

**“The Other Member of the Band”:
The Impact of Physical Space on Musical
Performance Within a Cambridge Bar**

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Abstract

Toad is a small Cambridge bar located next to Christopher's Restaurant in Porter Square. For over twenty years, the bar has offered live music to an audience that has been steadfastly loyal, despite the limited space of the bar's interior. In this thesis, I investigate how that physical space, as well as the audio system and acoustics in the bar, impact both the performance of bands and the reception of their audience. Drawing from the accounts of musicians and listeners who have been immersed in this space for years, I argue that the alternating feelings of intimacy and confinement within this bar causes participants to personify its space in unique ways, including as "another member of the band." This perception allows for performers to enter a kind of test of their performance abilities that, if accomplished, facilitates musical growth.

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For the purposes of anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all participants who played a role in this field research.

Introduction

The first time I visited Toad—a small Cambridge music bar located in Porter Square—a friend and I were turned away. The bar was filled to capacity. We were eventually allowed in, but the lack of space prevented us from even navigating the bar to find any opening for us to sit or stand. We were relegated to standing near the entrance, about as far from the band as possible. A year later, a similar experience occurred, only this time the man at the door snuck my group in after we promised to force our way as far as we could into the bar and towards the stage, so as not to block the entrance.

It is difficult to say which location is preferable. If you are sitting near the stage, you are directly under the system speakers. And I learned from talking to performers that if it's a busy night and the crowd is chatty, the musicians are forced to turn the sound up in order to be heard. Yet despite this potential for an aural onslaught, there is something extraordinary about this venue. It became apparent to me over time that Toad is extremely popular and attracts loyal attendees on a regular basis. What exactly set it apart from other popular venues in the Cambridge area?

I met and interviewed Evan, a member of the managerial staff, not long after my first visit to the bar. In the course of our talk, I asked him how his band first came to be. As Evan described it, two bands performed at Toad one night,

and then combined for an impromptu jam session when the headlining performer was a no-show:

“I took some brushes and played against the wall. He [the guitarist and singer] played guitar. And we just went around, we just sang songs. Like, whatever we could think of. And within five minutes—the place was packed—people that were seated at the bar actually turned around and sat on the bar, people from the back of the room came forward. You could have heard a pin drop. And everyone was like—I remember sitting down at the table thinking, people are so high, they’re sort of piled in around us, it was this like intimate, unbelievable moment, and connectedness to an audience. Music kind of at its purest.”

In addition to the physical space to a performance, I am interested in the concept of musical space as a “scene,” within which audiences and musicians can immerse themselves, and through which an identity is strengthened. From what I observed in the course of collecting data, I am specifically interested in what can happen when musicians in that space play genres that do not align neatly with the scene’s attributes.

Ultimately, my most pressing concern is how physical space affects both performance and reception, and whether it always plays a role. This thesis concerns a location where there are fewer barriers—both physical and subconscious—between the musician and listener. I address how this factor impacts performance and reception at this particular bar, while also contrasting it

with musician and audience behavior in other music bars elsewhere in the Cambridge and Somerville area.

Toad had first been highly recommended to me by a friend a year earlier, shortly after I moved to Boston (spring 2014). This endorsement was based purely on our mutual interest in live music, rather than on any academic research. I was told that it was a quirky location that featured high-quality roots-rock/Americana music every night of the week. They never had a cover charge. Over the next year, I visited other music venues in the Cambridge-Somerville area, but only glanced in the windows at Toad when passing by on the street.

In the course of formulating a topic for this master's thesis, the notion had been placed in my head to pursue an ethnography of a musical venue. I settled on Toad, admittedly for the convenience of free music every night, but also because of the reputation it had cultivated as a tiny space with high-quality music.

The space in Toad was unlike any other clubs I had experienced. It was uncomfortably crowded for musicians and listeners alike. The first couple of visits, I was forced by the little available space to either stand at the back or sit at the bar near the entrance—the latter area, I later learned, being a kind of marked territory for the bar's most frequent visitors.

The first band I observed featured four stringed instruments and no drummer. Consequently, all four musicians were able to stand on the corner stage, out of the way of the packed crowd. And yet to the eyes of a spectator

new to the location, the stage did not exactly look comfortable, particularly when containing a double bass. When I first observed a band featuring a drummer, I learned that this necessitates that half the band be relegated to the floor either in front or to the side of the stage. Additionally, I soon began bringing earplugs on every visit. During sets by a full band, sitting anywhere except at the back near the entrance puts one at risk for hearing damage.

Most intriguing about this arrangement was that it was apparently not unpleasant for most participants. It was fascinating to observe how musicians and customers occupied and engaged in the space, and what role this played in fostering a sense of intimacy during a musical performance. I also saw performances that did not draw packed crowds, but which generated an equally curious response among those in attendance. During sets by certain performers, when turnout was not as stifling as on other nights, customers could enjoy a comforting environment that differed in nuanced ways from other bars in the area. It was after hearing Evan's anecdote that I actively pursued studying how musical performance and audience reception are influenced by the physical space in which they occur, with the bar Toad as the specific field site of interest.

In my interviews with audience members, I learned of their fondness for the bar, foremost for always delivering satisfying music. However, I also observed how participant stalked ambivalently about what they perceived to be obstacles or shortcomings intrinsic to the Toad experience. Depending on to whom I spoke, this varied among such factors as the limited space; the kind of audience reception some of the musicians receive for the music they choose to

play; the sound system; and the kind of clientele turnout on a given night.

Attending a night of music at this bar was not as pleasant as I had initially been led to believe.

