral right for all of society to realize their human value. Importantly, it was also not only the right to be included in the city *as it is*, but to shape the city into *what it could be* for its diverse citizenship. In 2014 article, he identified multiple interpretations of what the RTC has come to mean. I have selected five that are worth identifying. They have all been mobilized by different groups in music, art, and activism for different purposes. Ultimately, he suggests, one should recognize which approach they are taking and adjust expectations accordingly. The following are short summaries of five discrete readings, with a deeper examination of the *spatial reading*, as they apply to the development of the *VMS*.

Firstly, the *strategic reading* of the RTC is used by groups whose economic position does not give them power to be included in the existing city. It can include a discussion of existing power relations and what changes may be possible within those relations, but it does not necessarily explore the possibilities of changing the form of power relations. This is essentially the approach that the City of Vancouver has taken by consulting, listening, acknowledging, and articulating in the broader Culture|Shift plan, the racial, ethnic, and gender inequality and spatial injustice of the pro-capitalist system that the state (the City of Vancouver in this case) produces and reproduces. However, there are no significant commitments to radically altering the broader system that enables inequity in the first place (e.g., providing or ensuring secure tenure for multiple, independent, and economically marginalized communities in the creative sector).

Second, the *discontented reading* comes from those that do feel included in the city as it is, but who also feel that,

their own potentials were constricted, their human values distorted, their aspirations for the future pushed into conspicuous consumption, their search for social support and solidarity, defeated by the pressures of competition, competition for goals they did not share but are forced to pursue – and convinced to value by an extreme cultural and ideological apparatus, against their own deepest desires (Marcuse, 2014, 7).

This group is composed of primarily of students, teachers, intellectuals, and artists and has some representation within of the City's engagement process and the plans' objectives. Marcuse (2014) cites Herbert Marcuse (his father and philosopher from the Frankfurt School) who observed that this group rarely suggests a path to achieve its goals, as the significant changes required for a more equitable city lay in that group changing its own consumption habits and system of wealth distribution. He argues, that in practice, discontented claims for a RTC often lead to new leadership opportunities, such as in community development or politics, for those with existing financial or social privilege.

It is possible to connect this reading to many of the key players in the development of the VMS. Steering committee members, advisory committee members, engagement facilitators, and even the City's cultural planners are benefiting from the leadership opportunities created through the development of the strategy. They likely hold professional positions in stable organizations and institutions and are compensated with social networks, prestige, and direct or indirect remuneration. According to Marcuse (senior), they are the privileged middle and upper-class, educated in the tensions and complexity of a City ensuring entrepreneurial competitiveness and social justice, growth and preservation, but ultimately committed to their own professional sustainability.

A *subversive reading* would fall in line more accurately with Lefebvre's original conception and combines aspects of the strategic and discontented readings. Marcuse argues that the subversive reading makes "transformative claims and demands, for programs and goals that both give priority to the immediate needs of the excluded, the ultimate goals of the discontented... [and those] exploited by the same existing patterns from which the deprived, the excluded and the discontented suffer" (2014, 8). This group would include the working class, the poor, the discriminated against and the excluded, even if they are not aware of or engaged in activism or demanding their right to the city. In the case at hand, emphasis is on *transformation* and urgency, rather than incremental *reformation* of Canada's granting systems, urban land economics, and cultural planning paradigm.

A *spatial reading* is focused specifically on the built environment, favoring design, efficiency, beauty, health and environmental sustainability. This is where Marcuse differs with spatial justice advocate and geographer Edward Soja, calling the spatial

perspective a “narrow reading” of the RTC theory (2014, 7). He argues that this reading appeals particularly to professionals, architects, urban designers, planners and geographers that demand better utilization of their skills. This group seeks to promote the potential for the built environment to determine better social outcomes. However, Marcuse is sceptical, suggesting that this approach would likely result only in alternatives for the discontented rather than a shift in power-relations that could improve outcomes for more excluded groups. This observation is perhaps directly applicable to the limited capacity for the City to provide and ensure spatial justice more comprehensively in the *Vancouver Music Strategy* and the *Making Space for Arts and Culture* plans, were a few new City-sanctioned spaces are intended to compensate for the significant loss of space elsewhere in the city.

In his book, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010), Soja examines the history of the explicit use of ‘spatial’ and ‘justice’ together and what prioritizing a spatial perspective over a historical or social perspective means for how inequality is produced and reproduced. He explains his own reading of Lefebvre’s original concept of the RTC and how Harvey’s incredibly influential work evolved from a liberal democratic perspective that seeks equality through reform, to a Marxist perspective (shared by Marcuse) that seeks radical transformation of society and then back to a position that embraced liberal reform, but with a more equity-based theory of change (85-90). One key element of Harvey’s work that was explicitly spatial was his concept of the “spatial fix” whereby capitalism’s endless need for growth necessarily requires urban renewal to persist (2010, 90). He also explains some distinctions between Fainstein and Marcuse’s framing of a ‘just city’ and a deeper spatial analysis as “pre-eminently normative, reflecting the strong utopian tradition among planning theorists”, bluntly stating that it remains in the realm of theory and is difficult to implement without the, aforementioned, radical transformation of society, therefore incremental reform is welcome in the meantime (2010, 29).

Iveson (2011) presents an analysis of Marcuse and Soja’s conflicting positions and identifies their commonality and where they differ. According to Iveson, both want “radical and progressive alternatives to injustices of actually existing cities” and both are “impatient with critique” which is disproportionately focused on *identifying the injustices of past neoliberal urbanization* and fails to *identify opportunities for justice in the moment* (2011, 252). How each of them conceives of the appropriate place for intervention into

social injustice varies. For Marcuse, “most problems have a spatial aspect, but their origins lie in economic, social and political arenas” (2011, 252). Soja, on the other hand, argues that putting ‘spatial’ before ‘justice’ is “crucial in theory and in practice to emphasize explicitly the spatiality of justice and injustice” (2001, 253).

Iveson’s analysis of both perspectives in tandem is useful for understanding how both perspectives are necessary to consider when developing an analysis of the planning process that led the Vancouver Music Strategy, as one is critical of soft liberal reform and another aims to be pragmatic. However, it is likely that those that believe that engaging with the City, to identify ‘solutions’, are the ones who show up to committee meetings and public events, while those that are more critical, disillusioned, angry, and indeed disruptive are often not present or represented. This tension is at the heart of this research project. The document’s emphasis on ‘providing and preserving’ music spaces, ‘amplifying’ all genres of music and ‘elevating’ underrepresented voices could be both its strength if it successful in reducing discrimination, accessibility and inequality, and its weakness if it fails to implement meaningful policy that protects or provides actually existing space for those most often experiencing social, historical, as well as economic and spatial injustices, adding fuel to the more radical critiques of the legitimacy of creative city strategies, even when inclusivity is a stated priority.

My research question assumes that many artists and cultural producers would want to contribute, either individually or collectively, formally or informally, to a social movement for more equity, inclusion, diversity and a right to the ‘creative’ city. However, the *collaborationist reading*, according to Marcuse, supports only “mild reform”, is “pure co-optation” and is a “distortion of the radical content of the [RTC] slogan” (2014, 8). He is blunt in his assertion that,

when the Right to the City becomes embodied in an officially adopted Charter of the City, adopted by public institutions ... that have neither the desire to implement such rights, however defined, the fact that Lefebvre’s call recognized the inevitability of conflict ... is blatantly denied, concealed and made toothless behind a façade of good intentions, rationality and quest for consensus.

The *collaborative reading*, expressed by Marcuse, and a critique that is shared by others (Purcell, 2009; Peck, 2005; McCann, 2007; Fainstein, 2014), interferes with,

rather than promotes the action required to mitigate urban inequality and reconcile significant conflicts of interest when adhering to the Floridaesque creative city script.

Additionally, Fainstein, argues that “process-oriented discussions rarely make explicit what policies would produce greater justice within the urban context” (2014, 5). She draws attention to the use of justice claims in urban policy documents as a response to the neoliberalization critique, highlighting specifically the utilitarian justification often used in urban redevelopment projects where, displacement is accepted because of the perception of a ‘common good’ or ‘best-use-of-land’, often benefiting those already better off at the expense of the most marginalized (2014).

### **1.2.2. Music Space and Culture**

In many Western, post-industrial cities, creative activity has usually clustered in older, cheaper residential and non-residential rental buildings. However, cities have been recently embracing a narrowly defined, creative city script, preferring trendy new (and green) developments or redevelopments and high profit creative industries, such as high-tech, digital entertainment, lifestyle apparel and craft breweries. The creative city script is being used to justify rapid displacement of non-commercially oriented, potentially subversive, and self-consciously marginal spaces, substantially undermining the essential nature of independent and alternative art and music (Shaw, 2013; Hracs, 2009; Bain et al, 2012, Behr et al, Rantisi et al, 2009).

Thus, the second literature in this conceptual framework explores the relationships between commercial and independent music, cultural producers and counter-hegemonic space. To borrow the words of Shaw, independent creative subcultures are the “primordial soup of cultural evolution” (2013, 333). It is these spaces where new work begins and with few barriers to entry, consumers can easily transition to producer, leading to significant social, community and personal health benefits. For many in these subcultures, there is not necessarily a substantial economic incentive in producing art or music. Instead, the act of creation helps artists express a range of positive emotions from joy to catharsis to belonging that are often relatable to a small number of other supporters. Rantisi et al (2009) also argue that top down, creative city policies are insufficient at sustaining creative practice because they tend to privilege



commercial interests above aesthetic or social values. It is the informal, independent or alternative sites of creative experimentation and production that sustains the arts sector.

Historically, Western independent music and alternative art's ideological roots are often traced back to Adorno's critique of the 'culture industry' (1947), and the Marxist teachings of the Frankfurt School, the anti-hegemony of the Dadaists and Surrealists movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Existentialists and the Beat Poets of the 1940s and 1950s. The late 1960s and the early 1970s rock and blues soundtrack to the counter-culture movement, which is still highly celebrated in art and music culture today is viewed as a golden era of individuality, authenticity, counter-hegemony, and free creative expression (Shaw, 2013). The music that emerged from Black communities, while not often considered alternative due to current mainstream status, such as Jazz, Blues, Soul, R&B, Funk, Rock n' Roll, Techno, House and Rap emerged from small and underground Black clubs before being adopted by predominantly white audiences in the North America and Europe, making them commercial forms of music (Dressman et al, 2017).

In *alternative to what? Subcultural capital and the commercialization of the music scene* (intentionally lower case, 2005) Moore examines the historical commercialization of alternative youth subcultures through the alternative rock boom of the 1990s. He discusses the tendency for counter-hegemonic youth subcultures to become more rebellious the more they are condemned or constrained by the state. On the other hand, Moore argues that tensions between alternative and the status quo subside when the pressure to conform is reduced. Through the record label and news media commercialization of "the adversarial qualities of youth culture" and the exploitation of "subcultural capital", genuine counter-hegemonic positions can be undermined or pacified (2005). The analysis of this phenomenon could potentially explain how City-sanctioned music spaces may intentionally or unintentionally dilute or diffuse any counter-hegemonic, anti-capitalist, or disruptive voices, despite claims to protect and provide the space to do so.

Artists and musicians are increasingly faced with the choice to either commodify their 'product' (often described as 'being realistic') in order to pay a higher rent for the same or less space stop their creative practices or consider relocating to smaller cities, towns or suburbs where space is more affordable regardless of ones connection to the

city on the first place (Bain et al, 2012; Edensor et al, 2009; Hracs, 2009). The creative city script presents a set of dilemmas for many artists, musicians and audiences wanting to support a genuinely creative culture in their city but also recognize how growth leads to further displacement. Edensor et al (2009) emphasize a need for rearticulating the vernacular (ordinary) and quotidian (everyday) creativity for *all* people as a means of defending an over-emphasis on the commercial value of creativity by governments, elitist and upper-class tastes of opera and classical music and a commercial music industry that requires commodifiable artists to sustain itself.

### **1.2.3. Creative Cities**

Cities have long been attractive to artists, musicians and 'creatives', but in the last two decades, municipal governments in Canada, Australia, Germany, USA and the UK have been adopting formal 'creative city strategies', influenced by Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) and seemingly ignoring the wave of criticism that responded to it (Boren et al, 2013; Edensor et al, 2009, Peck, 2005).

Florida's particular version of creativity and its potential for civic boosterism can be briefly summarized as follows: The success of the post-industrial city in the new knowledge economy depends on the presence of an emerging class of workers in fields such as science, research, law, education, arts, culture and technology (Edensor et al, 2009). According to Florida, cities should prioritize 'quality of place' by promoting liberal ideology, cosmopolitanism, and entertainment to attract the mobile and highly educated creative class. Innovative new firms will then pursue that talent (Florida, 2002; Boren et al, 2013; Shaw, 2005). In practice, increasing quality of place often takes the form of redeveloping or rezoning historic neighbourhoods, investing in the arts sector, increasing access to outdoor activities, and a general appeal to the creative class's consumption and lifestyle habits (Grodach, 2013).

Many scholars have responded to Florida's thesis with scathing criticism. Most notably, University of British Columbia geographer Jamie Peck argued in a book chapter titled *The Cult of Urban Creativity* (2010) that the creative city 'doctrine' is,

barely disruptive of the prevailing order of neoliberal urbanism, based ... on polarizing labour and housing markets, property and market-led development, retrenched public services and social programming, and

accelerating intercity competition for jobs investment and assets ... represent[ing] a 'soft' scalar fix... a case for modest and discretionary public spending on creative assets while raising a favoured bundle of middle-class lifestyles to the status of an urban development objective. This newly influential urban development script – which finds legitimacy in progressive circles for its social liberalism and its valuation of art and culture – is in fact completely enveloped in, and suffused with, market logics.

Peck's initial analysis, *Struggling with the Creative Class* (2005) is discussed in a substantial amount of the critique that followed the release of Florida's book and its adoption by municipal governments in primarily Western, post-industrial cities, such as Toronto and now Vancouver. In addition to the charge of facilitating an econocentric 'business-as-usual', Florida's theory has been criticized on two other key fronts: First, according to Grodach et al (2018), the causality of economic development due to the presence of 'creatives' varies significantly across cities, undermining Florida's argument outright. Second, according to McCann (2008), creative city strategies can lead to exacerbated social and economic inequality, making cities increasingly *less livable* for those excluded from Florida's preferred creative class composition.

More recently a critique of the critique has emerged, arguing that the backlash following Florida's work over-simplifies the characterization of artists, musicians and cultural producers. Boren et al (2016), inspired by Gibson et al (2005a), Novy and Colomb (2013) and Markusen (2006), present a more nuanced argument that resonates with my own desire to be optimistic, as they try to move beyond casting artists in binary terms, as either in radical opposition or fully embracing creative city policy initiatives, complacent in their role as an instrument for gentrification, a binary that Peck tends to construct. Similarly, Boren et al question whether urban cultural policy is fact, driven only by neoliberal logics. Instead, they suggest that new studies should "explore the locally contingent nature of artists' responses and organization" to understand a more nuanced relationship between arts communities and City Hall (2016, 21). This critique of the critique was the initial spark for pursuing this research project, as the goal is to examine precisely *how* the City of Vancouver worked with *parts* of the music community to produce a plan that seeks to ensure that all 'musics' can persist in a densifying and increasingly expensive city. This critique is not in complete opposition to Peck's argument, as neoliberal forces are undeniably at play, certainly in the commercial music and entertainment industries, but music has a much broader cultural significance than framing it only as an instrument of capitalism, neglecting the importance of music, and

space for it, in every corner of society, not the least, those that remain on the margins of mainstream arts and culture or are perpetually excluded by a prioritization of elitist lifestyles and tastes (Edensor et al, 2009).

Boren et al argue that the main barrier to finding better solutions to sustain the arts in growing urban areas has been a “mundane level of misunderstanding between ... two professional worlds”, rather than a dramatic opponent versus enthusiast dichotomy. They call this communication gap the “creative policy gap” where policymakers lack an understanding of the logic of creative communities’ needs and creative communities lack the governmental logic of planning processes (2016, 24). My research aims to identify some of this possible ‘miscommunication’ between two professional worlds and examine how and if the VMS incorporated the diversity of local knowledge and if it is likely to lead to the preservation and provision of music space for those that need it most.

This brief overview of the creative economy and creative class debate helps to stage an emerging discourse responding to calls for more specificity, complexity and hope in the examination of the arts-led, strategic planning. Scholars, Grodach (2012), Markusen (2014), Gibson et al (2005a), Boren et al (2016), Novy et al (2013) understand that exposing creative city strategies as operating primarily for the will of particular economic interests is necessary for holding governments accountable for *how* and *what* they prioritize, as Peck does so proficiently, however they also argue that more analysis of context specific, socially progressive urban policy is required for a more nuanced understanding of variations on Florida’s creative city recipe, for better or for worse.

## Chapter 2.

### Methods and Methodology

This research project is a merging of critical theory from Urban Studies, Cultural Studies and Economic Geography as well as my own 14 years of lived experience and relationship building as a musician, songwriter, and performer in Vancouver, Canada. It employs a combination of document analysis, audio/video, ethnography and semi-structured interviews and is built upon a conceptual framework from three robust bodies of literature that position the work in a relatively niche and emergent corner of academic inquiry. This process began from an assumption that creative music space is vital for *all* residents of the city to express their identity, feel a sense of belonging, and maintain or improve their mental health regardless of their race, gender, or socioeconomic status. I believe that in highlighting spatial injustices and building on the work that is already being done to improve fairness in the city, a greater understanding of how to work through the potential contradictions of urban place marketing, neighbourhood revitalization and spatial justice can be achieved. The next section outlines my own unique position, observations regarding the challenges of COVID-19 emerging during data collection, process, research methods and analysis.

#### 2.1. Positionality

This study of the development and perceived need for the Vancouver Music Strategy is primarily dependent on the combination of document analysis, ethnography and semi-structured interviews. However, the selection of this topic comes from personal experience and the experiences shared by my immediate musical community, stemming from the consistent loss and increasing cost of the physical space to create, record, and perform live music. While the framing of this subject is being presented by a *white-cisgender-middle-aged-indie-rock-dude*, the emphasis is not on my own musical taste, but explores why certain kinds of music and the people that participate in that music are more or less supported by land use policies, grant funding, and public engagement processes.

I also believe that there is a historical disconnection, in society at large, between how Black music's history and culture is highly valued when it is commodified or potentially commodifiable, particularly if its palatable to white audiences. Yet, at a grassroots level, Black musicians and audiences are denied access to meaningful support when the narrative, genre, or cultural space they want to elevate does not align with the broader City initiatives or meet expectations by the status quo of what is politically and socially acceptable creative content.

As the cost of living in Vancouver continues to be the most significant barrier for most artists, musicians, and cultural producers, in addition to those that face barriers because of their racial or gender identity, those with lower incomes, including youth, are increasingly excluded not just from creating and sharing their own music, but from the audience experience as well. Given my own background growing up in a lower-income family and leaning heavily on music as source of purpose, creative expression, catharsis, and relationship-building, I know in my bones that music has a far more significant role in our society than its economic function or a path to celebrity. Yet, this social and cultural value is what is most often up for debate, taken for granted, or delegitimized.

Music should not be reduced to its exchange value or a privilege for those who can afford to produce or consume it. It is part of the human condition. Spaces to gather, experiment, dance, yell and sing are essential for all humans to prosper.

