

Written by Allan Besselink  
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<p><a title="The Live Music Capitol of the World"

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As the story goes in Aesop's Fables, there was a goose that laid a golden egg every day. The owners of the goose, believing that the golden eggs were due to some internal lump of gold, killed the goose. Their short-sighted desire for gold removed the capacity to produce the golden eggs in the first place. In Austin, we have our own musical golden goose, and we're slowly but steadily killing it.

Music put Austin on the map, plain and simple. Venues such as the Vulcan Gas Company, Soap Creek Saloon, Rome Inn, Armadillo World Headquarters, Antone's, Liberty Lunch, Continental Club, Saxon Pub, the Back Room, and La Zona Rosa - among many others - became the lifeblood for Austin music. Austin City Limits was magical when it was housed in a small studio on the University of Texas campus. So was South by Southwest, back in the days when the 400 or so bands that played were unsigned, a wristband was \$25, and you could catch 15 over several nights. Of course, there were also the countless dive bars - Joe's Generic Bar and the Black Cat Lounge, to name just a couple - that always had better music on a Tuesday night than most cities have in a month full of weekends.

Musicians would flock to Austin to be a part of the vibrant music scene. Many sacrificed economics just to be immersed in a culture that brought so many different genres of music together to create a musical stew of epic proportions. I like to call it Austin music. Good luck in defining the blend of singer-songwriters, cosmic cowboys, and guitar virtuosos. However, it was this melding of influences that brought me here in 1990, and it is why I remain so passionate about it now. Being able to hang out in small, intimate venues with world-class musicians every night of the week is otherworldly.

Over the years, music was woven into the fabric of the community, a part of the grand scheme of life here, one of the pillars of Keep Austin Weird. This great music city - a function of great musicians and venues to support those musicians - formally became The Live Music Capital of the World in 1991. That's when the City of Austin adopted the moniker. Austin has morphed into many different things since the late nineties. Sure, the University of Texas has always brought people to Austin, many of whom fall in love with it and never leave. However, in the late nineties, I remember there was a subtle but noticeable shift in vibe. More and more people started flocking to Austin. Now, it is to the tune of more than 150 people every day. With the influx of new residents needing homes and infrastructure, the City of Austin and the developers have lost sight of the golden goose.

Music. Our golden goose. Many may argue that the demise of Austin began when the Armadillo closed on December 31, 1980. I don't tend to be quite so fatalistic, but I am not far removed. I would be lying if I didn't say that the writing was on the wall, for me at least, when Liberty Lunch closed in 1999. In true Austin fashion, Liberty Lunch had some of the steel beams from the Armadillo demolition. I spent my share of nights at the Lunch, a club that was voted Best Club for 10 consecutive years, a club that was the antithesis of all that Austin has become now. Live music establishments of all shapes and sizes are falling by the wayside in Austin. Every day, it is another club going under because rent is going up or the space is being sold or renovated or torn down and re-developed. How do you promote being the "Live Music Capital of the World" when your music scene is slowly being strangled by developers? It is almost hypocritical to tout Austin in that way, but in the meantime push musicians and club owners further to the fringes of musical survival. Musicians can barely earn a living here anymore (if they ever really could in the first

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place, which is also a hotly debated topic), and the cost of living has forced many into bedroom communities and far beyond.

Now don't get me wrong. Austin is still one of the coolest, funkiest places in the country. I appreciate the value of growth, yes, and I appreciate the influx of cultural events and global presence. That's all great. But let's face it, if it starts to look like Dallas and sounds like Dallas and has traffic like Dallas then just how weird is it anymore?

Austin's musical ecosystem needs our support. Austin musicians are some of the finest in any genre worldwide, and our venues are known internationally. If you lose the music, you most certainly lose the vibe that put Austin on the map in the first place. While organizations like the Health Alliance for Austin Musicians (HAAM) and the SIMS Foundation do tremendous work, it is ultimately a patchwork approach. The City of Austin needs a clear, long-term plan that embraces all that makes Austin the Live Music Capital of the World - musicians and venues alike - and does justice to it.

Feed the goose, don't strangle it. Before it's too late - if it isn't already.

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