Over time, I supplemented these perspectives with trips to other music venues in Cambridge and Somerville. On these visits, I saw how the musicians avail themselves of the space within each bar, and learned how some of them compare the performative experience at these locations to that at Toad. This was especially of interest when I visited other bars—namely, The Plough & Stars and Bull McCabe’s—whose interiors are laid out similarly to the one in Toad. On some visits elsewhere, I participated in fascinating—and in some cases, hilarious—phenomena comparable to Evan’s story, including a brass band performance at The Lizard Lounge that turned into a musician-and-audience procession throughout the bar and upstairs to the adjoining restaurant, Cambridge Common. Such experiences offered further insight into how a given physical space allows for an unusual and compelling musical performance, and whether some locations are better equipped than others to facilitate specific phenomena like that observed at Toad or The Lizard.

I come to this study with a set of questions to address. Chief among them is, what participants gain or lose from a musical experience, based on which venue they are visiting. Among the factors contributing to the performance and reception of live music, the significance of the performance site’s physical space is not always emphasized. As I observed within Toad and other bars around the area, certain forms of music and performance techniques lend themselves to

some environments better than others. Toad is a location whose physical space plays an integral role in how live music will unfold, and how listeners will receive it.

Chapter One: Theorizing Space

This thesis explores how physical space of a venue is capable of influencing both a live musical performance and the reception of the audience. I will argue that in addition to the impact of the music itself, the greater experience is shaped by the intersection of performers, audience, and the space they occupy. Using the data collected from fieldwork and the application of theory concerning spatial concepts, I examine how repeated immersion within a physical space creates among participants a liminal process. I cite Turner's usage of this concept to emphasize that immersion in Toad is a trial in which the participant begins as a "blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status."¹ This transitional process of interacting with the music and space begets musical identity for listener and performer, as well as artistic growth for the latter.

Spatial Analogies Applied to Boston Bars—Milano

Anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have been aware of the influence of performance space on musical experience. Before addressing how space has been conceptualized within these and other disciplines, I cite music critic Brett Milano, whose book *The Sound of Our Town* provides insight into the diverse roles that physical space in a variety of Boston bars has played in crafting the musical experience.

¹ Victor Turner. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca: Cornell University

Milano's book predominantly examines the ever-changing Boston rock scene since the 1960s. In one passage, he describes how record label executives crafted this musical space out of a desire to recreate the college student scene at Berkeley. Milano quotes Bruce Arnold, the leader of Worcester-based folk-rock band Orpheus, who explains that Boston—"a college town with a young population, plus the ragtag bunch of kids you had in Cambridge"—had more potential for recreating the success of the West Coast music scene than a city like New York, which had more demographics to navigate than simply the college youth.²

Milano describes how various Boston bars were utilized and perceived by participants. While his purpose is not to offer extended analysis of this subject, he does frequently share diverse analogies of how audiences have occupied the spaces of individual bars since the '60s. Among them was the Man Ray, which he describes as catering during the 1990s to "a goth contingent, elegant vampire types who danced to dark-toned electronic music,"³ as well as featuring a BDSM theme. This gives an inkling of the various scenes featured in a city like Boston in the past and present, as well as the specifics of the physical and social space that participants occupied.

In talking about the music club scene in the 1980s, Milano describe a typical spatial layout: "a dark open room, a bar, a makeshift dressing room, a load of black leather and t-shirts..."⁴ Except for the attire, this description could

² Brett Milano. *The Sound of Our Town: A History of Boston Rock & Roll*. Beverly: Commonwealth Editions, 2007. 49.

³ Milano, *The Sound of Our Town*. 220.

⁴ Milano, *The Sound of Our Town*. 142.

broadly be compared to that of Toad, as could some of Milano's analogies for how audiences perceived such a space. We see this in his vivid description of The Channel:

"... The eighties equivalent of those wide-open dance halls on the beaches in the sixties: instead of an urban side street, the picture windows looked out onto Fort Point Channel. If you'd had a couple drinks and the band was great, you could be forgiven for thinking you were looking out at some seaside resort, instead of an unswimmable stretch of dirty Boston Harbor water."⁵

Similarly, he describes how the bar Cantone's "felt less like a fallout shelter and more like somebody's unintended living room (complete with hot subs that were sold at all hours during shows)."⁶

This stance of reimagining and reinterpreting what one might perceive to be a less-than-ideal space is integral to how participants occupy Toad. This chapter focuses on how scholars of music, sociology, anthropology, and other academic disciplines have developed multiple concepts of space, with particular emphasis on the physical, social, and spiritual. These theories allow us to observe what role the bar itself has to play in the musical experience.

Defining and Applying "Space"—David Harvey

In my study, two different topics pertaining to space will be under discussion: the physical space of a building interior; and the social space cultivated by a community of people with similar interests/vocations. The former

⁵ Milano. *The Sound of Our Town*. 143.

⁶ Milano. *The Sound of Our Town*. 98.

is especially integral to this thesis, though the latter will come up when discussing Toad's impact on patrons and musicians in the Cambridge music scene.

Responding to the omission of the term "space" in Raymond Williams' foundational cultural studies text, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, David Harvey wrote "Space as a Keyword" for the Marx and Philosophy Conference in London, in 2004. Drawing from his own and others' prior work on the subject, Harvey observes that there are multiple frameworks from which one can theorize about space. Three that he himself identifies are "absolute", "relative," and "relational." Citing Leibniz, Harvey explains that relational space is regarded "as being contained in objects in the sense that an object can be said to exist only insofar as it contains and represents within itself relationships to other objects."⁷ As will be addressed repeatedly, this notion is a recurring theme, as the space within Toad resonates with participants in a variety of ways. In a very real sense, that space *does* exist for some participants, who conceive of having a relationship with it like one would with another living person such as a colleague—a complicated, but productive and gratifying relationship.