## **2.2. The Impacts of COVID-19 Regulations on the Research Process**

In March 2020, COVID-19 became a reality in British Columbia, significantly disrupting peoples' lives in unexpected ways. While two interviews were conducted in-person prior to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions, the remaining three interviews were conducted via Zoom or by telephone. This less personal interaction and the overarching anxiety of COVID-19 likely altered the communication of both interviewer and interviewee in the discussion given the uncertainty of how live music and gathering was being impacted and would be impacted in the future. Given the uncertainty of COVID-19's impacts, interviews were postponed by approximately 1.5 months until it felt appropriate to ask respondents to reconnect. Presumably, some of the original

respondents did not follow-up after initial responses to the invitations due to the added strain that COVID-19 was putting on themselves or their organizations.

The authors and contributors of the Vancouver Music Strategy could not have foreseen the extraordinary need for a multi-governmental response for preserving cultural spaces and the emerging challenges that music spaces will face as the city (and the world) come to terms with a new post-COVID reality. This massive shift in context is necessary to acknowledge as the 'music ecosystem' that existed at the beginning of this project will be very different from the one it will end in, outlines the data collected and my approach to analysis.

### **2.3. Document Analysis**

The history of the City of Vancouver considering music as a distinct and formal priority is relatively short. At the beginning of this project, I compiled a list of relevant research, recommendations and music related strategic planning documents, beginning from 2013. However, in 1990, Vancouver City Council adopted its first *Cultural Facilities Priorities Plan* which intended to ensure the existence of creation and presentation spaces for arts and cultural in the City, but music was only one among numerous creative mediums. The focus then was primarily on the operation of Civic Theatres, sub-leasing to non-profit organizations, capital grants, and the development of large-scale cultural institutions (CoV, 2008). Since 2013, several music specific documents have been produced by large organizations and government bodies that have pushed to expand the scope of local governments' responsibility and sharpen the focus on economic impact. **Table 2.1** identifies two categories of document. Category 1 identifies a direct citation within the *VMS* and Category 2 identifies supplementary music related documents that were relevant but not directly cited in the *VMS*. In this research project, deeper attention was given to documents directly cited in the *VMS*, but supplementary materials were explored for further breadth and contextual analysis.

**Table 2.1 Music Related Planning Documents**

Category	Title	Source	Date
1	Vancouver Music Strategy	City of Vancouver	2019
1	Making Space for Arts and Culture: Vancouver Cultural Infrastructure Plan	City of Vancouver	2019
1	Culture Shift: Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture Administrative Report	City of Vancouver	2019
2	A City Without Art? No net loss plus	Eastside Culture Crawl Society	2019
1	Vancouver Music Strategy – Interim Report	City of Vancouver	2018
1	Vancouver Music Ecosystem Study	Music BC, FACTOR, Government of Canada, Creative BC, Province of BC – prepared by Sound Diplomacy and Secret Study Projects	2018
1	“Here, The Beat” The Economic Impact of Live Music in BC	Music Canada Live – prepared by Nordicity	2018
1	The BC Music Fund: From Design to Impact	Creative BC	2018
2	Staying in Tune: A Study of the Music Industry Labour Market in British Columbia	Adam Kane Productions, Deetken Group	2018
2	Music in Motion: An Analysis of Exporting Canadian Independent Music	Canadian Independent Music Association – prepared by Nordicity	2017
1	BC’s Music Sector: From Adversity to Opportunity	Music Canada	2016
1	The Mastering of Music City	IFPI, Music Canada, Midem	2015
2	Vancouver Music Centre: Feasibility Study	Vancouver Independent Music Society – Prepared by Donald Luxton and Associates Inc.	2014
2	BC Music Industry Profile	Creative BC – prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP	2014
2	The Next Big Bang: A New Direction for Music in Canada	Music Canada	2013

Public outcry over the loss of cultural space has also become a running story for several local news outlets. Numerous articles in recent years have reported on the closure of cultural spaces and what the City should do to preserve existing spaces or provide new ones. Indeed, artistic or creative spaces have historically occupied older buildings, in transitional, lower income neighbourhoods, but the rapid rate of



displacement, lack of new affordable locations, and disillusionment with governmental promises is what frustrates many in the arts community currently. This research will examine a few key spaces and events that highlight some of these tensions and frustrations, particularly for the DIY and grassroots music community. **Table 2.2** highlights the range and tone of media coverage since 2017, followed by **Table 2.3**, which identifies two open letters from small non-profits organizations that have experienced or are facing displacement (prior to COVID-19). Selected excerpts will be presented in Chapter 5.

**Table 2.2 News Media Sources**

<b>Title of Article</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Date</b>
Vancouver's Red Gate Arts Society Is Facing Eviction: Development policy has led to a monstrous property tax increase	Exclaim – Calum Slingerland	January 13, 2020
One of Vancouver's largest rehearsal spaces shuts down unexpectedly: Fifty musicians and artists left scrambling for new practice venue	Vancouver Courier – John Kurucz	October 30, 2019
Vancouver passes a culture plan for the next decade — with no major increase in funding: Focus on increasing affordable cultural spaces, while emphasizing equity, accessibility and decolonization	CBC News – Justin McElroy	September 11, 2019
Vancouver eyes fund to support arts and culture in pricey real estate market: The continuing loss of cultural spaces and venues in Vancouver — largely due to real estate market pressures — is identified as a key challenge in the report before council this week.	Vancouver Sun – Dan Fumano	September 11, 2019
Protest rave staged outside Chip Wilson's Vancouver mansion: Group speaking out about a 'crisis of renovictions' and dwindling spaces of artists in the city	Vancouver Courier – Jessica Kerr	August 10, 2019
Speculation weeding out Vancouver's grassroots arts spaces at alarming pace: As two arts and culture studios near completion, two more venues owned by Chip Wilson close	Vancouver Courier – John Kurucz	June 21, 2019
Can Vancouver's music scene be improved by a committee?: Matt Roach argues the Vancouver Music Strategy should address the livelihood of smaller venues such as the Rickshaw and the Biltmore, which are at a greater risk of closing than some of the city's more established venues	Vancouver is Awesome – John Kurucz	April 3 2018
Vancouver seeks more performance spaces to support local music scene: 'My dream is to have people come around every corner in the city and find music,' councillor says	CBC News – Anna Dimoff	March 23, 2018
Dwindling rehearsal space has Vancouver musicians in a jam: Real estate, craft breweries, tech startups squeezing out rehearsal space for city's music community	Vancouver Courier – John Kurucz	August 2, 2017
How Vancouver's housing and tech boom is putting the squeeze on local musicians: Musicians say high cost of living and competition for industrial real estate is pricing out talent	CBC News – Matt Meuse	March 28, 2017

**Table 2.3 Open Letter Sources**

Title	Source	Date
Open Letter to the City of Vancouver and the Province of BC: Eliminate unfair and unjust property taxes for cultural non-profits!	Red Gate Arts Society	2019
An open letter from New Forms about the loss of Great Northern Way	New Forms Society	October 26, 2019

## 2.4. Ethnographic Research

In addition to a critical analysis of documents, I attended two 2-hour, public engagement events called the Community Conversations Series in May and June of 2019, as well as, a full-day staff presentation of *Culture|Shift; Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture, Making Space for Arts and Culture* and the *Vancouver Music Strategy* to City Council in September, 2019.

The Community Conversations Series was held by the City of Vancouver’s Cultural Services Department at Matchstick Coffee-Chinatown and The Pace co-working and event space. Both are located in Vancouver’s rapidly gentrifying Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. These locations were chosen because of the perceived comfort and informality they would bring to attendees by resembling their “natural habitat” (Sales, interview, March 11, 2020) Both the events were hosted by local artist/facilitators that self-identify as non-binary, people of color. The Pace event featured live DJ’s from NuZi Collective, a platform for black women, indigenous woman, queer women of color, and trans folks within the Vancouver electronic music scene (NuZi, 2020). It was very apparent that the goal was to make civic engagement feel inclusive and fun. I collected field notes and photos at both events.

The staff presentation to Vancouver’s City Council was held at City Hall and was attended primarily by some of the key stakeholders and contributors to planning process, as well as a few vocal advocates from the arts community. After staff described the main thrust of *Culture|Shift, Making Space* and the *VMS*, numerous community members spoke positively about their support for “placing art & culture at the center of city building” (Culture|Shift, 2019, 10), while a few others shared a more pointed critique. Community members were limited to 3 minutes each to ensure they were concise, but it also clearly limited some peoples’ ability to comment on more nuanced or complex elements of the plans. I took limited field notes during the original meeting but revisited

the filmed version of the presentation, available in the Council Meeting Archives for further analysis.

## 2.5. Recruitment and Semi-structured Interviews

The third primary method used to collect data was semi-structured interviews with professionals from the DIY, non-profit, for-profit and public sector. I compiled a list from my own knowledge of key music figures in the city and identified ideal representatives from organizations directly a part of or indirectly impacted by the development and direction of the *VMS*. Early in the research design a decision was made to focus on the professionals with an informed opinion, rather than a broad invitation to musicians or industry professionals that would have certainly had experience and thoughts to share, but may not have been informed enough on this specific engagement process and the development of the *VMS*. Race, gender, and age diversity was considered in compiling the list as to try and mitigate any unconscious bias, however the distinct role that people had in the music ecosystem took precedence.

Invitations were sent using email and addresses were gathered from organizational websites (and one pre-existing personal connection). Of the 13 invitations, 11 responded, and 5 completed the interview process. Two interviews were conducted in person prior to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions and three were completed remotely using either Zoom or telephone. 1 of the 5 interviewees did not confirm consent to have their identity revealed, therefore one respondent will remain anonymous. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Sample questions from the interviews are available in the **Appendix**. Questions varied slightly depending on the role of the respondent and the information gathered from previous interviewees.

## 2.6. Audio/Video Data Sources

In addition to the audio collected through the initial interview process, **Table 2.4** lists additional pre-recorded audio and video content that aided in the data collection and analysis process.

**Table 2.4 Additional Data Sources**

<b>Title of Source</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Source</b>
Below the Radar- Am Johal interviews Jarrett Martineau	Jan, 2020	Podcast, Episode 33
Vancouver City Council Staff Presentation of Culture Shift, Vancouver Music Strategy, and Making Spaces	Sept 10, 2019	Video recording

## **2.7. Approach to Analysis**

In using the mixed methods approach of document analysis, semi-structured interviews, ethnography, and audio/video, I was able to better understand the multiple and divergent perspectives before narrowing my focus on a discussion that will examine my research question. For the primary documents under analysis, I extracted the content from their original form of highly aesthetic, research and planning publications and condensed the material into Microsoft Word documents, as to concentrate primarily on the written data. This allowed for highlighting significant passages and data points and adding ‘jottings’ in the margins during a first and second read. Subsequent, document analysis involved developing a coding system that drew together key themes across the multiple documents which led to additional jottings in the margins and greater clarity around where the overarching narrative was consistent or divergent.

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews began during the interviews themselves with note taking, and follow-up questions that would provide more clarity upon reviewing the transcripts. Each interview left me energized and I often felt like they could continue for much longer than the allotted time. Approximately one week was intentionally given between the interview and the transcription phase to let what I heard ‘sink in’, often leading to new insights and connections to previous interviews, documents, events and personal experiences. Transcriptions were produced using the digital audio recordings collected during the interviews. The transcription program that I used was approximately 80% accurate which meant a close listen to the audio was necessary to correct errors in the transcript. This process enabled a deep second read of what the respondents had expressed, leading to even more insight, as the importance of particular elements became clearer and more nuanced elements emerged. Upon completing all the transcriptions, a new coding system was developed to connect each transcript through major themes, common statements, specialized knowledge, and

valuable examples. I highlighted significant passages and wrote reflective jottings into the margins. Transcripts were then further condensed into Word documents to aid focusing on the key elements. The major themes gleaned collectively from the interview transcripts shaped the body of this thesis, as to center the respondents input in the final document.

Field notes were collected during and after attending the two Community consultations and Staff Presentation to City Council. I primarily focused on who was in the room, who was not in the room, and importantly what the events were trying to communicate and to whom. Greater attention was paid to things that relate specifically to space and equity as they related to the research question. Analysis was conducted during and following the events. Fieldnotes were referred to in the final synthesis of all the collected data.

Revisiting the recorded presentation to City Council after having conducted and analyzed numerous interviews and documents clarified the context in which the *Vancouver Music Strategy* is intended to have significant impact. Feedback from the public speaking portion of the event held more weight that it had previously, given my improved understanding of the purpose of the plan and who was and was not involved. This generated new field notes with improved connections to the research question that are woven into the body of the thesis.

The *Below the Radar* podcast interview with Jarrett Martineau, Lead Social Planner for the *VMS*, provided content that was unavailable due to multiple unsuccessful attempts at meeting one-on-one. In the 30-minute interview, Martineau shared his perspective about elements of the strategy that are salient to this research as well. Detailed notes were taken, meaningful quotes were extracted, and thoughtful comparisons were made to other respondents. As the lead author of the strategy, it is reasonable to assume that Martineau's perspective is well articulated in the plan, which is already under thorough investigation as the primary document in this research project.

The next section provides three contextual elements that the City of Vancouver's cultural planners must contend with: rapidly increasing property value, a global pandemic, and active resistance to racial injustice in North America.

## Chapter 3.

# Vancouver, COVID-19, and Racial Injustice

### 3.1. The City of Vancouver

In 2020, the City of Vancouver had a population of over 600,000 and was the largest city in the Metro Vancouver region of 2,500,000. With only 115 square kilometers, it is the most densely populated city in Canada and 4<sup>th</sup> in North America (Population Stats, 2020). This distinction is important because this project focuses specifically on the one municipality rather than the whole region. *Vancouver* is regularly used to refer to the city and the region, casually, in numerous media and data sources, and in one of the key documents under analysis.

Vancouver has long been socio-economically and politically divided in two. The population of the Westside of the city was historically middle and upper-class, generally earns higher incomes and holds post-secondary degrees. The East side's population was historically working class, lower income, and holds fewer post secondary degrees, and is often the destination of numerous recent immigrant populations due to its relative affordability and pre-existing cultural enclaves. Vancouver has the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest population of Indigenous people in Canadian cities and East Vancouver's Grandview-Woodland neighbourhood houses the highest concentration in the city, with 8% of residents identifying as Indigenous (Hamilton, 2020). Grandview-Woodland is directly to the east of the False Creek Flats, one of the areas this project focuses on specifically.

In 2008, prior to the economic crisis, the average home in Metro Vancouver was sold for \$900,000, double the price from 2004. Despite a slight dip following the crisis, by 2017 the average home price had doubled again to just under \$1.8 million, with the City of Vancouver displaying the highest prices overall (Wilson, 2018).

Between 2011 and 2020, the City of Vancouver was working towards the goals of the *Greenest City Action Plan* (GCAP). This strategic plan is a document that was intended to be integrated into all City policy and planning. Key priorities included: Green Buildings, Green Transportation, Green Economy, and more. Some of the strategies led to measurable accomplishments such as 54% of trips are now made by walking, bike, or

transit (pre-COVID-19), a 32% decrease in solid waste was sent to landfills and incinerators, and 139,000 new trees were planted (GCAP, 2020). Meanwhile, reductions in greenhouse gas emissions remain minimal and the creation of 18,000 'green' jobs has not materialized. The GCAP has been critiqued extensively elsewhere as 'greenwashing' or 'green capitalism' but has also made the City a world leader in sustainable urbanism (McCann, 2013; Soron, 2012). There are commonalities between the intentions of sustainability strategies and creative city strategies that make the comparison relevant. Similar critiques have been made towards creative city's strategies with parallel terms, such as 'art-washing', and a problematic conflation of arts and culture with the commodification and entrepreneurialism promoted throughout 'creative industries' such as tech, digital entertainment, lifestyle apparel, and craft brewing (Peck, 2010; Markusen, 2006; Gibson and Kong, 2005b).

From the perspective of Vancouver Economic Commission, an external, non-profit economic development agency for the City of Vancouver, "Vancouver is where lifestyle and business come together" (VEC, 2020) Their website sets the Vancouver skyline against the North Shore Mountains when describing the city's economic growth priorities in fields such as construction, technology, digital entertainment and the green economy. The Vancouver that is projected to potential investors around the world emphasizes the city's liveability, entrepreneurial spirit, proximity to Asia, talent magnetism, ethnic diversity, and green economy priorities (VEC, 2020). There is almost no mention of the arts beyond digital entertainment jobs in film and animation, certainly nothing that expresses the value of music, despite being Canada's 2nd largest live music economy (VMS, 2019).

In 2010, the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games welcomed 82 nations and millions of viewers to compete and witness elite athleticism, Canada's cultural diversity, and the West Coast's spectacular scenery. In the wake of the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, the City of Vancouver, and neighbouring communities (West Vancouver, Whistler, Richmond) prepared to show off the regions natural beauty, enabling the development of a new Skytrain route between YVR airport and downtown Vancouver (Canada Line), multiple athletic practice and competition venues, an award-winning waterfront conference center (Vancouver Conference Center West), and a new residential neighbourhood (Olympic Village), proving that large scale infrastructure projects are possible, despite financial strain, when priorities align.

Mega-events, such as the Olympics and previously, Expo '86, have had both positive and negative impacts on the cities and countries that they occur. Boosting local economies with tourism dollars, increasing global trade stature, and increasing a sense of national pride are 3 common justifications for hosting the Olympic Games. One of the most notable negative consequences of the 2010 Olympics was the displacement of lower-income residents, non-profit organizations and small businesses in Downtown, East Vancouver, and along the new Canada Line Skytrain route. Like the impact Expo '86 had on Vancouver in the 1980's, the 2010 Winter Olympic Games created a significant shift in the cities economic, social and cultural spheres, exasperating rental vacancy rates, economic inequality, a real estate market driven by speculative investment, and gentrification, particularly on the East side.

Sports (mostly hockey) have always held the gold medal for cultural significance in Vancouver. One respondent highlighted how the City's local government has historically viewed music and the degree to which it is a priority,

When the City see musicians on a piece of paper it sees classical musicians that are performing at the symphony at the Orpheum and the support they need. Or they think, you know, the guys or the girls that are hitting the charts... and so they see this tiny little percent of what's actually going on. (Stewart, interview, Feb 28, 2020)

Vancouver Civic Theatres, such as the Orpheum and Queen Elizabeth (City-owned) and a handful of well-supported, non-profit societies sustain a Classical and Traditional music culture that tends to serve elite tastes. Likewise, Rogers Arena and The Commodore Ballroom (privately-owned), along with multi-national concert promoters such as Live Nation, host large, mainstream, and expensive international acts that attract tourists and commercial music audiences to the city from other regions. These two ways of presenting live music have been the focus of support by the City of Vancouver until only recently when the *Vancouver Music Strategy* sought to express greater nuance. Through the development of the Vancouver Music Strategy and the hiring of a music staff person, the diversity and complexity of the city's local music ecosystem is emerging as a bigger player in political discourse and potential cultural policy reform. Where previously 'engaging with the City' could have meant the police were shutting your event down or permanently closing your space for bylaw infractions, now the City is consulting with some local musicians and presenters seeking to develop



solutions for sustaining their craft, mitigating displacement and improving equity across historical race, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, and income disparities.

Vancouver also has the unfortunate reputation and nickname as *No Fun City*. In 2010, a documentary film was released examining the city's "DIY culture, loud music, illegal venues, and war on fun" (No Fun City, 2011). The nickname had been building resonance for years as a response to DIY and grassroots music space displacement, residential development near commercial and industrial districts, overly strict noise, zoning and liquor bylaws and the commercialization of larger venues by organizations such as The Donnelly Group, The MRG Group and Live Nation Entertainment.

### **3.2. Impacts of COVID-19 on Live Music**

In March 2020, music events, among many others, were canceled until further notice. Social distancing measures in British Columbia recommended limited contact beyond one's household, pushing pause on any in-person rehearsal, recording or performances. By June 2020, small gatherings were temporarily permitted, but not recommended. This allowed for in-person rehearsal and recording, so long as individuals felt comfortable, wore a mask and practiced social distancing. Due to its very nature, live music performance was suspected to be the last type of event that will be permitted, likely after a safe vaccine is developed, distributed and proven effective.

Meanwhile, the online music space erupted with live streams and pre-recorded performances. Though the creative response by professional or established musicians to stay engaged with their audiences was comforting in a time of great uncertainty, more screen-time was and continues to be an unsustainable and inadequate substitute for live music at a time when most work-related or social engagement had also moved online. Improvements in the quality of production and audience engagement of online events continues to be innovative in ways that emulate in-person experiences, though for numerous reasons, it seemed impossible to replace the transcendent, vibrational, and collective feeling of live music being shared, in-person, by audiences and performers.

Due to the unknown length of social distancing regulations and music space providers' ability to sustain extremely limited revenue streams, the live music infrastructure is likely to be altered in predictable and unpredictable ways. The very act

of live music creation, recording and performance is now a serious health risk. Gathering in close proximity, connecting with groups of friends, strangers and musicians, even singing along to your favorite song can put yourself and other individuals at danger of contracting and spreading a lethal disease.

While the bulk of this research was conducted prior to the spread of COVID-19 across the country, with the limited use of rehearsal spaces and recording studios, and the closure of live music venues, data eventually began to emerge about the devastating impacts that losing these spaces has on the broader economy and social life. In September 2020, the City of Vancouver reported that arts and cultural groups are likely to lose \$90 million, with organizations that manage a physical space being particularly challenged due to significant revenue loss through ticket sales, alcohol sales and space rental (Takeuchi, 2020a) and more than half of artists and cultural groups were ineligible for federal emergency assistance. In lieu of federal support, the City opened a one-time emergency grant application for organizations hit hard by the pandemic. According to the managing director of Cultural Services (Takeuchi, 2020a),

We are particularly keen to support groups and programs that champion equity, as well as groups who have played, and continue to play, a critical role in the city's cultural and economic vitality or have been significantly impacted.

Due to the recent and evolving nature of the pandemic response, it is not possible to analyze this program, but it would be interesting to review who the successful applicants are and who exactly they serve in the music community.

Another document worth noting was published in October 2020 in Toronto, Ontario for the Canadian Live Music Association and authored by Nordicity (who also produced *Here, the Beat: The Economic Impact of Live Music in BC*). Though similar data has not been formally collected and shared for Vancouver, *Re: Venues - A Path Forward for the Toronto Music Industry* highlights some of the major impacts and long-term consequences in Toronto (39-40):

- As venues permanently or temporarily close, artists careers do not progress or do not progress at the same rate as pre-COVID-19.
- Businesses near venues do not benefit and the streets are less vibrant leading to a less desirable place to live or work.

- Artists no longer need to live in the city for them to have access to spaces and generate revenue.
- The entire night-time economy is reduced, making the city less attractive to talent in other fields of work.
- Marginalized communities (LGBTQ, BIPOC) that rely on music spaces to gather and feel safe are particularly impacted.
- The majority of venues are for-profit and not eligible for governmental financial supports available to non-profit organizations (an interesting limitation being that for-profits businesses do not explicitly indicate how they support artists career development and music culture, when in practice they have a significant impact)
- Insurance premiums have increased or have become unavailable due to insurers uncertainty of potential risks of COVID-19 exposure.

When examining long-term impacts, the report highlights that a 'return to normal' is overly optimistic and that how people experience live music in the future is surely to change. Their research suggests that audiences will be very cautious in returning to venues particularly as the size of the venue increases and that they are less likely to travel to see a music event (Re:Venues, 2020). Figure 3.1 shows one venues optimism during the early and very uncertain time of COVID-19 restrictions.

One respondent in my own research argued that the importance of smaller venues could be increased post-COVID-19. She suggested, "when these disasters hit, we don't have the venues that actually might be able to accommodate those smaller under 50 audiences" (Kadota, interview, May 8, 2020). At the same time, musicians will choose new careers and hobbies, further reducing the quality and quantity of the live music community in the city.



**Figure 3.1 Rickshaw Theatre**

An optimistic Rickshaw Theatre marquis, in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, following closure due to COVID-19. August 17, 2020. Photo by author.

The increasing pressure on small and medium sized venues (such as the Rickshaw Theatre), formal and informal rehearsal spaces, and recording studios prior to COVID-19 has only been exasperated by the new risks and regulations. Meaningful government intervention on multiple levels will likely be needed more than ever to preserve and eventually aid in the provision of safe and accessible creative spaces for the music community in cities across the country if sustaining an inclusive music ecosystem is in fact a priority.

### **3.3. Active Resistance to Racial Injustice**

In the wake of COVID-19 social distancing restrictions, the disproportionate economic and health impacts on communities of color and the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the Spring of 2020, racial tensions in the United States inspired a resurgence in public discourse that sought to address racial discrimination in the Canadian context. This brought heightened attention to Black struggles for social and

spatial justice in Vancouver (St. Denis, 2020). Non-profit organizations such as Hogan's Alley Society, which aim to revitalize Vancouver's single, historically Black neighbourhood, have been advocating for a community land trust that would secure a Black Cultural Centre, built on City-owned land and on the same land appropriated by the City (displacing Black residents and business owners) to build the Georgia Viaduct in the 1970s (Hogan's Alley Society, 2020). In July 2020, Vancouver also saw its own anti-racism protests, in solidarity with the international Black Lives Matter movement, on the same site. The area is also part of the City's *North East False Creek Plan* (2018a) (See **Figure 4.1** for location).

Throughout the Summer, despite all live music events being cancelled, Nuzi Collective, an electronic and rap music collective, were using social media to advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement and fundraise for the Vancouver Black Therapy and Advocacy Fund (NuZi, 2020). Afro Van Connect also hosted an online Black Spaces Symposium that was intended to help strengthen community capacity development using a "hip hop culture approach" (2020). The *VMS* recognizes the importance of space in marginalized communities and focuses specifically on recommending opportunities to support the local Black community. Despite Black musicians creating many of the musical genres the rest of society takes for granted, young Black artists continue to face discriminatory barriers to creating, producing, performing, and attending live music (anonymous, interview, June 1, 2020).

The *VMS* also puts substantial emphasis on Indigenous music, both contemporary and traditional. Many contemporary Indigenous musicians are indebted to and heavily influenced by Black music and culture. Two key examples that have become well-known in recent years are A Tribe Called Red who fuse electronic, reggae, and hip-hop with elements of traditional drumming and chanting and rap group Snotty Nose Rez Kids, both of which are vocal about Indigenous issues, similar to the role that of Black music has had as a platform to combat oppression and a form of political, social and cultural expression.

## Chapter 4.

# The Music Ecosystem in Vancouver

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter is intended to provide a brief summary of who and what led to the development of the *Vancouver Music Strategy* (VMS) and how 'creativity' is being integrated into community and economic development plans. The VMS is the first of its kind in Vancouver and seeks to address the gaps and opportunities in the city's music ecosystem by embracing the true diversity of the musical landscape, with a strong emphasis on collaboration, social equity and space.

### 4.2. What is a Music Ecosystem?

It can only be assumed that the term *ecosystem* has been repurposed as a more inclusive and trendier version of *economy*. Sound Diplomacy, the consulting group that was hired to deliver Vancouver's own 'ecosystem study' in 2017, define it this way, emphasizing the desire for consensus across key stakeholder groups (Sound Diplomacy, 2020),

A music ecosystem, like all ecosystems, is multiplicitous and in constant evolution. It includes your music industry, music education, city regulation, ancillary industries like tech and sport and sustainability. Music is our universal language. We all speak it. And when it, in all its forms, thrives in places, places thrive.

This definition is intended to encompass the broader music-adjacent economy and community, to counter the current state of genre, identity, and ideological divisiveness and to promote symbiotic relationships across fields, to the benefit of all. It could also be interpreted as normalizing or naturalizing the lifecycle of cities and neighbourhoods where dynamic and diverse systems of nutrient cycling or disturbance and succession are inevitable, but of course then we would also have to acknowledge not just mutualism and commensalism, but also parasitism and parasitoidism in the music environment.

### 4.3. The Vancouver Music Strategy

The *Vancouver Music Strategy* was presented and approved by City Council in September 2019 and was heavily informed by the data collected in the *Vancouver Music Ecosystem Study* and *Here, the Beat: The Economic Impact of Live Music In BC*, as well as first-hand consultation by the City's Cultural Services Department. One of the early recommendations in the *Vancouver Music Strategy Interim Report (2018)* was to hire a fulltime staff person to produce the *VMS* itself. In January 2019, Jarrett Martineau was hired to lead further development of the strategy. Martineau's experience in the music ecosystem was impressive and represented numerous noteworthy achievements and legitimacy within the local music community. In addition to his music related suitability for the role, he has a PhD in Indigenous Governance and is Plains Cree and Dene Suline, which likely improved the strategy's articulation and prioritization of Indigenous and other underrepresented groups in its recommendations.

The purpose of the *VMS* is to seek ways that the City and the music industry can address gaps and opportunities by embracing already existing music scene vibrancy and diversity. It has adopted the Floridaesque language and the logic from other cities, such as Toronto, London, Austin and Melbourne, that music is a key economic driver, contributes the broader arts sector and is integral to all city life. Through partnerships and collaboration, it seeks to include everything from underground venues, to street buskers and arena shows. It seeks to support the needs of local community and to help share Vancouver's music with the world.

The *VMS* is also a companion piece to *Making Space for Arts and Culture* and both are integrated into the broader *Culture|Shift: Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture*, formerly the *Creative City Strategy*. This name change is symbolic of both Indigenous cultural heritage and an explicit move away from an emphasis on 'creative industries' to art and culture's embeddedness in society, which is often not captured by focussing too closely on the needs of the commercial and large-scale non-profit music industry. The *VMS* follows the lead of the more holistic view of *Culture|Shift* while drawing from the previous, more econo-centric reports simultaneously. The tone is overwhelmingly optimistic and aspirational while acknowledging many of the city's challenges. For example, the *VMS* states (2019, 9),

Vancouver music is as rich and varied as the many distinct communities that make up our city's population and, more than ever, music has come to mean many things to many of us. Music is more than a discipline or a genre within arts and culture: it is a shared experience, an economic driver, and a tool for urban development and social transformation.

followed by,

... but both residents and tourists are challenged by music's lack of visibility and presence in our city's cultural life. Vancouver's music ecosystem also faces challenges shared by many global cities: rising housing and land prices, loss of venues and music spaces, barriers to access, sectoral fragmentation, and gaps in infrastructure and investment.

To make the degree of aspiration abundantly clear, the *VMS* also states that,

By leveraging the economic, social, and cultural power of music to support the night-time economy, attract tourism and increase the city's vibrancy, reduce social exclusion and loneliness, and build community and collaborations across genres and cultural groups, music has the potential to realize its shared value and create long-term positive change across the city.

What does stand out among previous culture plans and music strategies found in other cities, is how the City sought meaningful engagement with local Indigenous, Black, LGBTQ+, people of color, and youth from genres historically absent from the engagement process (e.g., Hip-hop, improvised and experimental music scenes) and managers of more underground music venues, studios and rehearsal spaces. In addition to the stakeholder engagement conducted by Sound Diplomacy and Nordicity, the City of Vancouver hosted an additional series of public consultation and roundtables aimed specifically at engaging previously underrepresented groups, meeting with an additional 500 industry and community members (*VMS*, 2019). While it is likely that there is some cross-over of participants across data collected from multiple sources, one of my interview respondents (a colleague of Martineau) spoke of Martineau reaching out to specific DIY musicians and organizations to ensure that they had input, connections that would have been more difficult to make if not for his pre-existing credibility and relationships within the music community.

Through this multiple-sourced consultation, the *VMS* presented the 10 following priorities (2019, 11):

1. Promote a sustainable, resilient, vibrant music industry



2. Remove municipal barriers
3. Ensure music is represented in city planning and space-making
4. Foster collaboration and economic growth across the sector
5. Celebrate the sound of Vancouver and the music of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples
6. Provide affordable, safe, and accessible places to create, produce, experience and share music
7. Elevate the voices of underrepresented groups
8. Amplify all genres and music cultures in the city
9. Attract and retain artists, businesses, tourism opportunities and events that strengthen the local economy
10. Support music education for all ages, including youth, Indigenous, and underrepresented communities

These 10 stated priorities are in alignment with the broader *Culture|Shift* directions which seek to prioritize Arts and Culture being at the center of city building, reconciliation and decolonization, cultural equity and accessibility, affordable cultural spaces, relationship building and collaboration (2019, 12). However, questions arise regarding whether these objectives reach the root of the issues identified by the arts community.

#### **4.4. Third Party Data Collection**

The *Vancouver Music Ecosystem Study* (VMES) directly influenced the findings and recommendations of the *VMS*. Details of the VMES include a comparative analysis between Vancouver and other cities, music's economic impact in the city and numerous strategic recommendations that aim to inform policymakers of the music industry's critical role in the local economy. Key findings from this study are summarized below (Sound Diplomacy, 2018, 13-21):

- Having clear and flexible bureaucracy and accessible advice around licensing, permits, company registration and bylaws could expand the live music sector in Vancouver.

- Artist respondents quote limitations of existing grants, including genre representation in awards.
- The cost of living and access to affordable rehearsal spaces prevents musicians from focusing on their work.
- Fewer events are being hosted because of obstacles with permits and curfews in high-activity areas.
- There is a lack of funding and direction to music education in compulsory learning.
- Few Vancouver artists sustain themselves purely through their music.
- Music professionals state that they would benefit from mentoring, networking and workshops to help them expand their businesses and continue to thrive.
- Improved transport, affordability of tickets and utilising local media and other promotional techniques can develop the size and diversity of current audiences.
- Better dialogue between the city and the music industry would encourage local communities to be more involved in the music scene.
- There are a number of opportunities to utilise non-traditional spaces to create community hubs for all ages. Many cross-sector opportunities were identified, particularly in the tech industry.
- The growing tourism industry needs a robust infrastructure to support and link it more effectively to the music industry. Tourism Vancouver does not promote many music events during peak festival season. This can be seen as an opportunity to expand on Tourism Vancouver's market capabilities.

A similar set of findings and recommendations was reported in *Here, the Beat: The Economic Impact of Live Music in BC* in 2018, produced by Nordicity. This document includes data from across the province, but the City of Vancouver is central to its findings and recommendations due to higher population and location of venues and music related businesses. It offers a music sector profile and economic, tourism and non-economic analysis of live music in British Columbia. Details include the acknowledgement that there is a historical lack of support and recognition for the music sector in BC, that in 2017 the music sector contributed almost 7000 (fulltime equivalent)

jobs and generated over \$600 million in labour income and over \$800 million to the GDP in the provincial economy. It also acknowledges that the most significant barrier for the music sector is unaffordable spaces and retaining talent. The following list is drawn from the report and summarizes the studies key findings (2018, 7).

- There exists a growing sense of community and momentum within BC's live music sector; stakeholders are increasingly seeing themselves as an important and inclusive whole.
- Digital technology and diversity practices are causing the most fundamental changes to BC's live music companies' business models.
- In the next year, 78% of festivals expect to see an increase in attendance, 59% of venues expect an increase in fill rates, and more than half of BC promoters expect to book more shows.
- BC's geographical 'isolation' can be a challenge for both touring artists and those booking shows.
- Increased operational costs, property taxes, and both wage and artist fee demands are placing direct and indirect constraints on the industry and its audiences.
- There has long existed a lack of public support structures to sustain industry operations and effectively upskill entrants to the business of live music.
- A vibrant live music industry provides the conditions that the broader music industry requires to thrive. It is increasingly becoming the financial lifeblood for the wider music sector.
- BC's live music sector is seen as a cherished 'cultural space', a critical home to risk-takers, innovators and place-makers, and a launch-pad to realizing artists' dreams.

Each report claims to have done extensive stakeholder engagement. The *VMES* had 862 survey responses from music professionals and fans. 75% of survey respondents identified as European descent, 8% as Asian descent, and less than 1% from Indigenous descent (2018,12). This data over-represents people of European descent and under-represents people of Asian descent relative to the actual demographic composition of Vancouver. For example, 27% of Vancouverites identify as of Chinese, while only 47% identify as white (CoV, 2020b, 30). 2% of respondents in the

VMES survey identified as Black, which is double the actual percentage in Vancouver (2018, 12).

Sound Diplomacy hosted roundtables with 120 stakeholders that included artists, educators, industry, recording studios, music tech, City Hall, media, choirs, event production, and underground and alternative scenes. 51.3% of respondents identified as musician/artist while 22.6% were from the general public, 16.9% were music professionals and 9.2% represented music companies (2018, 32).

Certain details regarding the identity of respondents are worth highlighting. 52% of music business owners identified as women and 29.4% as LGBTQ. 33% of music business owners were of a visible minority and 9.8% were Indigenous (2018, 60). This shows that there is considerably more diversity on the higher income, managerial end of the music industry compared to what the general demographics of respondents across the music ecosystem would suggest. Concerning however, is the lack of input from younger Vancouverites. Only 6.6% of respondents were under the age of 25 (2018, 61). This is a significant gap in the data considering the participation of young people in music culture more broadly and the significant role that they will play as the next generation of musicians and audiences in the city.

Of course, older respondents were once young people, but the needs of the next generation are going to be quite different as they coincide with how the technology to create, produce and share music evolves. The average age of respondents was 42-43 years old with 59% of respondents being born between 1972 and 1992, potentially grossly misrepresenting what young audiences, musicians and presenters experience on the ground (2017, 61). Census data from 2011 suggests that there were 84,000 people between the ages of 13 and 24 and 125,000 people between the ages of 25-34 (the largest category) in Vancouver, putting a significant number of the population below the average age of respondents (CoV, 2020b, 12).

*Here, the Beat* draws from a survey of 903 live music related companies in BC and retrieved detailed financial data from 123 companies. Nordicity engaged 60 stakeholders from across the Province in interviews and focus groups (2018). They are transparent in their approach when they explain that (2018, 9):

this report should not be considered a statistical exercise. Instead, it is based on a 'convenience sample' of companies that responded to the online survey. As such, the numbers reported below are best possible estimates, given the data available.

What this means is that it does not necessarily represent all or even a random sample of responses from across the music ecosystem. However, "the Nordicity team is confident that it captured most of the large companies operating in BC's live music sector" (2018, 10). This is reasonable considering its stated goal of measuring the economic value of the music industry, namely venue owners, festival producers, concert promoters and music managers. However, these responses then privilege a mainstream, narrative of the commercial music industry, highlighting well established acts and seeking to justify the meaningful return-on-investment that supporting the music industry will have on other sectors in BC.

At the same time, it acknowledges the DIY nature of much of the music sector. They credit "BC's emerging underground talent [that] has long been supported through the DIY scene, where a close-bonded community has promoted itself through staging events from scratch and, oftentimes, choosing a minimalistic approach to promotion and media" (2018, 38). They then identify two DIY venues (333 and SBC) as examples; however, both venues have shut down since the report was published (and prior to COVID-19). In the footnotes, the report is also transparent about the potential overrepresentation of purpose-built and medium and large venues in the data due to the likelihood of small and underground venues not responding to the survey. 57% of respondents represented purpose-built music venues, 15% from bars and restaurants and only 5% from informal spaces.