Absolute Space

Harvey contrasts relational with absolute space, the latter being a "fixed... pre-existing and immovable grid" that can be measured.⁸ As he explains, this

⁷ David Harvey. "Space As A Keyword." (Presented at the Marx and Philosophy Conference, Institution of Education, London, May 29, 2004). 2. Accessed at: <http://frontdeskapparatus.com/files/harvey2004.pdf>

⁸ Harvey. "Space As A Keyword." 2.

concept is utilized to give a location—such as a private building establishment or a state formed by boundary lines—an identity.

This is relevant when considering the history of Toad as an independent music venue, rather than as an extension of a larger business establishment that people primarily visit to dine out rather than to hear music. Once the space was purchased by the owner of the restaurant next door, it went through a transitional period where it was an extension of that restaurant, before becoming its own independent establishment. (A slightly more detailed history is included in the second chapter). This contrast between the room's status as an extension of the restaurant and as a separate venue, albeit one still owned by Christopher's, gives insight into its transitional state as a fully realized location with defining components such as a bar and stage, and whose foremost draw is music rather than food. Its identity as an absolute space is enforced not only by the restricting of what was once passage to and from Christopher's, but also of the hiring of staff at the front door, both to manage underage entry and prevent overcrowding. This last addition became a necessity once, as interviewees fondly acknowledged to me, the bar cultivated a reputation for consistently offering quality musical performances, and never at a charge.

Relative and Relational Space

The idea that absolute space is a thing that can be measured and calculated, transitions into the next concept of relative space. Citing Einstein, Harvey postulates that all forms of measurement depend on the subjective

perception of the observer. Using the example of physically traveling from one location to another within an absolute space, he points out that multiple other “maps of relative locations” can be created when taking into account such factors as cost, time, and mode of transportation.⁹

Such factors arise when exploring the motivations of Toad’s customers. Of particular interest are Toad’s close proximity to universities—especially Lesley—and the convenience of patrons never being charged a cover. Additionally, several interviewees highlighted the fact that, once the bars in nearby Davis Square (including fellow folk music bar The Burren) close for the night, patrons gravitate to Porter Square and Toad in order to continue the festivities. This is a map of a relative location like Harvey writes about. The fact that customers can walk to Toad from their locations of origin is significant when highlighting spatial proximity.

Conversely, spatial distance is a significant factor for many of the participants at Toad. Integral to this is that some of the musicians, including ones who perform there on a weekly basis, do not live in the immediate area and are forced to travel in order to keep performing there. Using this “relative” concept illustrates that the dynamic between space and participant is much more complicated than individuals initially let on. The distance is, in fact, trying on some of the musicians.

Elaborating on his explanation from *Social Justice and the City*, Harvey defines relational space as holding that “there is no such thing as space outside

⁹ Harvey. “Space As A Keyword.” 3.

of the processes that define it. Processes do not occur *in* space but define their own spatial frame. The concept of space is embedded in or internal to process.”¹⁰ In comparing how one would perceive a house as an absolute, relative, and relational space, Harvey explains that relationality considers “global property markets, changing interest rates, climatic change, the sense of what is or is not a historic building, *and its significance as a place of personal and collective memories, sentimental attachments, and the like.*”¹¹ The last element is especially relevant when illustrating the significance of a musical venue to its participants. The space resonates for its audience because of their historical and sentimental attachments to it. In subsequent passage, I will illustrate further what about Toad is appealing and important to participants beyond the conveniences of free live music.

Lefebvre

A tripartite theory of space exists across the social sciences, as sociologist in Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991) maps space in a manner similar to Harvey. Lefebvre’s concepts include material space, the representation of space, and representational space.

In addition to providing a springboard for Harvey’s later theory, Lefebvre work provides us a useful definition of social space. He identifies a number of ways space is conceptualized and utilized beyond its materiality alone. Citing as an example the usage of the word to indicate the area of expertise of a craftsman

¹⁰ Harvey. “Space As A Keyword.” 4.

¹¹ Harvey. “Space As A Keyword.” 9.

or artist, he says: “Specialized works keep their audience abreast of all sorts of equality specialized spaces: leisure, work, play, transportation, public facilities- all are spoken of in spatial terms... We are thus confronted by an indefinite multitude of spaces, each one piled upon, or perhaps contained within, the next...”¹²

The notion of “space” referring to a specialty is intriguing when considering how we can view the various participants within Toad: musicians, staff, and audience members. Everyone who visits the bar has a perspective. But is it a necessity to establish a hierarchy determining whose viewpoint takes precedence in offering insight into performance phenomena here? I argue against this by citing Christopher Small’s coining of the term “musicking,” coined for the purpose of conceptualizing music as an act rather than a tangible thing. More to the point, Small argues that defining music as an activity illustrates that all participants, including listeners, have significant roles to play in receiving and responding to the music.¹³ This minimizes the notion that musicians are the only ones whose observation of a musical subject is relevant.

Sacred Space

Musical and anthropological scholars alike have written of the sacredness inherent in the concept of space. Small, Lefebvre, and others have drawn intriguing comparisons between churches and music venues, both for the

¹² Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald-Nicholson Smith. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991. 8.

¹³ Christopher Small. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998. 9.

atmosphere cultivated by the interior itself and for the fulfillment experienced by participants during a ceremonial occasion.