While *Here, the Beat* focuses primarily on economic value, it also provides a short section with some non-economic insight. It expresses many of the arguments for framing the music industry as *not just another industry* and echoes the rationalization for my own research project in the first place. It states that (2018, 61),

The social and community impacts of a vibrant music scene catalyze benefits far beyond the transactional economic activity that the industry generates. A growing body of literature supports the view that live music represents a form of critical infrastructure that supports and sustains an inclusive cultural environment within the cities in which they make their home.

As most of the social and cultural value of music is often taken for granted, Nordicity's brief but necessary examination of stakeholder feedback and academic research of non-economic value is welcome despite limited engagement from the underrepresented groups I am seeking to elevate. A summary of what they learned follows (2018, 61-66):

- A robust live music sector is critical for strengthening the social fabric in its communities.
- The top four identified 'assets' of BC's live music sector – local talent, variety of genres, sense of community, and diversity of the scene – are indeed critical enablers of social cohesion.
- Music is arguably the most democratic of all the art forms in that it touches on the lives of so many. Through its multitude of genres, live music experiences help to break down barriers between disparate communities, providing a common language and space.
- Music also provides a venue for integration of newcomers and immigrants and can support mental health and wellbeing, especially in already vulnerable segments of the population.

Unfortunately, a common weakness across both the *VMES* and *Here, the Beat* is the framing of DIY and grassroots venues only as a stepping-stone before musicians 'break' into the mainstream rather than sustaining the majority of musicians and many audiences live music experiences in and of themselves. In practice, most musicians will not reach nor do they seek larger stages and audiences, and most have accepted the modest role of simply participating in a community and expressing themselves through music. Likewise, many audiences prefer consistent, affordable, small scale and intimate performances occasional, expensive, and large-scale spectacles. This perspective may have been better reflected if DIY or grassroots organizations and venues were better represented in the collected data.

#### **4.5. A City Without Art?**

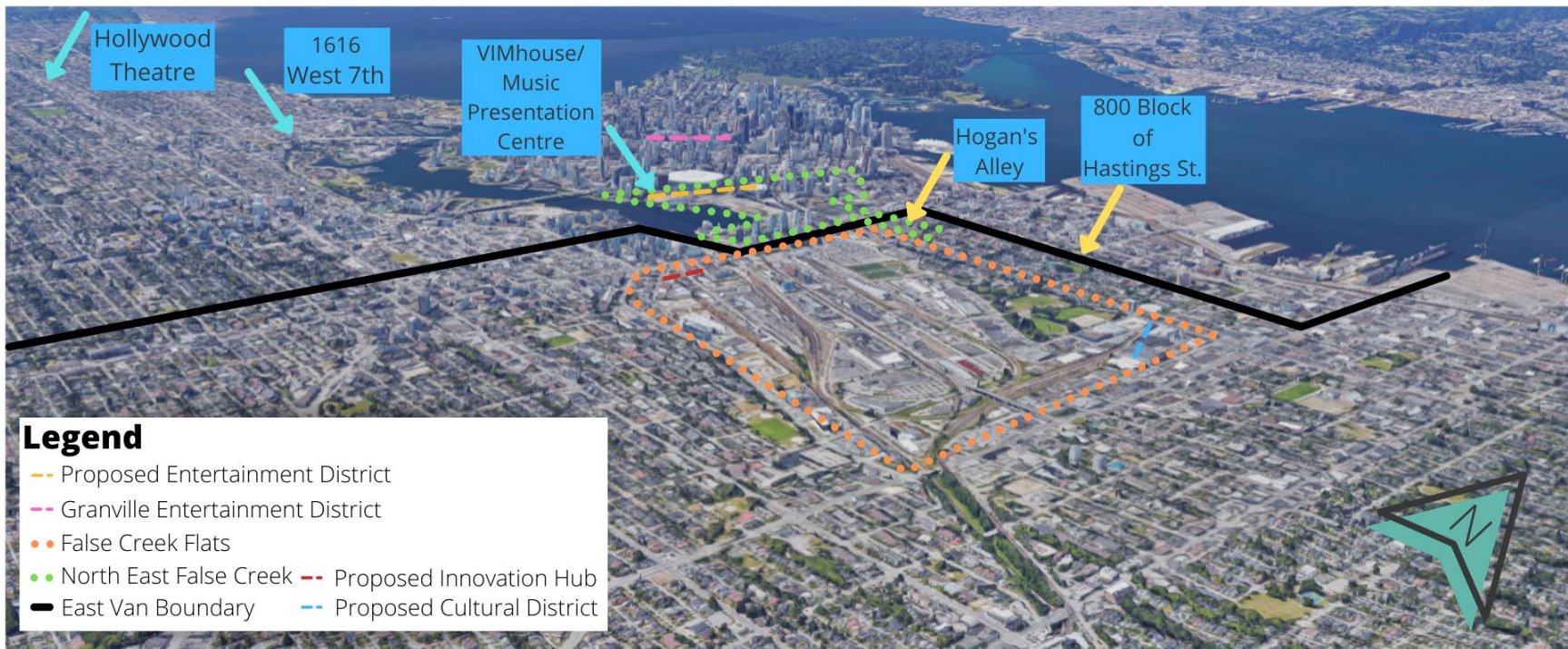
An accurate, time-based inventory of music spaces is not available, but a recent study (*A City Without Art?*) conducted by the Eastside Culture Crawl Society (2019), which focused on visual artists' studio spaces, warned that "if this rapid rate of artist displacement continues, we will become a city without art" (2019, 2). They are advocating for "No Net Loss" and the expansion of art studio spaces. The data they collected suggests that the city has lost 400,000 square feet of studio space in the last

10 years, seen a 65% increase in the median rental rates, and 77% of survey respondents said they are seeking relocation due to rent increases and property redevelopment (2019, 7).

The report explains why studio spaces are increasingly under threat of displacement. Rezoning industrial and commercial land for other purposes has reduced the availability of appropriate work environments most significantly. They cite that the unintended consequences of new policy that designed to mitigate the speculative residential real estate. For example, the Empty Homes Tax and short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb) restrictions have shifted investors' interests to the profitability of industrial and commercial property as an alternative to the more regulated residential property market (2019, 17). A broader shift away from manufacturing and transportation industries, towards high tech and digital entertainment companies, that can outcompete the traditional arts for rent, have also had a significant impact on the reduction of available studio space. They relate the displacement of a specific group of artist studios in Railtown directly to City of Vancouver policy changes that allowed for software development to be an appropriate use of zoning defined as 'creative manufacturing' (2019, 18). While there is no relative data available for music spaces, remarkably similar stories are told throughout the music community, particularly with the rehearsal, production and small- and medium-sized performance space sector, that serves the needs of local musicians, presenters, and audiences.

## 4.6. Integrating 'Creativity' into City Building

Two local land-use planning documents are particularly relevant to the discussion of preserving and providing music spaces in Vancouver: The *False Creek Flats Area Plan* (2017) and *North East False Creek Plan* (2018a). Both plans express prioritizing creativity and culture in future development projects and both areas will see significant changes to the landscape in the near future. **Figure 4.1** depicts the key areas under analysis in this research and highlights specific areas, referenced throughout this document that due to their potential significance to the music landscape.



**Figure 4.1 Map of Vancouver – Areas**

This map features the borders of East Vancouver, the *False Creek Flats Area Plan* and *North East False Creek Plan*, as well as specific areas referenced throughout this document. Base map, Google Earth, 2021.



The *False Creek Flats Area Plan* which concentrates on a mostly light industrial area in East Vancouver, seeks to intensify “green jobs in light industrial uses in multi-storey buildings, walkable street level shops and restaurants, parking facilities, low cost artist and innovation spaces” and ensure access to “affordable and accessible studios for artists’ diverse needs in arts and culture hubs” while maintaining “an affordable business friendly hub model, demonstrating light industrial innovation and the circular economy, a special zone testing new venture models and industries” (2017, 9). It was influenced by the re-visioning work that the Vancouver Economic Commission had already done and celebrates that the innovation economy is “the new engine of prosperity in the global marketplace and is used as a rationale to reorganize inner cities and to develop new strategies and policies to accommodate... growth” (2017, 20). It has designated the southernmost portion of the area as a Creative Campus and boasts the inclusion of the New Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Centre for Digital Media and Red Truck Brewery. The area around Main Street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue (most southwestern corner of the area) is formerly and currently the location of several small venues, studios and rehearsal spaces. The North Eastern corner of the area is the location of dozens of visual art studio spaces and has been proposed as an ideal location for a cultural precinct. The plan describes this area as intended for Industrial, Production, Distribution, Service and Art uses (2017, 18).

Adjacent to the False Creek Flats is Northeast False Creek which is comprised of the former Expo '86 land and the Georgia and Dunsmuir Viaducts. The Northeast False Creek Plan has a set of guiding principles that include “strengthening the festival and entertainment function of the area” including the improvement of access to BC Place and Rogers Arena (2018a, 9). It seeks to “create a vibrant waterfront district” a mix of entertainment, recreation, and residential use while privileging view corridors (2018a, 9). Stakeholder engagement is stated as key priority, including participation in the design of the engagement process itself. Notably, this area includes the Hogan’s Alley neighbourhood and potential site for a Black Cultural Centre at the intersection of Main Street and Union Street. The plan specifically highlights the opportunity for reconciliation with Black Vancouverites, however, little progress in the development of a Black Cultural Centre has been made since the plan was approved, despite ongoing advocacy.

In July 2018, following the publication of the plan, council approved the development of Vancouver’s first dedicated music creation, education and performance

venue which will be located in the proposed Events and Entertainment District at the former site of the Expo '86's Plaza of Nations. The Music Presentation Centre (MPC) is intended to serve Vancouver's independent music scene and counterbalance the privileging of classical or commercial music available at theatres, arenas, and bars (VIMCS, 2014). The approval of the MPC follows years of advocacy by the Vancouver Independent Music Centre Society who have shown why Vancouver needs a publicly funded music space that is affordable, accessible, inclusive, and ultimately designed for experiencing live music above all else (CoV, 2018b).

## Chapter 5.

### A Place for Music

The notion of how you balance unregulated space with the need to create safety for people, I think is one of those core questions. And I think that DIY spaces have these ways of taking a liminal zone or zones that need to be ... that these places and spaces that are liminal are in need of repurposing or have a certain kind of possibility or opportunity or beauty that is often overlooked and making a literal physical place, as well as a more amorphous set of things that can travel between spaces.

And so I think that when we're looking at where should they be in the city, they're the types of spaces that we know that they have historically happened within. But there are also the communities where there are particular lineages or lived experiences that they are rooted in ...

[It]is not only about the typology of space, but the intersection of the typology and the geography, the cultural geography. And so how do we ... leverage our ability to use assets and regulation in order to ensure that there are clusters where clusters are best benefited and then there's also dispersion across cultural geographies that have specificity. And to what degree can we connect them so that they're more resilient (anonymous, interview, June 1, 2020).

The *Vancouver Music Strategy* combines an emphasis on the preservation and provision of space with an emphasis on social equity for historically underrepresented groups, particularly for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of color) and LGBTQ+ communities. It frames the music economy and the music community as a natural 'ecosystem'. It bolsters some aspects of the ecosystem, such as classical music, opera, and other large scale non-profit organizations and spaces, but has insufficient power and resources to support others, such as DIY and grassroots organizations and spaces that occupy older buildings and are being priced out of existence. To compensate for its inability to radically transform economic inequity in an increasingly unequal and unaffordable city, few and limited grant and subsidy opportunities, for individual artists and key organizations, and a sense of civic participation are the City's strategies for reconciling historical spatial and social injustices for some underrepresented groups and identities.

To answer the question, *how does the Vancouver Music Strategy seek to reconcile the apparent contradictions of urban economic development and spatial justice*

*that are embedded within it?* I begin with an examination of the ecosystem framework and the recent studies that have been conducted into its character. I then examine the recommendations from VMS before exploring some of the critical feedback from the public. I also provide specific examples for why some parts of the music community have little confidence that the VMS can help preserve and provide spaces without the City preserving the city's few remaining affordable and already creatively vibrant neighborhoods.

In addition to the primary research question, the first sub-question, *who is being displaced in Vancouver's music ecosystem (and by whom)?* lies beneath the first half of the discussion, before moving into the second sub-question, *who was represented in framing the recommendations for the strategy?* Keeping these questions in mind is important as it becomes clearer who the primary beneficiaries of the City's tangible commitments are.

## **5.1. What is a Music City?**

The vision for the Vancouver Music Strategy is to “amplify the sound of Vancouver” but what makes a city a Music City in the first place? Whose music is going to be preserved? Whose music is going to be provided space? And how do those ‘musics’ propel or potentially disrupt broader capitalistic economic growth and development goals? Do more subversive genres like Punk, Rap, Reggae or Experimental Electronic musicians and presenters have the same voice and priority as Pop, Orchestral, or Traditional musicians and presenters? All these genres have enormous audiences and creative communities surrounding the music, but each have their own historical relationship with governmental, institutional and corporate power and have been more and less accepted by the dominant status quo. Each of the respondents in this research was asked at the beginning of the interview, about what a music city is, with diversity repeatedly claimed as being the primary objective. The following are three examples of what was heard when asked, *what is a music city?*

So, a Music City is just one, I think, that is, it's actually open to as many different kinds of musical expression as possible and unfortunately, it isn't really now. For me, a music city would allow cross-fertilization, like less of a siloed approach to music and allows more intersections of music and musicians to collaborate and hear each other (Kadota, interview, May 8, 2020).

A Music City is one that gears itself around or at the very least, well minimally ... fostering an environment where things can be created on multiple levels. The smallest thing, like 20-person, 10 person events up to large scale things. There can't just be one of those tiers (Lyons, interview, May 11, 2020).

A Music City should be a city that allows musicians to make a living in ... typically when the city infrastructure is not set up properly you aren't able to provide the resources to give the musicians what they need in order to monetize what they do (Stewart, interview, Feb 28, 2020).

These comments emphasize diversity, accessibility and the necessary infrastructure for music and culture to be sustainable, let alone flourish. Diversity is key and should include all the niche music communities and not just the most popular, well understood, traditional or easily commodifiable genres.

One respondent articulated well what was heard from other respondents as to why prioritizing all music cultures in the city are essential, before tactfully commenting on what it *should* be.

Music is one of the most accessible forms of, quote unquote, capital A arts, where people have maintained very close ties to their cultural traditions and to their DIY practices in a way that is often lower barrier than some other forms and more successfully creates a proliferation of non-elitist, highly specific ways that people express their human experience and that it's kind of the first place where people go to when they need to understand or express something that's happening for them. And so a Music City would really be a place where the city itself understands that music is often the heartbeat and the soundtrack for our lives, and that if we are interested in rooting and grounding the music traditions that have shaped this place, then we actually have to invest in those and amplify those in order to equip them to stay in place and also to, you know, continue to be as creative as they are in the changing face of both what the production tools and the market itself demands of them (anonymous, interview, June 1, 2020).

This respondent's emphasis on accessibility, self-expression, acknowledgement, and indeed technological advancement is perhaps a recognition that the "soundtracks to our lives" are often taken for granted by society in general and formally preserving and providing music space through policy is now required for those soundtracks to persist at the scale necessary to meet the desire of the city's local music community.

## 5.2. Displacing the Music Community

By far, the number one challenge for musicians and presenters in sustaining music space is the loss of space and the cost of what remains, which puts constraints on what can even be created in the first place. According to one respondent, “Just being able to afford space is the big barrier that seems to be, you know, limiting what people can do, limiting music” (Kadota, interview, May 8, 2020). What this means is that the physical constraint of limited space is having a direct negative impact on the quantity and quality of music in the City and forcing people to create alone more often, perhaps in their home (which has its own constraints), or occasionally meeting to rehearse and record, or not creating at all. What is created is then a product of constraints with the product often lacking the diversity and collective nature of music’s potential. **Figure 5.1** depicts an important part of the Vancouver music ecosystem. It identifies existing DIY and grassroots rehearsal and performance spaces, readily used by local musicians and audiences, that were captured in the data collected for the *Vancouver Music Ecosystem Study*. However, since the study was published in 2018, 9 venues and 3 rehearsal spaces have closed, highlighting the rate of displacement. Very few spaces have emerged to replace them and the impacts of COVID-19 on music spaces is still to be determined.



**Figure 5.1 Map of Vancouver – Music Spaces**

This map features most of the primary (and former) DIY and grassroots rehearsal and performance spaces in Vancouver. The majority form a ring surrounding the False Creek Flats, while key commercial venues and new purpose-built spaces are located in the Downtown or Westside neighbourhoods. The red hearts and green triangles only represent spaces that were captured in the VMES but have closed since it was published in 2018 and prior to COVID-19. Base map, Google Earth, 2021.

DIY and grassroots rehearsal, recording and performance spaces rarely close due to lack of demand. Operating costs may quickly exceed what the operator and the clientele are able to pay, but most often it is the building itself that is approved for redevelopment (to achieve a higher and better use), erasing the spaces and the culture sustained in and around them and that have been foundational to the city's local and international music and arts community. The City of Vancouver seeks to "Blanket the City in Arts and Culture" and to "place music, arts, and culture at the centre of city building", but also, "to create long-term pathways for growth and success across the city's creative industries" (VMS, 8). This dramatically broadens the scope of creative pursuits included in the preservation and provision of creative space in the City's existing cultural hotspots and has led to the rapid displacement less-visible, potentially more disruptive or less predictably commodifiable mediums such as electronic, rap, experimental, improvisational, or aggressive music.

### **5.2.1. Behind the Data**

In 2018, the *Vancouver Music Ecosystem Study* (VMES) identified 11 grassroots venues, 27 bars or restaurants with live music, 54 recording studios, and 18 rehearsal spaces in the City of Vancouver. It also identified 15 key venues that have closed in the last 35 years: Au Bar, Richards on Richards, The Big Bamboo, Graceland, Electric Owl, Purple Onion, Level 5, The Cave, The Cellar, Starfish Room, Gandy Dancer, Luv-A-Fair, and The Town Pump. The Waldorf Hotel and the Railway Club were included in their findings and had, at the time, closed temporarily but reopened under new management and entertainment models that engaged with local musicians less than they had previously. The following section aims to exhibit a more accurate representation of the loss or inaccessibility to existing spaces.

What the VMES identified primarily, are the formal, well-known, small and medium sized clubs, mostly in the downtown core, that are no longer with us. They also often misrepresent the format or function of the business they included in their findings. For example, numerous production spaces were categorized as rehearsal spaces and numerous businesses appeared to be non-existent after searching for more information online (details below). In addition to their inaccurate findings, they did not include many of the closed or currently struggling-to-stay-open informal, non-traditional, or grassroots venues, dive-bars, occasional venues, and rehearsal spaces that have helped keep the



whole diversity of music culture afloat in the city for years. This would, admittedly, be difficult to quantify, particularly because being ‘under-the-radar’ and often non-compliant to zoning and bylaws, is often important for a space’s security and exclusivity, and hence sustainability.

In failing to acknowledge these spaces, the *VMES* underrepresents the scale of loss experienced by musicians, presenters, and audiences around the city. It is important to understand that the data collected by Sound Diplomacy is limited in its scope and exemplifies the inaccuracy that can occur when consultation is directed by a non-local organization. However, critically assessing just some of studies findings and comparing them to the current (pre-COVID-19) state of music spaces highlights the issue sufficiently to examine the cause for concern. Recall for a moment, the optimistic tone of Vancouver’s “vibrant” and “diverse” music ecosystem shared throughout the key planning documents.

Of the 11 Grassroots/Live Music Focused venues they identify only three are what many would consider DIY spaces: The China Cloud (at risk of closing due to COVID-19), The Toast Collective and Merge (since evicted, pre-COVID-19). This is in stark contrast to the Commodore Ballroom, a 900-person, Live Nation Entertainment (multi-nation corporation) managed venue in the Granville Entertainment District and the Malkin Bowl, an outdoor amphitheatre which is also managed by Live Nation and located in Stanley Park. The Biltmore has shifted from local and ‘underground’ touring acts to a much more commercial live music and DJ events since The MRG Group took over in recent years. MRG also own the Vogue Theatre, The Imperial, The Yale Saloon, Beatroute Magazine and the Khatsahlano and Westward Music Festival, among other companies, forming their own music ecosystem in the last few years, and what some might call a monopoly in Vancouver music event industry. The Rogue Folk Club is not actually a space but an organization that hosts occasional events at St. James Hall, an occasional music space. The remainder are independently owned, commercial venues, of varying sizes, including halls and theatres. **Table 5.1** illustrates the format or function of venues and the accessibility or status as a venue for local musicians in the City. DIY and Grassroots venues are particularly low barrier and inclusive while larger commercial venues, such as the Commodore Ballroom accommodate international touring acts primarily. Merge Studios (highlighted) has since closed due to eviction after Low Tide

Properties purchased the building to renovate the space to make it more appropriate for more profitable creative industries.

**Table 5.1 Grassroots or Live Music Focused Venues**

Venue	Format/Function	Status related to live music
China Cloud	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	At risk of closure due to COVID-19
Guilt and Co.	Small Bar/Restaurant	Regular live music events
Malkin Bowl	Large Outdoor Music Venue in Stanley Park (capacity 2000)	Very occasional events during summer months, managed by Live Nation
The Biltmore Cabaret	Bar/Nightclub) capacity 350+)	Regular live music and DJ events, managed by The MRG Group
The Commodore Ballroom	Bar/Nightclub (capacity 900+)	Regular live music and DJ events, managed by Live Nation
The Fox Cabaret	Bar/Nightclub (capacity 200+)	Regular live music and DJ events
The Rickshaw Theatre	Theatre/Bar (capacity 600+)	Regular live music events
The Toast Collective	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	At risk of closure due to COVID-19
Wise Hall	Community Hall/Bar	Occasional live music events
Merge Studios	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	Regular events, closed due to eviction
The Rogue Folk Club		Not a space, events held at St. James Hall (see occasional spaces)

Of the 27 bars or restaurants with live music, at least 6 have closed or changed their entertainment model since the *VMES* was published in 2018. The Cobalt, The Fairview Pub, The Libra Room and SBC Restaurant in particular, were staples in the Vancouver music venue landscape, served their own niche musical tastes and have not been replaced elsewhere. **Table 5.2** illustrates the format or function of the venue and its accessibility or status as a venue for local musicians in the City. Some of the bars and restaurants that advertise ‘Live Music’ are only providing music on weekends during peak hours, often musicians are performing cover songs, and may in fact be performing solo or as duo, tucked into the corner with no stage. The music is for ambience and to increase the sale of alcohol rather than the performance of art being the focus in the space (e.g., The Main, The Brighton Pub, The London Public House). Other bars and restaurants are pushing the limitations of their business licenses by functioning primarily as a music venue for larger and higher volume acts (e.g., Café Deux Soleils, The

Heatley, LanaLou's). Bars and Restaurants highlighted in grey have since closed or no longer do live music.

**Table 5.2 Bars and Restaurants with Live Music**

Bar or Restaurant	Format/Function	Status related to live music
Astoria	Bar/Nightclub	Regular live music events
Blarney Stone	Bar	Regular live music events
Brandiz Bar and Hotel	Bar	Occasional live music events
Café Deux Soleils	Restaurant	Occasional live music events
Cottage Bistro	Restaurant	Occasional live music events
Frankie's Jazz Club	Bar/Restaurant	Regular live music events
LanaLou's	Restaurant	Occasional live music events
London Public House	Bar	Occasional live music events
Mahony and Son's (Stamps Landing)	Restaurant/Pub	Occasional live music events
Pat's Pub	Pub	Regular live music events
Prohibition	Bar/Lounge	Occasional live music events
Pub 340	Bar	Occasional live music events
Sylvia Hotel	Bar/Lounge	Occasional live music events
The Brighton Pub	Pub	Occasional live music events
The Heatley	Bar	Regular live music events
The Lido	Bar	Occasional live music events
The Main	Restaurant	Occasional live music events
The Portside	Bar	Occasional live music events
The Princeton Pub & Grill	Pub	Regular live music events
The Wolf and Hound	Pub	Regular live music events
Hindenburg	Bar/Nightclub	Closed due to redevelopment
Libra Room	Restaurant	No longer doing live music
SBC Restaurant	Bar	Closed
The American	Bar	No longer does live music
The Cobalt	Bar	Closed
The Fairview Pub	Bar	Closed due to redevelopment

Of the 17 occasional music venues identified, a category which is perhaps the most difficult to accurately quantify, but no less critical to serving the music community, 3 venues have closed since the *VMES* was published in 2018: 333, Renegade Studios Broadway, and Studio Vostok. Some of these venues were also pushing the limits and licensing of 'occasional' venues (e.g., 333, Studio Vostok, Red Gate) while others may only present a handful of live music every year (e.g., Open Studios, St. James Hall). **Table 5.3** examines the function/format of the venue in-practice and highlights venues that no longer exist or in the case of Mubi Studios, was not a venue but appears to have been an events marketing company, briefly in 2016-2017. Red Gate Arts Society is included in the category of occasional spaces, however since 2018, it was forced to

relocate to a new space after a dramatic rent increase, following an acquisition of the building by Low Tide Properties. Red Gate have maintained a high profile in the media for their critique of Municipal and Provincial urban development policies and the precarious tenure of their new location, particularly because Red Gate exemplifies the accessible, DIY, creative space for marginalized communities that is at the greatest threat of permanent displacement; embodying the very culture the *VMS* seeks to protect. Red Gate Art Society’s experience will also be explored in greater detail in **Section 5.3.4.**

**Table 5.3 Occasional Live Music Venues**

<b>Occasional Venue</b>	<b>Format/Function</b>	<b>Status related to live music</b>
Brix Studio	Multi-event space	Unknown
CBC Studio 1 Broadcasting Centre	Radio Station Studio	Occasional events open to public
Chapel Arts	Multi-event space	Very occasional live music events
Korean Hall	Community Hall	Unknown
Open Studios	Video Production Space	Very occasional DJ focused events
Red Gate	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	Regular events but at risk of displacement due to increased cost of triple-net-lease
St. Andrews Wesley United Church	Church	Unknown
St. James Hall	Community Hall	Occasional events
The Black Lab	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	At risk of closure due to COVID-19
The Woods Studio	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	Very occasional live music and DJ events
Unity of Vancouver	Church	Unknown
Renegade Broadway Studios	Rehearsal and Performance Space	Mostly rehearsal spaces, occasional events, closed due to eviction.
Studio Vostok	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	Closed (pre-COVID-19)
Stylus Records	Former record store	Closed (pre-COVID-19)
The Matador	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	Closed (pre-COVID-19)
Mubi Studio		No longer exists, was not a physical space
333	Small Grassroots/DIY Art Space	Regular events before closing due to eviction

According to the *VMES*, Vancouver musicians can “avail themselves” of 54 dedicated recording studios and 18 rehearsal spaces (2018, 22). Examining only the rehearsal spaces, 4 have since closed, 1 is not a rehearsal space but an equipment

rental business, and one is a theatre company for children. Many of the recording studios appear in multiple categories as they may serve multiple uses. For example, the recent closure of Renegade Studios Broadway, which served as performance, rehearsal and recording studio was also the 8<sup>th</sup> location for the company to close since 1983. Their previous location (evicted in 2016) was near the intersection of Main St and 2<sup>nd</sup>, across the street from the emerging False Creek Flats Creative Campus and current site of outdoor and lifestyle retail store, Mountain Equipment Coop (MEC). Prior to the MEC development this block was also the location of Afterlife Studios where dozens of musicians in folk, rock and soul had been recording albums for years. The Woods and Redgate Arts Society are within 4 blocks, as well as a handful of DIY and grassroots rehearsal, recording and performance spaces that the *VMES* did not capture in their data collection, some of which recently closed (prior to COVID-19). I have personally rehearsed at 4 different spaces and recorded 3 albums at different recording studios in this area, none of which are captured in the data. Only 2 of those spaces remain open for the time being.

One respondent highlighted the invisibility of rehearsal space, in particular, when he argued,

Rehearsal space is probably the best example of something the City, even today, doesn't really understand very well and I would venture to say that they don't understand the size of the community here, because they've always been underground and DIY because they've had to be, with zero support (Stewart, interview, Feb 28, 2020).

When examining the data collected by Sound Diplomacy, both the inaccuracy and displacement are apparent. **Table 5.4** illustrates this well. For example, of the 18 rehearsal spaces of which musicians can “avail” themselves, only 6 of them are accessible and functional rehearsal spaces. There is also a lack of clarity around Suna Studios and Jamnasium, as the Jamnasium is one of 3 Suna Studio locations (more on Suna Studios in section 5.3.2). 6 of the 18 businesses are not rehearsal spaces, though musicians may do some rehearsal before recording music in the same studio, and 5 of the remaining spaces have closed since the *VMES* was published in 2018 (e.g., Sanctuary Studios, Renegade Productions, Vancouver Rockspace). This is quite disproportionate to the demand. Stewart also argues,

When I use the numbers that we have or the number of musicians that we work with, which is about 600 bands currently and we're expanding all the time, that's about 2500 musicians [including one New Westminster location], it boggles people's minds, and they think well that's crazy, there's no way there's that many musicians in town but the reality is that's actually a small percentage of the number of musicians that are actually out there (Stewart, interview, Feb 28, 2020).

Indeed, Suna Studios aims to meet the demand for the rock, punk, metal, and pop groups in Vancouver predominantly, leaving other genres without many options for a stable or reliable space practice or write new material.

**Table 5.4 Rehearsal Spaces**

<b>Name of Space</b>	<b>Format/Function</b>	<b>Status</b>
Aurora Studios & Rehearsal Space	Unknown	Unknown
Backline Rentals	Musical Equipment Repair and Rentals	Not a rehearsal space
Carousel Theatre for Young People	Theatre school for children	Not a rehearsal space
Crying Sky Studio	Rehearsal Space	Open
Fader Mountain Sound	Recording Studio	Open, but not a rehearsal space
Gotham City Studios Ltd	Recording Studio	Open, but not a rehearsal space
INEO Studios	Audio visual collective specializing in visuals, 3D projection mapping, and event production	Not a rehearsal space
Jamnasium	Rehearsal Spaces and Recording Studio	Open, but also 1 of 3 Suna Studios locations (see below)
Martha Lou Henley Rehearsal Hall	Rehearsal Space	Open
Pandora's Box Studios	Rehearsal Space	Open
Sound Kitchen Studios Vancouver	Post-production studio	Not a rehearsal space
Soundhouse Studios	Rehearsal Space	Open
Suna Studios (3 locations)	Rehearsal Space	Open
The Phonix Studio	Rehearsal Space	Closed
Vancouver Rockspace Rehearsal Studios	Rehearsal Space	Closed in 2016
Renegade Productions	Rehearsal and Performance Space	Closed due to eviction
Sanctuary Studios	Rehearsal Space	Closed, due to increasing cost of triple-net-lease
Greenhouse Studios Inc	Recording and Rehearsal Space	No data available after 2017, likely closed

Very few spaces are replaced elsewhere in the City due to increasing rental and lease rates and the lack of confidence that it is worth investing in a new space only to be displaced again in the near future. When it's gone it's usually gone permanently.

### **5.2.2. Suna Studios**

Stewart's business is responding to the waves of rehearsal space closures. Suna Studios has been trying to catch up with the demand for rehearsal spaces for the amateur and professional musician, with 3 locations located just outside of the proposed False Creek Flats' Cultural Precinct. When asked why he got into the business of renting space, Stewart explained,

Venue spaces were closing, rehearsal spaces were closing, all kinds of stuff was going down, because of development primarily, you know rezoning, kicking the artists out and everything, and we were barely able to keep up, opening up our facilities and we would get a flood of people that had just been evicted. You could almost count on it as part of our model (Stewart, interview, Feb 28, 2020).

Suna Studios has grown into Vancouver's largest 'jam space' rental business. The 12,000 square foot Jamnasium opened in 2018 after 18 grueling months and \$500,000 in construction costs and permitting hurdles, which came after a disheartening search for a landlord that was willing to lease to musicians. The inside of building was re-designed with all the costly but appropriate safety and soundproofing necessary for sustaining a legitimate music space business in a light industrial/residential neighborhood for the duration of their 17-year lease. Their monthly rentals were fully booked immediately upon opening (Kurucz, 2018). Stewart's aim is to develop a profitable business model that is self-sufficient, not only to make a living, but because he believes the model is necessary for the sustainability of music spaces in the city at all. He argues,

You've got to build a financially sustainable type of arts economy. You can't just rely on public donations, tax dollars to fund startup of operations and then fund continuing operations. These need to be able to stand on their own, generate enough revenue to pay their own taxes, their own bills because it, the more pressure you put on the public, the less likely the public is to support more of these types of ventures. And realistically, the public needs more of these ventures. They should pay for it to a certain extent, but when you have all of these, when you're adding all of these new resources that then put additional pressure on the budget the City has, the likelihood of these occurring are less and less (Stewart, interview, Feb 28, 2020).

Stewart also argues that as music spaces disappear, peoples' expectations of what music is and how to engage with it adapts to what is available. For example, corporate pop radio or the cost effective, single DJ that can play music people are already familiar rather than a group of people performing original material. To be clear, Stewart is not dismissing these forms of music, but is defending the irreplaceable value of live, original music, that pop music is, at its core, always indebted to. Stewart and others (myself included) are not anti-pop or anti-commercialization. They are pro-everything else, pro-innovation, pro-niche, pro-local, in the name of creative progress, and the very diversity, inclusion and equity the VMS is claiming to prioritize. In his words,

Any city that loses all of its culture is not liveable. It's just no question. And that's kinda what's happening in Vancouver. You're getting all of these condominiums packed, boom-boom-boom, and people are living in these relatively prison-like buildings. There's not much going on. You know, maybe they can go to the pub or something and buy an overpriced beer and listen to a DJ or canned music cover the speakers but people are losing touch with the live element which is the lifeblood of music... there's so many people who's perception of what music actually is is what's on the radio and what's popular music and that is so far from the truth.

I want to see experimental music. I want to hear new artists, I want to see people doing new things, I want to see new genres emerge. I think that if more people knew about those types of activities and were out there experiencing them, they too would want those types of things. But their ignorance is a product of the environment they have been provided. And that's ultimately what the bottom line here is. That environment is what they are consuming (Stewart, interview, Feb 28, 2020).

Stewart's comments speak specifically to where the City has historically positioned itself as a music industry stakeholder, one that uses its power to zone and rezone appropriate uses of space to the highest and best use (usually not music) while corralling formal, largely mainstream or classical music related businesses into entertainment districts such as the Granville Entertainment District, the Civic Theatres Downtown, and the Music Presentation Centre that was negotiated in a community amenity agreement for the Northeast False Creek development. Only in the last few years has the City expanded its engagement deeper into the music community and recognized the diversity of what exists and where it exists around the city (Sales, interview, March 11, 2020), engagement which should, lead to better outcomes for Vancouverites, if it is not too late.



### 5.2.3. The Vancouver Music Strategy: Analysis of Recommendations

As the physical, musical infrastructure that serves the needs of locals disappears, some recognition is deserved for work that the City’s Cultural Services Department and the numerous collaborators have done in seeking to articulate a response, despite competing urban growth objectives. **Table 5.5** is a list of recommendations categories intended to address the lack of infrastructure and key policy gaps, many of which overlap with those found in the *Making Space for Arts and Culture* and *Culture|Shift: Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture* plans. Of course, these are only recommendations that were approved by City Council in September of 2019 and not reformed policies or concrete commitments. It is also difficult to know the long-term impacts of COVID-19 will have on City budgets and a commitment to cultural spaces. Questions also arise throughout regarding how recommendations could be implemented, who really benefits, and whether they can truly achieve the stated goals of inclusivity, diversity and access to affordable and safe space for all in an increasingly expensive and rapidly growing city. **Table 5.5** outlines a brief summary before expanding on each individual recommendation.

**Table 5.5 Recommendations for the City of Vancouver**

<b>Priority Recommendation for the City</b>	
1	Establish a new Music staff position at the City of Vancouver (Phase 1: 2019-2021)
2	Endorse the creation of a Music Task Force co-led by the City of Vancouver and the music industry (Phase 1: 2019-2021)
<b>General Recommendations for the City</b>	
3	Streamline permits and licensing for music activity (Phase 1: 2019-2021)
4	Increase access to City-owned spaces; Create more spaces for music across the city
5	Increase access, availability, and use of venues (established, new, and prospective); Protect existing music venues and infrastructure
6	Develop and support music in outdoor spaces
7	Support increased community ownership of music spaces and development of a potential City-endorsed Cultural Land Trust
8	Increase housing options for Vancouver musicians
9	Expand the City’s music granting activities; Explore renewal of the Vancouver Music Fund; Affordable Spaces Grants
10	Audience engagement and development
11	Increase transit options to access music
12	Develop inter-city collaborations across Metro Vancouver

The first recommendation was to hire a staff person to implement the strategy, act as a liaison between the music community, advocate for music interests with the city

bureaucracy, support the development of a Music Task Force, and explore opportunities for expanding the night-time economy (VMS, 2019). As of February 2021, 18 months since approval, this position has not been filled. This may be an early sign of COVID-19's impacts on the City's ability to implement goals in the strategy.

The second recommendation is to develop a Music Task Force which would be co-led by the City and the music industry. It would promote ongoing learning for the City with regards to space, among other priorities (VMS, 2019). One wonders if the Music Task Force would only have a high-level, commercial and large-scale non-profit industry composition similar to the VMS Advisory and Steering committees or whether they would include more DIY and grassroots perspectives, particularly the groups that are experience the most significant barriers the accessing and sustain space. The 'usual suspects' from the Vancouver 'music industry' might include music businesses such as The MRG Group, Music BC, and Live Nation, positions and priorities already well reflected in VMS. Representation from Red Gate Arts Society, Nuzi Collective or Suna Studios may offer a much-needed injection of the lived experience of displacement missing from a more traditional roster of music industry key players.

The third is to streamline permit and licensing such as arts event licensing, venue curfew times, and cultural facility zoning (VMS, 2019). However, reviewing and reforming noise bylaws and liquor licensing (which is the provincial government's jurisdiction) are surely to meet resistance within the City's bureaucracy and when consulting the broader public, as these policies were constructed to control peoples' behavior and maintain peace and quiet in the first place. The 'No Fun City' nickname for Vancouver emerged partially due to observers arguing that Vancouver had particularly strict event policies, noise bylaws, and liquor licenses when compared to other cities in Canada and abroad.

Recommendation four is intended to directly address the loss of space and protect those that currently exist. It suggests increasing access to Vancouver Civic Theatres and to create new space across the city for more artists, particularly those that are from underrepresented or Indigenous backgrounds. This includes supporting the development of new rehearsal, recording and performance spaces in light industrial, commercial and mixed-use zones and would be designed to mitigate noise issues. (VMS, 2019). 3 key projects, co-led by the Cultural Services Department and community organizers have been developing over the last few years including: the Music

Presentation Centre, a recently approved proposal for an independent music hub in the *North East False Creek Plan*, at the current Plaza of Nations site near Yaletown; 1616 West 7<sup>th</sup> was also approved to include rehearsal and studio space on the ground floor of a new residential tower development; and the Hollywood Theatre which was previously a movie theatre in the Kitsilano neighbourhood has been converted into a venue that is appropriate for live music, comedy and theatre (See **Figure 4.1** for locations).