Lefebvre writes that representations of space during the Middle Ages were informed by Ptolemy and other ancient Greek geographers and astrologers, particularly with the image of the earth as the “fixed sphere within a finite space,” with heaven above it and hell below it.¹⁴ Representational spaces made for a singular focal point in a physical location. Lefebvre explains that medieval spatial practice encompassed and not only these sacred locations, such as a village church or a graveyard, but the “network of local roads” that led to these spiritual destinations as well.¹⁵

Lefebvre further explains that these were interpreted to represent cosmological routes, which were themselves associated with the divine path of the human spirit. He cites Albertus Magnus’ explanation of astrological signs corresponding to various body parts in order to show how similar analogies were historically applied to the human anatomy.¹⁶ This highlights the connection between embodiment and the experience of space. This idea of a space representing a spiritual journey parallels Harvey’s examination of traveling from one location to another within an absolute space. Arguably, the gravitation of patrons to the “fixed sphere” of Toad after Davis Square bars have closed for the night is a rite of passage at the end of the journey.

¹⁴ Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. 45.

¹⁵ Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. 45.

¹⁶ Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. 45-6.

Christopher Small has also written extensively about sacred space, and specifically how this concept can be applied to an evening performance at a concert hall. Small draws comparisons between a musical setting such as this, and a church service. Specifically, he compares the traditions that have changed little in the respective history of both spaces—the “stylized gestures” and the attire of the participants—emphasizing that “musicians, like priests, may come and go, but the music, like the liturgy, goes on forever.”¹⁷ Making such comparisons fortifies Small’s stance that classical musicians are perceived to fulfill a role dedicated to the sacred and divine, akin to the vocation of a priest.

Small’s perception of a concert hall as a church-like institution has particular relevance to a rock music venue like Toad, with the musicians standing in for priests and the attendees, the congregation (and occasionally the choir). Such a perspective sheds further light on what kind of role each participant fulfills; why specific phenomena occurs in this setting; and how we can interpret it through the lens of spiritual experience.

Such correlations between music and spirituality have been presented and problematized before: the idea of music offering “peace of mind, satisfaction, [and] direction,” as Jimi Hendrix put it when describing his belief in “Electric Church” on *The Dick Cavett Show*. Hendrix further alluded to a desire for his live performance to resonate with audiences in their “soul[s],” rather than in their eardrums. While scholars have not necessarily utilized the same vocabulary when analyzing how music and sound are capable of affecting the body, they

¹⁷ Small. *Musicking*. 66.

have touched on how sonic vibrations impact the body, and tied it to music's perceived capability to heal and facilitate a meditative, contemplative state of mind.

From this, we can infer that participants associate sacredness with live music not only because of the physical space of a venue, but because of aural vibrations and how they resonate with listeners. In order to understand the unique way that sound and space complement each other, I cite Andrew Eisenberg's description of nonspatial sound as "vibrating everywhere and nowhere."¹⁸ He observes that this concept is associated with mysticism, and that religious communities have attempted to achieve it through prayer and meditation. Such an experience has also been attempted through electroacoustics, in which "amplified sound and close proximity..." are used to "invade the body, dissolving the subject." Using Blesser and Salter's coined term "earcon," Eisenberg attaches significance to the architectural space of a grand cathedral for its "despatializing reverberations."¹⁹

The idea of sound invading the body is especially significant in the case of Toad, considering the venue's transition to a musical space independent of a larger dining establishment, whereupon it became impossible to avoid the music being played. Prior to Toad's inception as a venue separate from Christopher's, customers at the restaurant were free to go back and forth between both rooms as they pleased. If audience members grew tired of the music, there was space to escape it, with the invitation to return. With the establishment of Toad as a

¹⁸ Andrew Eisenberg. "Space." *Keywords in Sound*, Ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2015. 193.

¹⁹ Eisenberg. "Space." 193-4.

separate bar and the incorporation of a PA system, also came the restriction of using the side doors to navigate between the two locations.

Suddenly, attendees were welcome to music much greater in volume and less space to occupy while experiencing those sounds. With these new boundaries in place, a participant was either a customer at Toad or Christopher's but not both simultaneously, at least not like before. Also with this arrangement, there was virtually no way to avoid the music. If the volume became overbearing, the only potential respites would be a trip to the bathroom (itself a hurdle, as there is usually at least one musician playing in front of the door to the back area) or outside for a cigarette (also problematic on nights when the bar is filled to capacity and there is a line at the entrance).

As trying as this is, both musicians and audience members keep returning to Toad. Both groups of participants have had to develop strategies and rationale for navigating and responding to this space.

Ritual, Family, and Community

The concept of ritual helps illuminate the way patrons and musicians utilize the space of Toad. Christopher Small's analysis of ritual proves useful here. Small notes that in modern times the word "ritual" is associated with actions or customs that have been repeated for such a substantial length of time that they no longer have significant impact on the listener. He quickly refutes this, saying that ritual is never meaningless.²⁰

²⁰ Small. *Musicking*. 94.

This aspect of ritual is intriguing when coupled with Williams' passage on defining the keyword "family," which he explains is historically associated with the term "familiar." He associates the latter term with that which is "habitual" or which one is "used to," but additionally applies to "terms of friendship or intimate with someone."²¹ The term could be applied to people sharing a household or some other facility together. This is also relevant when considering what the aesthetic experience at Toad means to audience members, some of whom shared that they think of the bar as a living room or other extension of one's home life.

Additionally, I argue that the bar fosters a "community," of which Williams also examines the historical usage and meaning. Drawing attention to its connection to "commune," he writes that it had been used to refer to "experiments in an alternative kind of group-living."²² He also argues that it is used to refer to various kinds of a set of relationships, and that it stands out among other words used to refer to a gathering of people (such as "state," "society," etc.) for its lack of negative connotations.

These concepts can be applied to the musical and social experience at Toad. Resident musicians express conflicting viewpoints about the "routine" of performing at such a location on a regular or semi-regular basis. Some, I learned, desire to perform somewhere else weekly. Conversely, musicians also demonstrate genuine pleasure in occupying this musical space, both while they are performing and afterwards when they stay to converse with the listeners who come to hear them every week. Through repeated immersion in this space,

²¹ Raymond Williams. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983. 131.

²² Williams. *Keywords*. 75.

camaraderie is fostered among both performers and listeners, despite ambivalent feelings about the space. This degree of comfort is fostered by the space at Toad, in part because of the musical experience but also because of the physical space, which various participants strongly associate with the intimacy of home.

Affect and Acoustics

Many musicians expressed frustration with the sound system and acoustics in the venue, highlighting how this impacts a performance. Some shared remarkable perspectives that have been shaped by participating in the performance space at Toad, perspectives that do not ascribe to conventions of the “physical world,” to use Benjamin Steege’s term. As one musician recounted to me, he has become so immersed in his interactions with the space at Toad that he has come to personify the bar as an individual that “breathes,” and with whom a participant must negotiate and acclimate oneself to in order for a musical performance to succeed.

Such a way of perceiving the space at Toad is shaped not only by the physical space, but also by the acoustics within this setting. I find the work of ethnomusicologists Harris Berger and Gerard Behague helpful in substantiating how the atmosphere of a setting shapes a performance. Berger recounts the fieldwork he conducted following hard rock, heavy metal, and jazz musicians, and compares how such performers incorporate improvisation into a performance. He uses the expression “entrance into the music” to describe the

“flow of sound phenomena”²³ that—according to some of the musicians he worked with—occurs in an intense and unique live performance akin to the one at Toad described in the introduction of this thesis. In Behague’s collection of case studies *Performance Practice*, Philip Schuyler maintains that the musician’s “selective emphasis of one aspect or another” in any given musical performance depends on their sensorial intuition of what is at work in the given performance space. Two things specifically influence their actions: the “physical ambience” of the location, and the behavior of the audience.²⁴

More directly pertaining to the acoustics of a given space, in *Keywords in Sound*, music scholar Benjamin Steege defines “acoustics” by working back: defining “physics” as “a way of knowing about the [physical] world.”²⁵ Similarly, acoustics is said to be a way of knowing about sound and bringing it into focus. This is what some musicians performing at Toad strive to accomplish: intuiting how sound and space interact at the bar, and how they can adapt themselves to it in order to give what they deem to be a successful show.

In addition to the physical space and sound, the ritual of rehearsal is a factor to be taken into account when considering how affect occurs in a performance space. Significant to this analysis is the fact that some bands that regularly perform at Toad are unable to meet for rehearsal beforehand. Rather than this being a hindrance, some of them highlighted how important the

²³ Harris Berger. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999. 154.

²⁴ Philip D. Schuyler. “Berber Professional Musicians in Performance.” *Performance Practice: Ethnomusicological Perspectives*, ed. Gerard Behague. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1984. 135.

²⁵ Benjamin Steege. “Acoustics.” *Keywords in Sound*. 22.

“avoidance of [self] reflection”²⁶ is to them. This adds another layer to the musical experience: the fact that they are in effect rehearsing the music for the first time when playing at Toad, and finding out how they themselves, as well as the audience, will receive their performance. The combination of these elements—performing unrehearsed material with a challenging sound system—creates a musical event that is demanding of, and captivating for, its participants.

Audience

Drawing both from my observations of the dynamic within Toad and from literature that examines the audience’s role in live music, I posit that the listeners and their reception of the music are as integral to the overall experience as the music itself. Writing about music and trance, Rouget acknowledges that music has the potential to have a profound “sensorial modification in [the listener’s] awareness of being.”²⁷ However, he also takes the stance that the musical experience is more intense for the musician than it is for the listener, justifying this by preceding it with listing the physiological sensations felt when singing or playing an instrument. For this reason, he advocates distinguishing “act[ing]” music from “undergoing” music.²⁸

Christopher Small takes a similar viewpoint of defining music as an action, referred to as “musicking”: “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by

²⁶ Berger, Harris. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*. 153.

²⁷ Rouget, Gilbert. *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations Between Music and Possession*, trans. Brunhilde Biebuyck. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. 120.

²⁸ Rouget. *Music and Trance*. 120.

providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing... even to Muzak in an elevator is to music.”²⁹ In this way, Small does not downplay the significance of the listener’s role. Instead, Small indicates that everyone in a performance space has a role to play in cultivating musical phenomena, and how an audience both contributes to and is fulfilled by the experience.

Taking a similar stance of emphasizing audience involvement rather than downplaying it, I suggest that phenomena, such as are alluded to by Small, are manifested through combined participation of musician and listener in Toad and other venues in the Cambridge-Somerville area. This includes occurrences not unlike the one recounted to me and featured in the introduction of this thesis, of a band whose spontaneous formation and subsequent success was facilitated by the space at Toad, and by the unique reception of its audience.

Behavior

Essential to this thesis is not only how participants feel about Toad, but also how it affects them: how they externally respond to music and other stimuli within this space. I draw again from Williams in order to define the term “behavior.” As with the other terms, he gives a historical context as to the ways the word has evolved over time. He cites as the most important change in its usage, “neutral application of the term, without any moral implications, to

²⁹ Small. *Musicking*. 9.

describe ways in which someone or something acts (reacts) in some specific situation.”³⁰

Essential to this thesis is Williams’ further observation that behavior consists of an organism’s response to the environment in which it is situated. He also writes of the practice of treating human systems “as if they were ‘natural’ or objective stimuli, to which *responses* can be graded as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ or ‘deviant.’”³¹ Using such terminology will demonstrate the dynamics of participants in the music space. By discussing behavioral patterns in subsequent chapters, I will cultivate a compelling portrait of the dynamics within a music space.