The new projects are located in Vancouver's upper-class Kitsilano neighborhood, which is certainly lacking in music spaces, and in Downtown's next condominium mega-project area, North East False Creek. All 3 are a result of the City negotiating Community Amenity Contributions with developers in exchange for increased Floor Space Ratio, which can increase the developer's profitability on the project, but have additional impacts on existing neighborhood character, view corridors and shadowing. Regarding the approval of the development at 1616 West 7<sup>th</sup>, Senior Cultural Planner, Alix Sales told *Vancouver is Awesome*, "We have to be really opportunistic about where those spaces are depending on where the opportunity comes ... In East Vancouver, we have not got a lot of increased density and when we do, it is often quite rightly for social housing or childcare" (Kurucs, 2019). While it is important for all neighbourhoods the have access to music spaces, what does Sales' statement mean for existing spaces in the heart of Vancouver's existing music landscape? Of course, social housing and childcare spaces are necessary and are indeed experiencing their own crises, due to increasing land values and society's general ambivalence with the issues, but does the City then have any leverage to actually protect existing spaces elsewhere in the *North East False Creek Plan*? Will the plethora of rehearsal, production and performance spaces that enable the organic diversity of Vancouver's music ecosystem surrounding False Creek Flats be corralled into purpose-built entertainment and cultural districts, when density bonusing allows for it? It is difficult to accept that the way to preserve cultural space in Vancouver requires its erasure first.

Recommendations five and six focus specifically on venues. They suggest increasing access, availability and use of existing and prospective indoor and outdoor performance venues, particularly for youth and non-traditional events. It also insists on protecting existing venues through grants and cultural heritage designations (VMS, 2019). Grants are limited, very conditional, only offer short-term reprieve and do little to ensure the long-term sustainability of DIY and grassroots spaces. For example, in 2020

the *Cultural Infrastructure, Small and Making Space Grant Program* received a budget of \$1,080,900 and had 27 applicants (CoV, 2020b, 29). The Vancouver Opera Association received the largest sum of \$200,000 (18.5% of total) to transform their current office into more of a 'cultural hub', while The WISE Hall (staple East Vancouver cultural space) received \$20,000 (1.9% of total) to replace their HVAC system. \$10,000 (0.9 % of total) went to Afro Van Connect to *explore* the feasibility of Hip-Hop Cultural Centre (CoV, 2020b, 27). Funding music space in 2020 (post-VMS) took the impacts of COVID-19 into consideration but also reduced overall funding by 12% when compared to 2019's allocations (CoV, 2019e, 1). Nevertheless, the Vancouver Symphony Society received a staggering \$479, 760 and the Vancouver Opera Association an additional \$117,605 in Theatre Rental Grant support (CoV, 2020b, 23). This illustrates that the City does preserve and provide space for music, but not *all* music equally.

Recommendations 7-12 encourage further research on Community Land Trusts, social housing for musicians, expanded granting streams, equity and access in audience engagement and development, advertising, public transportation, and inter-city collaboration (VMS, 2019). As they pertain to music space, the emphasis is on 'exploring' and little detail is provided.

In fact, of the 65 sub-recommendations from all categories, the word *explore* was used 20 times to articulate the action required for that recommendation. Followed by *ensure* (4 times) and *support* (3 times). The remainder are a blend of action words across the commitment spectrum, from *consider*, *monitor* and *review* as well as *develop* and *provide*. This 'lack of teeth' is not lost on some of those that have read the document and have expressed concern with its scope.

#### **5.2.4. Selected Public Responses to the Vancouver Music Strategy**

Editor-and-chief for *Business in Vancouver* and former Mayoral candidate Kirk LaPointe called the document, "the least inspiring reason to go into the music business that any city could provide", citing that its recommendations are mostly "intangible" and that its key approach is "working with" stakeholders and the community, which has led to little more than identifying gentrification, that most musicians don't generate any significant income from music and that Vancouver is an expensive city to live and work (LaPointe, 2019). He commends the efforts to support Indigenous and underrepresented

groups directly through granting streams, such as the Vancouver Music Fund which directed \$300,000 to artists that self-identify as marginalized and have faced barriers to grant funding, but his cutting review is that it still falls short in delivering a plan that commits to improving the city's "audible vibrancy" (2019).

In 2019, the fund supported the creation of single a demo track recording with a professional producer (\$2000 each, 38 projects), the creation of a professional music video for promoting an artist's project (\$3,000 - \$10,000 each, 14 projects) and professional development activities (\$4,000 - \$15,000 each, 15 projects) (Creative BC, 2019). To be more specific, awarding \$2000 to an artist to produce a single demo track recording provides a producer, an engineer and a group of accompanying musicians approximately one day of modestly paid work. The funding is intended for marketing selected individual projects, quickly flows upstream and does not provide or protect affordable cultural spaces. To be clear, equity-based funding is important, as historically government funding programs have tended to reproduce financial and social privilege and has often been biased towards Eurocentric elitism. However, white-heterosexual-cisgender men and women are also experiencing the rapid loss of music related revenue, grant funding, and cultural space. The Vancouver Music Fund is an inadequate solution to spatial injustice for *everyone* in the city.

Of the 30 plus news articles reviewed, many of them draw heavily upon press releases, reiterating the challenges of affordability and the City's visionary goals for mitigating displacement, social justice and preserving, let alone developing new infrastructure, while other articles are critical of the *VMS* question its legitimacy and failure to tackle the real issues. This 'lack of teeth' was also echoed by most interview respondents and some of the public speakers at the Staff presentation to council.

A second example found in the media is from an outspoken music producer and engineer, Matt Roach. He is skeptical of the venues represented in the *VMS*, stating his doubts that The Commodore (managed by Live Nation), the Vogue (managed by The MRG Group) and the Queen Elizabeth Theatre (City-owned and operated with resident companies Ballet BC and Vancouver Opera) will face closure and that it is venues such as The Rickshaw Theatre that need to be protected (Kurucz, 2018b). The Rickshaw Theatre serves international underground and local music communities of all genres and provides one of the most affordable and accessible medium size venues in the city. It is

also located in the heart of the Downtown Eastside, just beyond the northern edge of the False Creek Flats, in a neighborhood that houses the city's poorest residents and continues to gentrify rapidly.

During the development of the *VMS* and referring to The Media Club Live Music Lounge, of which the City was the landlord, Roach questions the City's commitment to music spaces: "I don't understand how on the one hand they want to do more for local music and on the other hand let corporate interest shut down a seminal venue in this city" (Kurucz, 2018b). The space that once housed the Media Club has been leased by the City to the Kered Hospitality Group and Browns Restaurant Group who have opened Ventura's which promotes itself by, "taking its name, and cues, from stereotypical breezy California vibes" and suggests visiting the bar "is like going to your friend's pad for cocktails...if your friend lived in a bungalow near the beach in Cali" (William-Ross, 2019). Not preserving The Media Club as an affordable and easily accessible venue for local musicians was a missed opportunity for the City to demonstrate its commitment to local grassroots music culture and illustrates why many local Vancouver musicians and audiences are disillusioned by such claims. **Figure 5.2** provides some context for who the intended clientele will be at Ventura's.



**Figure 5.2** Ventura Room

The Ventura Room, formerly The Media Club Live Music Lounge, occupies property owned by the City of Vancouver, adjacent to the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Two new office developments intended to be occupied by Apple and Amazon, among other companies, are visible in the background. December 17, 2020. Photo by author.

### **5.2.5. Tax Related Challenges for the Local Arts Community**

During the research for this project, the Red Gate Arts Society, a DIY live music and arts non-profit organization, was facing displacement for the second time in 2 years. In 2017, Low Tide Properties purchased the building that they were leasing in Strathcona and immediately raised the rent by over 200%, prompting a move to Main Street, just south of the False Creek Flats Innovation Hub (Ligeti, 2019). Red Gate's new location was not without its challenges. Rent was \$8000 per month and they were subject to a triple-net-lease, which requires the tenant to cover the cost of insurance,

maintenance and property taxes. The property taxes in the first year raised monthly expenses to \$11,500 and in 2020 property taxes were projected to increase monthly costs to \$13,000 (Ligeti, 2019). In 2019, the assessed value of the building they recently occupied increased from \$2.5 million in 2015 to \$11.2 million in 2019 (Red Gate, 2019). This arrangement is not uncommon, but for non-profit, DIY and grassroots music and arts organizations, triple-net-leases are an additional challenge to sustaining a space, long before the more well-known issue of properties being approved for redevelopment.



**Figure 5.3 Red Gate**

Red Gate Arts Society current location in Mt. Pleasant with a new high-rise development in the background. Two new developments are also being built, to the left and the right, outside the frame of this photo. December 17, 2020. Photo by author.

The root of this issue is that property taxes are assessed on the potential use of the land rather than the current use. In the case of Red Gate, an old 2-story commercial space that functions as a hub for Vancouver artists, musicians, and audiences but that does not generate a profit, is taxed as if it is a multi-story, mixed-use building resembling



Red Gate's newer high-density buildings in the neighbourhood. This policy incentivizes redevelopment, yet these are the spaces where DIY, grassroots, and alternative culture happens, particularly for socio-economically, gender, or racially marginalized and underrepresented groups, the groups and environments that the VMS has elevated as a priority to preserve and provide for.

According to Red Gate Executive Director, "over a third of our total operating budget is taxed to the city and we're a non-profit arts group, so that seems insane" (Ligeti, 2019). In January of 2020, Red Gate published an *Open Letter to the City of Vancouver and the Province of BC*, expressing their critique of the new culture plans and the challenges faced not only by non-profit organizations but small for-profit business and non-profit community development organizations as well. The following is an excerpt from the open letter, which I quote in length, because the emotion and critique expressed accurately represents the frustrations of countless local artists and musicians, questioning the pro-growth and professional music industry-centric tone of the VMS (2019).

Despite occasional encouraging words, we receive no funding whatsoever from the City of Vancouver. Recently they've launched a new 10-year plan to "blanket the city with arts and culture", announcing their intention to "advance community-led cultural infrastructure" and "position Vancouver as a thriving hub for music", goals which the Red Gate not only endorses but has been actively implementing, through our own initiative and at our own expense, for decades. It's a tragic irony that in the short time since this plan was published, at least a half dozen art and music spaces have shut down, with many more under imminent threat.

All of the good intentions expressed in the current cultural plan are contradicted by a policy of punishing commercial tenants for not representing the "highest potential use" of their properties. While the plan briefly addresses this subject, it does so in vague and general terms and possible long term approaches, seemingly blind to the fact that we're already at an extreme crisis point and there won't be any "long term" if it's not resolved immediately. It's not only the Red Gate but virtually every cultural space, every non-profit, every small business, in other words everything unique and home-grown which gives Vancouver any sort of character or personality, which is being swept away by a tsunami of speculation, with the various levels of government engaged in passive hand-wringing at best, and at worst actively participating in the destruction.

The cultural plan also prioritizes a need for reconciliation with Musqueam, Squamish, and Tseil-Waututh peoples, and support for these and other historically under-represented and marginalized groups. It's hard to see

how this is possible while still maintaining policies which encourage speculation and gentrification, since these are simply Colonialism 2.0, in which the same space is periodically re-conquered and re-colonized in a process that continues to spiral out of control, further marginalizing and displacing the same vulnerable communities. Genuine reconciliation and representation can't really begin while these neocolonial assumptions and policies continue to dominate.

The letter also makes two tangible recommendations that could have a serious impact on the sustainability of cultural spaces around the city, possibly even incentivizing arts and music organizations as tenants. The first,

- Undeveloped (i.e., affordable) property should be taxed on existing use, not on a speculative, highest and best use.

The second,

- Non-profit cultural organizations should be exempt from property tax, as are churches and sports stadiums.

At the time, the Provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Selina Robinson, admitted that “years of an out-of-control real estate market have resulted in unexpected tax spikes for many small businesses that pay property taxes as part of their commercial leases” (Zussman, 2020). In February 2020, the Province of BC introduced a program that would allow municipalities to offer property tax relief for small business and charities. However, this was an emergency measure that would only benefit specific organizations deemed eligible. The City of Vancouver is still responsible for determining the portion of each tax exemption. For critics, the amendment did not go far enough, as properties are still taxed based on their approved zoning or speculative use-value due to changes in community plans (e.g., the *False Creek Flats Area Plan*), which for the property that Red Gate occupies, means a multi-story, mixed-use tower (Zussman, 2020). A split-tax assessment (lower tax rate on the undeveloped air space) has been argued for by businesses and critics for years and would reduce property taxes to zero or near-zero for eligible businesses, but this approach has yet to move forward.

In March of 2020, some City Councilors and the Cultural Services Department engaged directly with Red Gate offering them an emergency grant to cover property taxes for half of the year (Red Gate Arts Society, 2020). This grant stopped Red Gate from closing immediately but did not resolve the issue for other organizations, future tax burdens or reduce their operating costs.

To be fair, it is not that the Cultural Services Department at the City are unfamiliar or unaware of the challenges faced by arts and culture organizations as they have clearly outlined in the *Culture|Shift, Making Space* and the *VMS*. Much of their role is to advocate on behalf of these groups within the City's larger bureaucracy and competing departmental goals. Often the challenge is making inclusive, diverse, 'art-for-art's sake', or cultural heritage a priority in among other priorities such as those highlighted by the Vancouver Economic Commission (including Green Economy, Tech, Digital Entertainment). Another challenge is that in 2019, Real Estate, Rental and Leasing represented 17.6% of GDP in BC, followed by 8.9% in construction. That is 26.5% of the BC economy that depends on property and growth, while the (quantifiable) value of Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (let alone music) only represented 0.9% (Statista, 2020).

### **5.2.6. Low Tide Properties vs the Arts**

No Vancouver property owner could better exemplify the pro-growth principles of highest and best use, while simultaneously coopting the logic of a 'creative economy' than Low Tide Properties. Low Tide and owner Chip Wilson have become the villain to many of Vancouver's artists, musicians and presenters and it is not difficult to learn and understand why. The company website describes its business model:

As a private real estate investment company, we aim to create a positive impact in the communities we work in. To that end, we invest in emerging neighbourhoods around Vancouver, acquire unique properties, and transform them into alternative spaces that showcase their character. Each building is approached differently and we take great care to ensure that we create spaces that make sense for each community (Low Tide Properties, 2021).

Three important 'emerging neighbourhoods' for Low Tide are Strathcona, the Downtown Eastside and Mt. Pleasant in East Vancouver, three of the city's most creatively vibrant neighbourhoods, all adjacent to the False Creek Flats. The businesses that Low Tide features on its website include digital media and entertainment, high-end furniture, craft breweries, co-workspaces, and a mural festival.

The companies five core values include (Low Tide Properties, 2021):

- Integrity - Doing what we say we will do, when we say we will do it

- Authenticity - Being who we are, and not being whom we are not
- Choice - Making every decision through conscious choice
- Openness - Being open to all possibilities, at all times
- Presence - Experiencing life in the moment – clearly and mindfully

Reconciling Low Tide’s stated approach to revitalizing neighbourhoods, a literal interpretation of its core values and their track record for displacing already existing creative workspaces, commercial businesses and specifically music spaces, is necessary to examine in more detail.

In August of 2019, a group of artists gathered outside of Chip Wilson’s \$73 million home on Vancouver’s Westside as a *Rave Against Renovictions*, alleging that his company had evicted 18 arts organizations in recent years (Global News, 2019). There was a DJ playing music and people danced while holding signs proclaiming, “Artists Against Chip Wilson” and “Gentrification is Class War Fight Back” (Woodend, 2019). One organizer of the event, Nathan Drillot, was evicted from his community event and electronic music performance space Index, in Strathcona (Merge Studios also shared this location) after Low Tide Properties bought the building in 2016. According to Drillot,

The original owner wanted to support the arts, but when Low Tide came on board, everything changed. We knew their history of renovicting people, so we were very apprehensive about a company that had paid \$10 million for a building (Woodend, 2019).

In 2018, 2018 Red Gate Arts Society on Hastings Street faced a similar fate only to relocate to Main Street and has since faced increasingly precarious tenure. Of the protest, the Executive Director of Red Gate Arts Society, Jim Carrico, stated,

In the absence of a serious and concerted effort by all levels of government, the last vestiges of genuine home-grown emerging and experimental culture will be forced out of the city within a few years (Woodend, 2019).

Wilson briefly confronted the group outside of his house, attempted to share a lesson in classical economics, telling the group, “The world doesn’t want enough of your product for you to pay the rent”, to which Drillot responded, “your company didn’t give me the option of paying the rent”, to which Wilson laughed and walked away (Little, 2019).

Low Tide Properties is transparent about its approach to neighbourhood renewal. In 2016, it announced their goal of owning a portfolio of \$1.5 billion in property assets within a decade and at the time already owned \$300 million (Korstrom, 2016). Its strategy is to “acquire and hold a core of stable, income-producing properties while also acquiring *value-add properties* to improve and then add to the core” (authors emphasis; Klassen, 2019). It owns over a dozen properties on the 800 block of Hastings Street alone (See **Figure 4.1** for location) and the City approved rezoning of the block for multi-story residential redevelopment, significantly increasing the profit Low Tide will earn when it chooses to sell or rebuild. Until then, they primarily lease to boutique and high-end commercial business and streamline public art projects, essentially inducing the second wave of gentrification and increasing the value of their properties in the long run.

About the 800 block of Hastings Street, Low Tide CEO Andrew Chang suggested, “we don’t actually do a lot of development at this point. That area lends itself to be more of a village or a commercial neighbourhood” and is also the Eastern edge of the Downtown Eastside (Korstrom, 2016). Because of their relative affordability, value added properties are often the only spaces where DIY and grassroots arts and culture have access to in the City of Vancouver, making Low Tide Properties a direct threat to their existence. Low Tide is interested in renting to creative industries as long as they serve its own growth interests. By inducing neighbourhood change and leasing to tenants that can meet the expectations of maximum revenue generation, ‘creativity’ tends to manifest in the form of digital media and entertainment, high-end lifestyle clothing brands and craft breweries, while displacing the city’s vital DIY and grassroots music and art spaces, social services, off-brand small businesses and community development organizations, *en route* to an assumed ‘highest and best use’ that maximizes return on investment. Developing or reselling in the future, after they have successfully induced gentrification and increasing the value of their property, and indeed the whole neighbourhood, generates more profit for Low Tide Properties in the long run.

During the same weekend as the Rave Against Renovictions, a second critique of Low Tide Properties was published in the form of an Open Letter to the presidents of the larger local universities and the Board Chair of the Great Northern Way Campus (located in the False Creek Flats area). The letter was from New Forms Media Society (co-founded by Jarret Martineau) stating that their concerns “not only relate to the unfortunate situation that transpired, but more generally to the history and greater

successes of the Campus, and the cultural health and sustainability of our city” (2019). New Forms was one of the first cultural organizations to inhabit the early beginnings of what would become the Great Northern Way Campus (GNWC), in the False Creek Flats, and have held an internationally recognized, radically inclusive and diverse electronic music and art festival on the campus annually since 2008. Since 2010, New Forms has worked with UBC, SFU, and ECUAD to develop a meaningful and sustainable cultural area in the City, ultimately leading to Emily Carr’s new location.

In 2019, after 5 months of planning and discussing the upcoming festival, New Forms was told by the GNWC Trust that the two buildings that they had used in the past, to host the annual festival, were no longer available to them and were surprised to learn that “the GNWC Trust no longer supports culture as part of its mandate” and that “the GNWC Trust was now ‘going a different direction’ based on all of the land being sold” which New Forms claims was a reference to Low Tide Properties purchasing the property they had used for the festival and a new building was being planned. In their open letter, they state,

This needs to be acknowledged: we live in a city at a time, where the lack of spaces and lack of private support for culture is far beyond the breaking point. These spaces are far more vital to Vancouver and offer more value than any condo or industry development will at this time, because without them the city will be left without any culture ...

It goes without saying that the ‘South Flatz’ project by Low Tide which uses culture as central to its branding, is trying to whitewash the culture that New Forms and others created - both with regard to selling high end properties, but also by shutting down the culture at the same time. The impact that Low Tide has had on the destruction of culture in Vancouver is staggering (NFMS, 2019).

Low Tide’s ‘South Flatz’ project is a multi-building, office space project rapidly redeveloping the former light industrial properties along Great Northern Way and occupying a significant portion of the City’s *False Creek Flats Area Plan* which designates the area as a ‘Creative Campus’ and an ‘Innovation Hub’ (CoV, 2017). As reported to The Daily Hive, “all of these office buildings are being built in mind for larger and more established tech companies looking for spaces that provide flexibility and room to expand as their headcounts grow” which leaves little question of who the future tenants will be, who they will not be, and who benefits (Chan, 2020b).



**Figure 5.4 South Flatz**

Low Tide Properties currently housing two art galleries (red building), green space, and the future site of a Broadway SkyTrain Line train station (bottom right). It will be located next to the recently completed Emily Carr University of Art and Design (top right). The explicit use of mural aesthetics and 'urban' slang in their marketing approach lends itself to critique from the arts community. December 17, 2020. Photo by author.

Not unrelated, lululemon (intentionally lowercase), the yoga and lifestyle apparel company founded by Wilson, of which he remains the largest shareholder, has recently confirmed its new head office location on Great Northern Way after the company successfully applied for a rezoning that had originally limited the building height and design to “a building mass that does not relate to the streetscape or the surrounding context, and is not a building that would be representative of lululemon” (Chan, 2019). The City of Vancouver is accommodating the businesses they see as appropriate for attracting a certain kind of creative talent and that supports the grander vision of building Vancouver’s new creative industries epicenter. Chip Wilson may be the single greatest beneficiary having his hand in multiple projects in the area.

Around the time of Rave Against Renovictions, one artist designed and printed numerous bumper stickers. They were sold from a retail store affiliated with Drillot’s Index venue. On the sticker is a message for Chip Wilson and a call to the public to demand that DIY, grassroots, and independent cultural spaces, with little power or

choice over the length of their tenure in 'value-added properties', be better protected in the City of Vancouver.



**Figure 5.5 Stop Chip**

Bumper sticker available to public likely produced in response to the evictions of Red Gate (Strathcona), Index and Merge and the displacement of New Forms Festival. October 2019. Photo by author.

### 5.3. Engaging the Music Community

The second half of the discussion continues to examine the primary research question with the second sub-question, *who was represented in framing the recommendations for the strategy?* simmering just below. The following section examines who the architects of the VMS were at the beginning, middle and end. It develops a critique of its priorities by considering who is likely to benefit from them. The public engagement process was a central and highly celebrated part of the developing the VMS. Yet, in the end, much of the nuance or complexity of the lived experience, particularly from the DIY and grassroots communities, is sanitized or missing in the final version.

The City also put significant emphasis on its engagement process with historically underrepresented communities being targeted specifically. While they may have succeeded in hearing some of these marginalized voices in the engagement process and presented them in the City's planning documents, few and limited tangible outcomes are supported by concrete commitments at the scale necessary to impact issues of broader social and economic inequality in a rapidly growing city (e.g., property ownership or security of tenure). I provide three illustrative examples that clarify the contradictory goals of inclusive city building, the insecurity of cultural spaces, and how the proposed solutions are inadequate relative to the scale of the issues.



The final section recounts the staff presentation of *Culture|Shift, Making Space* and the VMS to Vancouver City Council in September, 2019, and highlights the distance between the aspirations of the updated and more culturally sensitive Creative City Strategy and the City's capacity to implement even moderate policy reform, let alone the capacity, jurisdiction or political will for the transformative change required for an economically inclusive and diverse city that would inherently produce more spatial justice for marginalized communities.

### **5.3.1. Leadership**

In 2016, the Vancouver Music Strategy was initiated following the publication of Music Canada's national *The Mastering of a Music City* (2015) and *BC Music Sector: From Adversity to Opportunity* (2016), as well as the Province investing \$22.5 million towards the growth of the Music sector in BC in a program called Amplify BC. The Vancouver Music Steering Committee, with input from the Vancouver Music Advisory Committee, led to the development of both the *Vancouver Music Ecosystem Study* (VMES) and *Here, The Beat: The Economic Impact of Live Music in BC*. At the time of the VMES, the Steering Committee included the following members (VMS, 2019):

- Sandra Gajic – Director of Civic Theatres, City of Vancouver
- Alex Grigg – Music BC, a non-profit organization claiming to be “the voice of BC music industry locally, domestically and internationally” (Music BC, 2020)
- Rob Calder – Secret Study Consulting and ‘indie’ record label founder
- Sharman King – Arts and Culture Policy Council and Vancouver Opera Orchestra
- Lynn Ross – Social Planner -Music, City of Vancouver
- Mike Schroeder – CEO at Nimbus School of Recording and Media
- Amy Terrill – Music Canada, a non-profit trade organization promoting the interests of Warner Music Canada Co., Universal Music Canada Inc., and Sony Music Entertainment Canada Inc.
- Kelly Tweeddale – Vancouver Symphony Orchestra

Of the original members, only Rob Calder remains in his professional role. Nearly all of the members have relocated or stepped away from their positions. Notably, Alex Grigg has shifted away from the non-profit sector and since become Director for

Festivals and Events with The MRG Group. MRG is one of the largest hospitality and entertainment companies in Canada (MRG, 2021). Lynn Ross was the first Social Planner to join the City with a music specific role and was a key contributor to the initiation of the *VMS*.

While it is the voice of the organization, rather than the individual involved that is most important, it is still surprising that so few of the committee's original members will not see the *VMS* through into implementation, especially considering the degree of their responsibility for its framing. The organizations themselves represent only a portion of music industry, and essentially no one from the DIY, grassroots, or small independent businesses in Vancouver. It is difficult for the average musician or presenter to see their interests represented at this decision-making table, particularly if they are critical or function outside of the commercial or large-scale, non-profit music industry.

However, even commercial and non-profit organizations face similar challenges of visibility and relevance against competing City priorities. Highlighting how only recently music has become a priority for the City, one respondent explained learning what was abundantly clear to the local music community,

If you take a look at a map... first off, you see we have very few music spaces that are city owned, especially our amenity spaces that we negotiate through development. So that came up pretty early in the music strategy. Just hearing it from Alex Grigg [Music BC], actually, and I was like, yeah, you're right. There's very few. So immediately we started to prioritize music spaces (Sales, interview, March 11, 2020).

The Vancouver Music Advisory Committee is larger and more inclusive of musicians, presenters and notably race and ethnic diversity. In 2016, this committee included 10 members including world-renowned musician Bryan Adams, concert promoter and manager Nick Blasko (Rifflandia Festival, Tegan and Sara), Asha Bhat from the Provincial Ministry of Jobs Tourism and Prem Gill, CEO at Creative BC. By 2018 the committee had completely turned over and included the following members:

- Hal Beckett – Composer and Music Director
- Graham Blank – Tom Lee Music, Music equipment and lessons
- Ryan Boelstler – Content Manager and Brand Development

- Shea Dahl – The MRG Group, one of the largest hospitality and entertainment companies in Canada
- Charles Gauthier – Downtown Vancouver BIA
- Julie Glover – The Armoury Studios, recording studio
- Branislav Henselmann – Managing Director of Cultural Services, City of Vancouver
- Lori Janson – Tourism Vancouver, a destination marketing organization and business association
- Brenda Leadlay – BC Alliance for Arts + Culture, a non-profit provincial organization that works to advocate, inform, connect and serve BC's Creative Community
- Tarun Nayar –artist (Delhi 2 Dublin) and concert/festival promoter
- Chris Norwood – Nettwerk Music Group, record label, artist management, publishing
- Eduardo Ottoni - Vancouver International Jazz Festival
- David Pay – Music on Main, classical and contemporary music programmers
- Nate Sabine – This Is Blueprint, hospitality management
- Dylan Towle – 604 and Light Organ Records
- Racquel Villagante – SOCAN, rights management
- Charlie Wu – Asian-Canadian Special Events Association

This Advisory Committee reaches further into the music ecosystem and improves on the ethnic diversity lacking in the Steering Committee, yet still represents mostly the interests of larger institutions, large events, commercial and traditional music genres and companies, leaving a DIY and grassroots perspective underrepresented.

### **5.3.2. Public Engagement: *A Means to an End, or Just an End?***

In addition to the influence from the Advisory and Steering Committees, and a heavy reliance on questionable third-party data collected by Nordicity and Sound Diplomacy, the City of Vancouver also conducted their own community, industry and stakeholder engagement campaign throughout 2019. Through the Community Conversation Series and numerous roundtables, the Cultural Services Department

sought to convene historically underrepresented genres (Hip Hop, DIY, Experimental and Improvised) and communities (youth, BIPOC, LGBTQ+). Through conversations with other interviewees, it was reported that Lead Music Planner, Jarrett Martineau, also consulted with some individual artists, musicians and presenters in one-on-one discussions, particularly with those that may not have felt comfortable attending roundtables or public engagement events. This approach was important due to the reluctance of those who did not ever feel represented in planning and policy or were possibly disillusioned after observing limited positive outcomes after previous engagement processes. When asked who is most often represented in public engagement efforts, one respondent explained,

I would say that the people that are most present are the people who have some amount of trust that it's worth their time to show up and typically, those people are people with connection or influence already. And so historically, you know, that's been white middle-class, straight, cisgender people with enough literacy to know how power works. [They] know what table they're showing up to and how to advocate for what they want (anonymous, interview, June 1, 2020).

And adding further on in our discussion,

The further away that you get from the amounts of personal privilege and resources to participate, the more likely [you] are to get an organizational representative who doesn't reflect the fullness of the lived experience, but is they're doing work on behalf of them (anonymous, interview, June 1, 2020).

The City's flagship music strategy engagement event was the Community Conversations Series held in May and June of 2019. The first of these two events was held at Matchstick Coffee in Chinatown and the second was held at PACE Co-working and Event Space in nearby Railtown. Both locations were intended to informalize community engagement by creating spaces that were comfortable for anyone. In that respect, trendy Matchstick Coffee was a questionable decision.

The Matchstick event was hosted by self-identifying Taiwanese-Canadian, non-binary, multidisciplinary artist, curator, film-maker, DJ, grant coach and community music consultant Nancy Lee, who claims to advocate on behalf the DIY community but is also a workshop facilitator with the City of Vancouver, Creative BC, and Emily Carr University. Nancy is a well-established artist who may not reflect the experiences of lower-income or non-professional artists. In many ways Nancy represents the leading

principles of inclusion and diversity that the City is championing in the *VMS* and has developed a professional leadership role that should, in theory, encourage other BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people to participate in municipal strategic planning programs. However, there is also a risk that Nancy's leadership could be interpreted as tokenism, characteristic of modern identity politics, further alienating critics of City engagement processes, and distracting from the more pressing issue of displacement and exclusion from the city based on financial limitation. As Marcuse had warned with the *discontented* and the *collaborative* readings of the Right to the City, leadership opportunities arise for the already socially and financially privileged and are not radical enough in their approach to transforming power relations between the state and the populations that experience displacement (2014).

If the goal was to elevate underrepresented identities at public engagement events and in the photographs of planning documents and social media posts, the City of Vancouver has been successful. Yet, more specific, concrete actions that prevent further displacement of lower income and musical niche-serving cultural spaces, in and around the False Creek Flats, would be necessary to *transform* how space is distributed across the city. This more concrete goal would also require building trust with hundreds, if not thousands, of Vancouver musicians, including BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities, from every genre and across the socio-economic spectrum.

Anecdotally, as someone who has been apart of the music community in East Vancouver for 14 years, of the approximately 40 attendees at the Matchstick event, I was certainly expecting to recognize at least one other person. However, I was only familiar with some City staff and some members from the Steering and Advisory committees. Clearly, the reach needed to go further.

At the PACE event, the City had a reworked its format, perhaps due to some critical feedback after the Matchstick event, and also to accommodate a slightly larger audience. **Figure 5.5** shows how the 'vibe' was dramatically improved with the venue resembling more of a party atmosphere. DJ's, couches, and a photo booth created a public engagement space that had optimism floating in the air and a sense that through inclusive consultation, win-win solutions would emerge.



**Figure 5.6 Community Conversations #2**

The scene at PACE, the second of two Community Conversations held by City of Vancouver. June 26, 2019. Photo by author.

More musicians and industry people, from more corners of the music community, attended the PACE event and there was as noticeable presence of young BIPOC and LGBTQ+ identifying artists. NuZi Collective was handling the music. Members of the NuZi Collective later participated in the City-funded Black Spaces Symposium and were particularly outspoken during the Black Lives Matters movement following the social unrest in the United States. Their Instagram page (posted to their website) speaks volumes to their perspective, sense of exclusion in society, and the role of music in their everyday lives. For example, one post reads,

techno is protest music. techno is anti-cop music. techno is anti-racist music. everything that is happening in minneapolis and the rest of the world right now is what techno is about. This is the true essence of “underground resistance” (2020).

One of the ways in which injustice has been carried out upon Black people is through purposeful exclusion and the Cultural Services Department is right to do their part in elevating the voices of Black artists and musicians in the City of Vancouver at this event. However, questions arise as to what the City can do to preserve and provide space for Black culture to thrive beyond purposeful visibility in photographs in planning

documents, on websites, presence at engagement events, or limited, one-time, Vancouver Music Fund grants. Additional opportunities to air well-documented grievances through more engagement events, surveys and focus groups do not protect or provide space for Black culture to thrive. Again, specific, concrete actions with real world outcomes are necessary.

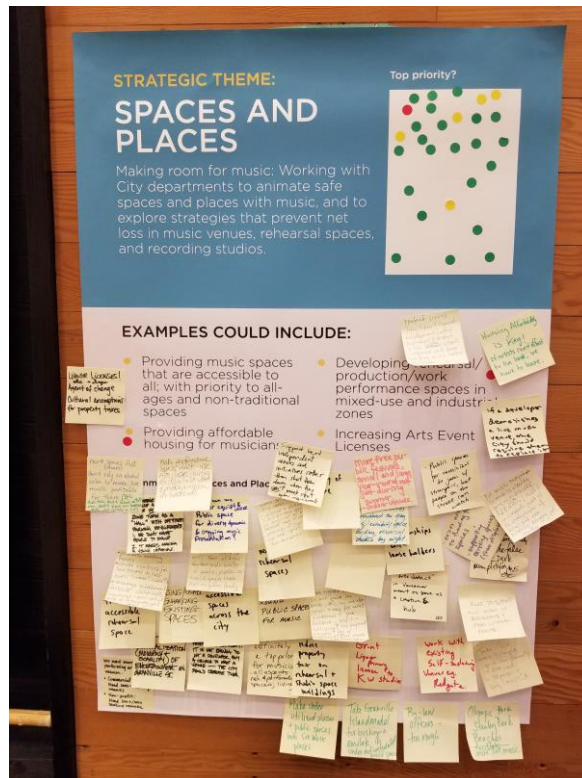
One can examine the proposal for a Black Cultural Centre at Hogan's Alley (see **Figure 4.1** for location) and the City's reluctance to meaningfully collaborate with the Hogan's Alley Society, despite featuring the project prominently in the *North East False Creek Plan* (2017), as an alternative example of the City's prioritization of Black culture and Black voices being placed at the center of city building.

A second example and closely related, is that in 2021 the City of Vancouver approved the naming of a new, nearby, street after renowned Black community member, Nora Hendrix. However, they did not consult with the Black community or the Hogan's Alley Society (HAS). The co-chair of the HAS suggested that the naming is "definitely tokenism" and is "without us and not by us" (Junos, 2021). There is no question that Nora Hendrix was a highly regarded community member during the Hogan's Alley heyday, but the City's disregard for consulting the community it intended to honour is a hurtful misstep and casts doubt on the sincerity of inclusive city building. Following the controversy, the City responded by acknowledging that the naming committee had "no resources for public consultation" to which HAS responded that they will "provide alternative names to the advisory committee" and that, "[a]s has been the case with its other input to the City in the past, it will be done on an unpaid basis" (Smith, 2021). Nora Hendrix was also the grandmother of legendary guitarist Jimi Hendrix and one wonders if his iconic status is also being used by the City to improve its own status as a music tourism destination, in addition to attempting to increase the perception of delivering some spatial justice.

Both the Matchstick and PACE events featured an activity whereby participants voted with stickers for what they think the priorities should be for the *Vancouver Music Strategy* (sometimes called Dotmocracy), as well as offering suggestions on sticky notes. **Figure 5.7** is an example of one poster from the first event where Spaces and Places was an obvious frontrunner in participant concerns. For example, some participants recommended,

- Support[ing] local independent venues and initiatives rather than shutting them down when they can't meet strict bylaw requirements
- Housing affordability is key! If artists can't afford to live here we have to leave
- Cultural exemptions for property taxes

None of these recommendations are particularly surprising to artists living in Vancouver. Instead, they highlight what the root of the concerns; overly strict bylaws and punishment for non-compliance when non-compliance is increasingly the only option and a runaway housing market that benefits existing property owners and incentivizes further development. Moreover, as I examined previously, there is also a need for incentivizing DIY or grassroots cultural organizations as tenants so that they can sustain a stable tenancy and then flourish. Yet, as I have addressed repeatedly, the rate of displacement and property values in City of Vancouver show no signs of slowing, until perhaps there are so few spaces left to displace that 'No Fun City' will not be a warning but a reality, unless of course, one finds fun at the opera or an arena.



**Figure 5.7 Spaces and Places**  
 1 of 8 posters from the first Community Conversation held by City of Vancouver, intended to rank importance of the key themes and draw ideas from the perspective of the local music community. May 29, 2019. Photo by author.



In February of 2020 (pre-COVID-19), the PACE Co-working Space was evicted from their building in Railtown under similar circumstances to other DIY, grassroots and small commercial business, succumbing to the weight of the triple-net-lease and adding tremendous irony to the case for protecting cultural spaces. Even the spaces that can accommodate people gathering to talk about preserving spaces are vulnerable. In a Facebook post, the former Director explains (Brennan, 2020),

In August [2019], we received our first substantial grant support - \$39k from the DTES Capital fund. Money that should have gone to building improvements, and some did - but there was rent to be paid, and I was hopeful that more support was on the horizon, with the upcoming Vancouver Culture Shift report, and the Vancouver Music Strategy. We hosted engagement events, BIA gatherings. It seemed we were really gaining traction as a valuable cultural space ...

Then the City of Vancouver Culture Shift report came out - aspiring to zero net loss of cultural spaces. I was elated - I had made a solid choice to stick it out. Help was coming ...

In the meantime, I secured \$21k of funding from City of Vancouver/ Cultural Services in critical assistance - money all earmarked to improve the building, specifically the accessibility of it - something that was of top priority for community reaching out to book the space ...