This allows for demonstration of unusual experiences and phenomena, some of which were relayed to me and some of which I witnessed personally. There are behavioral patterns that would be deemed normal in a given musical setting, and others that would be viewed unfavorably by those immersed in that setting. This thesis illustrates that physical space is a critical factor when determining what behavior, both of performers and audience, is conducive to the musical setting of Toad.

Boundaries between Musician and Listener

In addition to the spatial boundaries between Toad and Christopher’s, I examine the physical and psychological boundaries between performers and audience members, and how the interactions between participants in Toad differ

³⁰ Williams. *Keywords*. 44.

³¹ Williams. *Keywords*. 45.

from within other settings. I draw further from the case studies in *Performance Practice*.

Based on field research, Schuyler argues that profound commercialization in a musical setting can contribute directly to a “perfunctory” performance with, among other things, musicians being out of tune with each other.³² He observes that performances are far more likely to be flawed, and to receive hostile receptions, in a commercial establishment than in a private party, and that such features can contribute to and enhance each other in a cyclical pattern. Additionally, Schuyler argues that a bond is broken between the musician and spectator when a middleman, or “entrepreneur,” accepts the money from the attendee and pays the musician.³³

Responding to the then-recent phenomena in India of public concerts and mass audiences, Bonnie Wade similarly shared an intriguing perspective on the “impersonal” audience-performer relationship, separated by the performer being placed “up there” on the stage.

“When there is a reciprocal one-to-one relationship between patron and client, as in traditional relationship, and each enhances the other in some way (livelihood for status or ritual achievement as well as pleasure), the patronage is a personal one. When groups consisting of unrelated individuals (such as the mass audience) become the sponsor, the patronage is less personal, less individually

³² Schuyler. “Berber Professional Musicians in Performance.” 122.

³³ Schuyler. “Berber Professional Musicians in Performance.” 120.

*reciprocal, and the reasons for attainment of any status are likely to be somewhat different.*³⁴

Two points from Schuyler and Wade's observations are integral to this analysis. First is the exchange of money. When any person familiar with Toad is asked about its appeal, they will emphasize the fact that they never have to pay. Admittedly, my initial decision to conduct fieldwork at Toad was partially motivated by this convenience as opposed to other music bars in the surrounding area that typically charge covers.

Naturally, the lack of *any* financial transaction for entry to Toad would garner gratitude among customers for the live music they get for free. However, this raises the question of whether a reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship like the one Wade describes is still possible if the musicians are not financially compensated to an extent that they deem fair. I argue that, despite this disagreeable arrangement, other components do foster a bond between the musicians and audience.

This brings me to Wade's observation of the separation of an audience and a performer "up" on a stage. This is significant when talking about a venue like The Plough and Stars (where musicians perform on the floor adjacent to the bar), or Toad (where there is almost never enough room onstage to accommodate an entire band). This is a vastly different arrangement from a larger venue for performers of greater fame, with a fortified stage and a security detail. What is gained or lost within the latter setting? The difference is

³⁴ Bonnie C. Wade. "Performance Practice in Indian Classical Music." *Performance Practice*. 19.

considerable too when comparing either of those bars with a space like The Middle East, which is a restaurant but has enough space to encompass two large performance rooms, each of which has its own bar. Yet the unorthodox way that musicians and audience members are allowed to share the space in Toad strengthens the previously mentioned bond.

I am especially fascinated to uncover how this relationship unfolds at Toad, and how the criteria I have discussed influence it. This is a confining setting where musicians and audience members frequently intrude on the individual space each has cultivated. And yet the live performance here is frequently described as an incredible, intimate experience. Such an arrangement makes for more ambivalent receptions than participants at Toad are likely to readily acknowledge. Some have cited the experience as more problematic than enjoyable, while others cherish it for a unique, nuanced experience that is similar in some capacity to other locations in the area, but which cannot be replicated.

In illustrating my approach, I feel an important detail to emphasize is the conflicting reactions that participants (including myself) have felt for Toad. In the course of asking musicians and listeners for their opinions about the overall aesthetic experience, not one viewpoint shared with me was uncomplicated, and some leaned towards begrudging. However, those who did not express outright veneration for the bar still conveyed a reverence for the experience of participating there.

To some audience members, it serves as an intimate extension of one's self, a home away from home, whose physical setting, as well as the music associated with it, contribute to one's identity. To musicians, it can be a physical, mental, and creative challenge that proves taxing, but nevertheless is well worth the effort. Indeed, some musicians—despite expressing varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the location—told me how performing at this bar has helped them grow in ways that have not been replicated by other venues in the area.

Again highlighting how taking part in the act of music is a liminal process, I argue that this challenge gives participants “a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more than classifications, since they incite men to action as well as to thought. Each of these productions has a multivocal character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many psychobiological levels simultaneously.”³⁵

To some, Toad represents more than an analogous space that resonates with them on a personal and sacred level. It quite literally demonstrates a multivocal character—a personification that challenges musicians to thought and action. The end result is a strengthening of the reciprocal bond between themselves and audience, and their own perceived transition and evolution as facilitators of the live music experience.

³⁵ Turner. *The Ritual Process*. 128-9.

Chapter Two: How Space Shapes Performance

Research Methods

Over the first couple months leading into the spring of 2015, I visited Toad about twice a week. Sometimes I went alone, at other times with a group of friends. I tried to change the days week by week so I could see as many bands as possible, particularly with the goal of familiarizing myself with various groups in residency.

Over the summer, I came to Toad the same nights every week. My attendance felt almost ritualistic. In part, I shared my friends' enthusiasm for entering this space, for coming back to hear the same music each week. But strategically, I was also motivated to familiarize myself with specific musicians through repeated attendance.

I actively worked to engage staff, customers, and musicians, and ask if they would be willing to contribute to my research. I had less luck when the bar was crowded. Naturally, this may have had to do with the volume of the chatter around us. I found that by visiting shortly after the bar opened at 5 pm when there were fewer customers, it was easier for the bartenders to converse and allow me to explain my research in depth. Similarly, I was able to engage a customer named Katie on a Monday night during one of Boston's blizzards, when hardly any other patrons were in attendance.

By comparison, it was challenging to engage residential musicians when I tried to speak with them immediately after their sets. To be fair, many people turn out for their shows and want to talk to them afterwards. These musicians lingered

after their sets were over, and tried to chat with as many friends and fans as possible.

I had better luck during the performance of the above-mentioned solo artist, Kyle. While there was a considerable number of people in the bar, it did not prove a distraction, and Kyle allowed me to explain what I was pursuing while he loaded up his equipment. On another occasion, Natalie, one of the staff members, proved to be a wonderful resource as well as interviewee. On the first night I heard singer-songwriter Carolyn, Natalie was working a shift. In between sets, the musicians ordered drinks and sat next to me at the bar. Natalie was a great catalyst for interaction, engaged us all in conversation. In this atmosphere, I was able to meet Carolyn, as well as guitarist Johnny, and successfully arrange to interview them both on a later date.

The Bar Itself

History

The ages of visitors at Toad range from twenties to mid-sixties—locals who attend on a regular basis during the week, and college students who visit all week but especially on the weekend. The split between men and women in a crowd varies, depending on the night and the band that is performing. Typically, visitors are predominantly white.

Prior to Toad's establishment as a music venue, Christopher's Restaurant featured musical acts, much like other local restaurants such as The Burren and The Plough and Stars. In the early 1990s, once the lease on the next-door

beauty parlor expired, musician Evan persuaded the owner of Christopher's to purchase that space, "punch a hole in the wall," and turn the parlor into a "function room." Patrons of Christopher's could then go next door and listen to live acoustic music.

During Toad's early history, there was no PA system available to the musicians, and no bar in the room. Additionally, customers could go back and forth between the restaurant and the musical space without having to step outside. Despite his own assessment that the task seemed inconceivable at the time, Evan further persuaded the owner to install a bar, a PA system, a small stage, and a green room in a downstairs area backstage.

Since then, the door leading between Toad and Christopher's has been marked with an "Emergency Exit" sign, off limits to all except staff. A customer has to exit one establishment into the street, in order to enter the other. Toad customers can order burgers and fries from the kitchen in Christopher's, but cannot enter Toad from Christopher's with food or drink ordered within the restaurant.

Even though this performance space had long been associated with Christopher's, these elements established Toad as separate from the restaurant, or to use Harvey's terminology as an "absolute space."³⁶ Customers can no longer go back and forth between the two locations from inside, a fact that helped to form physical and psychological boundaries that shaped the bar's identity. Naming the space "Toad" reinforced this delineation of "absolute space". While it

³⁶ Harvey. "Space As A Keyword." 2.

might be squat and a bit ugly, this new space resonated with a unique Cambridge vibe.

Physical Interior

Toad is a rectangular space. One enters at the room's front left corner from Massachusetts Avenue. The bar flanks the left-hand wall, with tables and additional seating along the right. In the front right corner adjacent to the entrance is a blocked door leading to Christopher's.

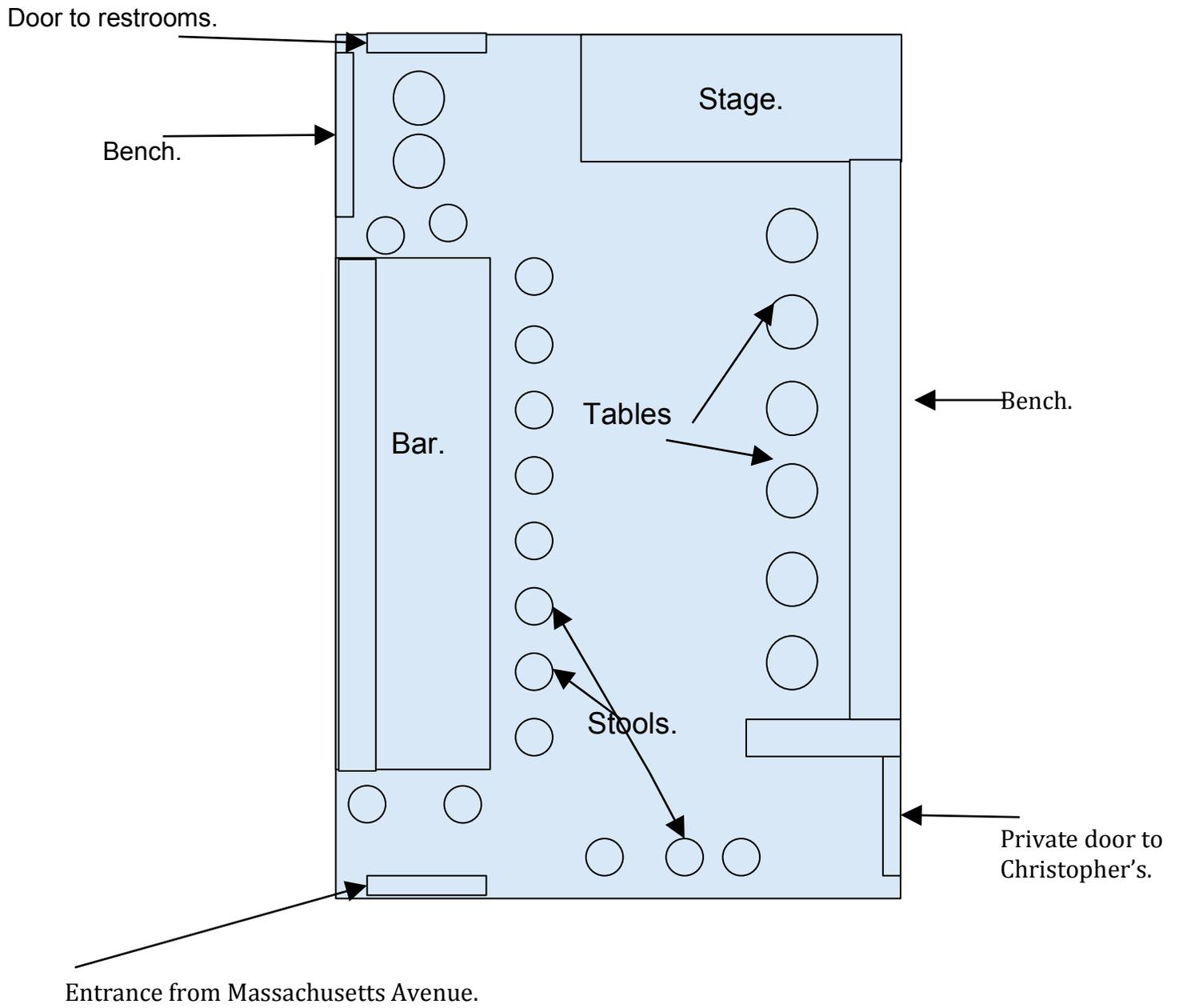
The door leading to the three restrooms is across from the entrance, with the bar in between. One restroom is covered with graffiti; chalk is provided for patrons to do as they will with the black walls. In this area, there is also a green room for the musicians. Toad customers can order burgers and fries from Christopher's, but the passage between the two spaces is restricted to wait staff.