It's hard to express the devastating reality this illuminates. It took every last bit of resources to facilitate this displacement, and for what? Ultimately, to punish us for not having the capacity to honour our lease agreement.

Beyond acting as yet another example of displacement of cultural space in the City of Vancouver and the broken hearts of once optimistic cultural producers, this example illuminates the futility of one-time, emergency grants that appear to be one of the few tools the Cultural Services Department has to preserve or provide security of tenure for precariously housed cultural spaces. Money that the City gives to struggling organizations is too often handed directly to property owners rather than investing in improving that quality, safety and accessibility of the space and enabling artists to do their 'thing', as it was intended. There is no crisis of ambition, there is a disabling lack of accessible, affordable, appropriate, and quality space that increasing the supply of brand-new buildings in pre-existing culturally vibrant areas or elsewhere, simply does not meet.

As Brennan concluded in her Facebook post, "But hey, that's capitalism for you, I guess" (2020). It is becoming clearer to some and was painfully obvious to others that

good intentions and identity politics are inadequate approaches if the City's true vision is to "amplify the sound of Vancouver" (VMS, 2019, 3).

### **5.3.3. Music Presentation Centre/VIM House**

In July 2018, the City of Vancouver approved the redevelopment of the Plaza of Nations site in Northeast False Creek. The proposal for a purpose-built Music Presentation Centre had been developing for years under the strong advocacy and lobbying by a local non-profit organization called Vancouver Independent Music Centre Society (VIMCS). The VIMCS is composed of local musicians, presenters, managers and audience members. Originally convening around the challenges of presenting local music during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, VIMCS began working towards a proposal to the City of Vancouver for a cultural hub that prioritized the creation, education and performance of independent, grassroots, improvised and experimental music above profitability and the sale of alcohol, in the same way other mediums such as dance, theatre, opera, and classical present events and receive subsidy from multiple levels of government, reducing the ever-increasing operating and tenancy costs. Included would be two acoustically superior venues designed for the enjoyment of music at small and medium scales.

Worth highlighting, the VIM House (as it is called by the society) is fundamentally grassroots in nature and is intended to be run by the local independent music community and meet the needs of the community first. One respondent, Diane Kadota explained some of her positive experiences while leading the development of the proposal,

Everybody, regardless of where they were coming from Classical, Folk, Jazz, Pop, Rock, all really wanted the same thing. Which was a great ambiance and a good sound, you know, a good range of sounds, not a particular sound, but this range of sound that doesn't exist in venues in Vancouver (interview, May 8, 2020).

But she also shared her experience of witnessing ongoing displacement and the justification for a music-specific cultural hub, highlighting the insecurity of tenure that smaller cultural spaces endure,

I support the Fox... the Biltmore... but they will come and go ... when we looked at what venues had opened and closed, the ones that are subsidized have existed for 30 plus years. The Cultch, Arts Club, the Fire

Hall, you know, they're all running on 35 or more years. And you look at the music venues and they, you know, they have these 10 or 20 year histories. They used to have a much longer history and over the last 30 years, it's just, there's been closure after closure. And so, I actually don't feel all that confident that even the Fox or Red Gate or, you know, the Biltmore even will be able to survive. There's no investment in them (interview, May 8, 2020).

Kadota is frustrated with the speed of progress and after having led a thorough consultation process that leaves little doubt about the provision of a dedicated music space and the needs of an important but still only *part* of the local music community.

I don't know, like why they're moving so slow on getting the VIM up because we have done more studies that I think that they have done at all. Whether they did the kind of consultation that we've done with a really wide range of the music community and ... really digging into some of the issues and not just acoustics, but also what people are looking for... just in terms of sightlines and feel and accessibility and even loading. I mean, we've talked a lot about a lot of the issues that everybody is actually facing (interview, May 8, 2020).

The City sees the Music Presentation Centre as a core community amenity for the forthcoming NEFC development that will link Downtown with Chinatown, Strathcona and the False Creek Flats neighbourhoods and as important initiative for them to defend their response to the plummeting music space deficit.

Supporting the grassroots is critical so those independent producers, those DIY spaces, those recording, those will always be important. And that's why, for us the priority is VIM House. The priority is on studio spaces, recording spaces, just anything we can do to allow folks to do what they want to do and get that first step (Sales, interview, March 11, 2020)

However, it did not come together entirely as hoped for and the long-term objective of community self-sufficiency could be undermined without public ownership. When speaking with Alix Sales she explained,

It didn't come forward the way we wanted it. In that case, we did want it city-owned because small music centers are hard to operate on their own. They need to be part of a larger center. It's hard. It's... they just don't make a lot of money and there's not enough bums-in-seats...And in this one we're still negotiating because it's intended instead to be developer owned. *That was the deal that ended up being done at a higher level* (emphasis added by author, interview, March 11, 2020).

Before the development of the *Vancouver Music Strategy* and before at least a dozen vital music spaces were displaced or permanently closed in the City, VIMCS had

commissioned their own *Feasibility Study* (2014) examining the local music ecosystem and the need for governmental protection and provision of music spaces. Much of the language would later be echoed throughout the *VMS* yet, few concrete actions have been accomplished in the last 6 years beyond reiterating the challenges and opportunities for local musicians, presenters and audiences in Vancouver music ecosystem. According to plan, VIM House will be completed in 2026, 12 years after its first proposal. The sense of urgency expressed by locals is hardly fulfilled by the 3 Community Amenity Contributions (VIM House, 1616 West 7<sup>th</sup>, Hollywood Theatre) negotiated into redevelopment projects, in this case located Downtown and on the West side, when the need is now. When those same participants in the *Feasibility Study*, *Ecosystem Study*, *Here, the Beat*, *Culture|Shift*, *Making Space* or the *Vancouver Music Strategy* are constantly facing the question of whether they will still be able to afford to live, work, and create in the City, the answer is too often no.

To take doubts one step further, it is also difficult to imagine how, regardless of good intentions to be radically inclusive, VIM House will meet the needs of musicians that do not adapt to City-sanctioned creative spaces, where the essence of their work is purposefully marginal and philosophically DIY, grassroots, non-commercial, non-professional or politically and socially disruptive. It's difficult to imagine underground musicians in niche genres and vital sub-cultures, marginal or otherwise, requiring a stamp of approval from an institution, performing at a music venue where noise bylaws and liquor licenses will be strictly enforced and surrounded by towers of middle and upper middle-class condominiums. Nevertheless, in 2014 the *Feasibility Study* articulated a common need and one potential piece of the solution, to ensure that *some* new music spaces will exist in Vancouver. Centralized, purpose-built, music spaces are a necessary part of addressing affordability challenges, but again, an inadequate in preserving the diversity of music culture for people across the whole city, particularly those that currently exist in the few remaining "affordable" spaces in and around the False Creek Flats.

#### **5.3.4. Vancouver Music Strategy: Staff Presentation to City Council**

Returning to the creative strategies specifically, on September 11, 2019, the Cultural Services Department presented *Culture|Shift*, *Making Space*, and the *Vancouver Music Strategy* to Vancouver City Council and a modestly filled council

chambers that included a number of representatives from different non-profit organizations, businesses, and participants from the engagement process. The emphasis from staff was on how the critical of a role the arts play in developing and sustaining a sense of belonging in the City and that leadership and ownership of space needs to be re-oriented towards and representative of the local arts community, specifically for BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and youth.

Following the staff presentation, numerous members of the public had the opportunity to reflect on the three integrated strategies. While I originally attended the event in person, direct quotes were retrieved by revisiting the recorded version found on the City of Vancouver's website. Megan O'Shea, from the Vancouver Economic Commission, spoke to the need for "activat[ing] the Downtown Eastside and the [False Creek] Flats", re-articulating the argument that the areas is not currently meeting its highest and best use, despite currently being the location of many of the last affordable creative workspaces for a significant number of artists and musicians in the city, as well as some of the few remaining commercially viable independent music venues (CoV, 2020f).

Many speakers from arts organizations praised the language around the prioritizing of space and equity in the plans, particularly for Indigenous and Black artists, musicians and organizations and for seeking ways to support the commercial music industry in Vancouver so that it can compete with Toronto, Montreal and other American cities (retain talent, promote music tourism, etc.).

One exchange between Councilor Swanson and South Asian festival producer, musician, and VMS Advisory Committee member Tarun Nayar, exemplified the playful, optimistic and solutions-oriented tone of much of the presentation. What stood out as problematic to Swanson was a bylaw that restricts dancing in restaurants. She asked, "is changing that rule something we should be doing to encourage musicians?", to which Nayar replied. "anything we can do to encourage more dancing is a good idea" (CoV, 2020f). This observation of a particularly annoying bylaw could lead to some positive outcome but still fails to address the core issues, and also ignores the practical limitations of non-compatible purposes, while still contending with noise and liquor laws.

Despite the playful tone of most of the presentation and public feedback, a number of speakers delivered a deeper set of critiques. Brenda Leadley, Executive Director for BC Alliance for Arts and Culture stated bluntly that the funding requested in the plans was insufficient and that increases were necessary to insure accessibility for all, not just the wealthy (CoV, 2020f). Similarly, former Manager of Special Events and Film in both Richmond and Vancouver, Sandy Swanigan echoed this call with “where’s the money?” (CoV, 2020f). She argued that there is a “real disconnect between the glory of the paradigm shift that is embedded in it and the amount of envisioning of how it will get lifted and delivered” (CoV, 2020f). The skepticism and experience of the two speakers is meaningful and represents a common public perception of local governments’ patchy track record for bold political statements and their timely, tangible outcomes.

Beyond insufficient funding, Brian McBay of 221A, consistent collaborator with City’s Cultural Infrastructure Development Team and a person of color, was critical of a lack of acknowledging the fundamental change necessary in the funding model for the arts in Canada. He acknowledged that he felt both obligated to support the actions outlined in the plans, but he was also blunt in his critique of a Eurocentric model which focuses on awarding prizes (funding, recognition) for excellence, which perpetuates elitism and re-produces socio-economic privilege. He was also critical of tying awards to groups in the form of reparations for a small group of artists and musicians from marginalized communities, as the symbolic gesture has been criticized as a move to proactively placate those are upset with the dominant class (Marcuse, 2014). This approach fails to acknowledge or support the significant role art *or music* plays (or could play) in peoples’ everyday lives and for those that have limited access to financial resources, regardless of their sexual or racial identity. McBay argues (CoV, 2020f),

Rather than art being a subcultural, European project that comes from a colonial past, we’re [221A] looking at moving art away from an awards model to redistribution to people that can’t afford to be here, that can’t take part in arts and culture here.

While not focusing specifically on the music community, McBay’s comments about arts funding in general is relevant and unfortunately lacking any significant representation in the *VMS*. Ensuring those from a lower socio-economic status have access to affordable and safe space is buried underneath commercial music success

stories, large corporate events, conflating the arts with tech and innovation, expanding middle and upper-class consumption habits, and limited financial awards, for a chosen few, as an act of reparations for historical injustices. To be clear, the disproportionate over-representation of BIPOC people that experience a lower-socio-economic status in Vancouver is then addressed inherently but directed towards those individuals and organizations that the need support the most.

McBay and 221A have been advocating for, and now operate independently, a City-owned art production space, Howe Street Studios, in Downtown Vancouver. In a news release by the City, McBay explained, “221A’s vision for the facility is to support the re-emergence of viable working spaces for artists within Vancouver’s downtown core, with a focus on artists who have traditionally been disadvantaged from access to public resources (CoV, 2019d). The emphasis is on disadvantaged and financial need rather than supporting explicitly equity-based funding only on gender, race or ethnicity which if not considered could hypothetically be awarded to the already financially and socially privileged BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people that make the most commodifiable art, doing little to narrow class divisions, incentivize deeper creativity and elevate subversive or marginalized voices at a *transformative* scale.

The 20 lucky tenants that were successful in being given access to affordable space at Howe Street Studios were assessed “on the basis of economic need, material suitability, as well as quality and contribution of the tenants’ artistic work in the field and the city”, which may or may not include specific identity or social purpose objectives (CoV, 2019d). While limited in how many artists the project provides space for relative to the need, the significance of this project is that the City owns the space, but 221A operates it independently. This model was the intended goal for VIM House, but as noted in **Section 5.4.3**, the Cultural Services Department was unsuccessful in negotiating public ownership of the property with the developer, leaving VIM House more vulnerable to modifying its original intent as time passes.

## Chapter 6.

### Conclusion

Vancouver has huge potential and it's going to face some really tough questions about what kind of city it wants to be going forward: a boutique city for the highest incomes? Or does it want to be a more inclusive, equitable city? (Gil Kelley, outgoing Chief Planner for the City of Vancouver, 2021)

The City of Vancouver's first music strategy sought, among numerous goals, to develop a new framework for supporting the commercial and non-profit music industries and increase the accessibility and affordability of publicly and privately owned spaces for *all* genres and identities, particularly for groups historically underrepresented in the commercial music industry. However, at its core, the strategy is intended to compliment parallel major redevelopments projects such as *North East False Creek Plan* and the *False Creek Flats Area Plan*, among others. Through the act of public engagement, centered around discussions of social equity and spatial justice, changes in cultural space infrastructure are justified as representative of the local music community's needs, with little acknowledgement of the City's capacity, jurisdiction, or lack of political will to address the root of the issues that lead to displacement, racial and gender disparities and economic inequality in the first place.

This thesis sought to answer the questions: *how does the Vancouver Music Strategy seek to reconcile the apparent contradictions of urban economic development and spatial justice that are embedded within it?* as well as two sub-questions: *who is being displaced in Vancouver's music ecosystem (and by whom)? and who was represented in framing the recommendations for the strategy?* In doing so, I provided context to understand the many challenges Vancouverites experience in accessing and sustaining affordable space to create, record, and perform *all* forms of music. However, my research focused more specifically on the perspective of a less-visible community of musicians and audiences that elude, consciously or unconsciously, the categories they must fit in to succeed in the commercial or non-profit music industries. It also considered economic barriers to their participation.



A majority of the data collection was conducted during the early stages of COVID-19 spreading around the world. This had a significant impact on both the research process and the prospects of any individual or organization ensuring the provision and preservation of music space in the near future. The data I collected included semi-structured interviews, music related planning documents that led to the development of the *VMS*, numerous media sources, two open letters, two neighbourhood plans (NEFC, FCFAP), as well as ethnographic research and reflections from my own personal experience as a musician and music consumer in Vancouver.

To address the research questions, I analyzed the data that influenced the strategy's priorities, with an emphasis on their space and social equity claims. I then contrasted that data with what I learned in the interviews, media sources, and the open letters. I focused on clarifying the status of music spaces in the City since 2017 and highlighted specific examples and reasons for their displacement; explanatory details missing in the *VMS*. I then compared the public engagement process in the development of the *VMS* with other commitments to public engagement, which presented challenges to the City's willingness to meaningful consult and implement inclusive city building practices when the stakes increase.

In its summary of community engagement process, the *VMS* states that it "is guided by community needs and values and reflect [sic] an ongoing commitment to ensuring that the many voices that comprise our city's diverse music ecosystem are reflected in the strategy's final recommendations" (*VMS*, 2019, 18). The stated commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity is laudable, as many in the music community would agree that this is the appropriate approach. On the other hand, disillusionment with the gap between what government says and what it does is common. Indeed, historical examples of aspirational words and underwhelming actions fuel ongoing skepticism. Mistrust with government is so high that in 2017, the Vancouver City Planning Commission published a paper called *Engagement for Real* which explored the need for the City to empower communities and build social resiliency, in a "city for all", *for real* this time (VCPC, 2017). Survey data from the *Vancouver Music Ecosystem Study* included responses from only 6.6% of people under the age of 25, which is a very significant gap in representation considering the topic, arguably highlighting their apathy towards a City-led music strategy (2017, 61).

The strategy's key findings, explicitly intended to reflect the voices of the historically marginalized (essentially everyone other than white, cis-gender men) were distilled to a high-level acknowledgment of broad issues but did so at the cost of accurately representing the anger, sadness, and seriousness of community and industry experiences, across the music ecosystem. It also bypassed the perpetually undervalued significance, of radically inclusive DIY and grassroots music spaces in local residents' lives and their influence on the greater music ecosystem. As was examined in previous sections, the approach to developing solutions is too often to 'explore further', to choose between cultural spaces, childcare spaces or social housing when negotiating CAC's or by seeking ways to promote a select few commercial BIPOC or LGBTQ+ artists rather than fundamentally changing or advocating for fundamental changes related to core issues.

The findings in this research project highlight a disconnection between the City's broader economic development goals and the many residents that feel that the city's musical backbone is at risk of disappearing. That is to say, that urban economic development and spatial justice are not being sufficiently reconciled, despite a righteous appeal to social equity for selected beneficiaries and the apparent consensus found in the *VMS*. The few positive examples of new purpose-built music spaces faced (and still face) significant hurdles that increased cost, do not ensure ongoing accessibility, and may only serve those from a more socially and financially privileged background, which I argue, is an inadequate response to compensating for the spaces that have been lost.

The empirical evidence that I collected suggests that ideas, suggestions, and experiences from underrepresented individuals, groups, and organizations shared throughout numerous engagement processes continue to be sanitized. They are re-fabricated into a narrative that minimizes music's deeper social and cultural purpose to that of supporting grander visions of urban economic re-development in specific, already arts-rich areas of the city, while providing few and limited tangible pathways to accomplishing overly aspirational social development goals.

This thesis project brought together three intersecting literatures: Right to the City, Music Space and Culture, and Creative Cities. I combined these discussions to better understand The City of Vancouver's approach to preserving and proving music spaces while reconciling spatial injustice in a highly competitive property market, that

privileges 'highest and best use' of land. This combination bolstered this examination of the complex relationships between seeking to plan culture, the growth of the creative economy and the unequal distribution of opportunities and consequences of these pursuits.

Of course, acknowledging that there is an issue is the first step to developing solutions and the *VMS* was perhaps only ever intended to be a brief, high level communicative tool to highlight well-known issues for the uninformed, but none of the key findings should come as surprise to anyone responsible for arts and culture in local government if they've been listening to community advocates from previous engagement processes regarding displacement and increasing unaffordability of cultural spaces over the last 15 years. Perhaps it is their voices, with an added emphasis on economic justice, that needs to be amplified at City hall, above the inevitability of growth. For many, a sense of belonging, community cohesiveness, socio-economic diversity, and the sound of Vancouver is at stake.

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## **Appendix.**

### **Sample questions for semi-structured interviews**

#### **Introduction**

- 1) What is a Music City?
- 2) Why is space so important?
- 3) How did you become involved in the local music community? What are some of your roles and experiences?

#### **Arts-led strategic planning and collaboration**

- 4) How have you engaged with the City of Vancouver regarding access to independent or DIY rehearsal, recording or performance spaces?
- 5) How do think your engagement has impacted strategic plans, such the Vancouver Music Strategy or Making Space for Arts and Culture, or Culture Shift?
- 6) What are some of the competing interests within the Vancouver music ecosystem?

#### **City Branding Initiatives**

- 8) How do outward-facing, music specific, city branding initiatives improve or constrain access to affordable creation, production and performance spaces?
- 9) Who do you think is excluded or absent in these initiatives?

#### **Independent and DIY Spaces**

- 10) Who are the key players involved with Independent or DIY music spaces?
- 11) Why should non-commercial music creation, production and performance spaces be preserved or provided by the City?

12) Where should they be located in the city?

### **COVID**

13) What impact could the pandemic have on the sustainability of independent or DIY music spaces?