The stage is at the back of the bar, diagonal to the corner entrance. A solo musician, such as an acoustic guitarist-vocalist, can play in relative comfort. When a band plays the venue, there is usually not enough room onstage for the whole group. By default, the drummer is given space onstage, and there is usually room for one additional musician, a singer or guitarist. Depending on the band, the vocalist will either stand onstage or on the floor, directly in front of the stage.

When there is a band of four or more, at least one musician has to stand in front of the door leading to the restrooms. This is a setup for awkward occurrences when audience members have to use the bathroom. This is even

more challenging when the room is packed and people are standing in the aisle. Patrons try to be conscious of disturbing musicians in the midst of a performance.

When seating is required for a musician apart from a drummer, such as a keyboardist or pedal-steel guitarist, other complications ensue. Such musicians usually sit in front of the stage at the bench along the right wall, taking place where a customer might normally sit. Kevin, a singer-songwriter and pianist, has played from here. He described how he has a vantage point of sorts from the bench, and can observe how Johnny, the guitarist, fares with his own position in front of the back door. Kevin commented how amusing it can be when Johnny becomes immersed in the music, with his eyes closed, and a patron is standing in front of him, trying to determine the exact moment when to circulate around Johnny and get to the restroom.



The Staff

Natalie explained that when she began working there, there were barbacks to support the older bartenders who had been working at Toad for years, and might need a break during a long shift. Today that is more common on weekends when there can be a larger, potentially more unruly crowd. During the weeknights there is usually only one bartender working the club. However, it is not uncommon for another bartender to put in an appearance and stand behind the bar near the entrance and enjoy the band. Natalie opined that the bartenders arguably have the best view of the band.

Additionally, in brief moments when no one is ordering drinks, some of the bartenders will dance a bit to the music. Natalie spoke fondly of having the best dancing space behind the bar. Indeed, she commented what a “totally different experience” it is to finish a shift at 12:30 am, and to then step into and listen to the band as an audience member, rather than from the relative comfort behind the bar.

The Role of the Audience

Christopher Small observes that, in addition to live performance, numerous activities (composing, rehearsing) fall under the act of musicking. He further takes the viewpoint that, in the activity of music, there are multiple participants apart from the musicians themselves, such as listeners and dancers.³⁷ The relationship between musicians and audience has a profound

³⁷ Small. *Musicking*. 9.

impact in shaping the experience of musical performance. In turn, this relationship is influenced by those involved in the music event.

In other live music venues, a divide (subconscious as well as physical) was cultivated between musician and listener. In concert settings, the listeners often pay a substantial amount to attend a performance. In some cases, I wondered if the gratitude and reverence they feel for the musicians teeter into adulation. This is especially the case if the musicians are widely known and celebrated, and are performing in arenas or other large venues so different from a bar like Toad.

Hero worship, extreme adulation, and an intense fandom are common when listeners experience music in such spaces. Clearly, Toad differed in this regard. In this bar, I observed that the limited space, the lack of physical barriers between musician and listener, seemed to dissipate mental and emotional barriers as well. While the musicians are still spoken of with great reverence by the listeners within this setting, I suggest that the space promotes a shared humility and informality between the musicians, audience, and staff who work the venue.

At Toad, it is common for many of the musicians to stay after their performances are over, to chat with attendees and/or to listen to the musicians playing the second booking of the night. Additionally, when musicians are nearing the end of their sets, it is common for them to acknowledge the bartenders by name to the audience, and to encourage generous tipping. When not performing, some of the musicians are permitted by the staff to stand inside

the door leading to the bar. In this way, musicians are given access to privileged space that is much valued by staff like Natalie.

Drawing from her own field research, Wade writes about the significance of a relationship, or bond, between audience and listener. Acknowledging such a bond is critical to understanding the audience member as an “active agent” in the music experience. She lists several criteria that influence the strength of this bond: “the constituency of the audience, the musical knowledge of the members of an audience, and the attitudes they bring to different types of occasions, and the attitudes and responses of performers.”³⁸ In the course of my research at Toad, listeners and musicians referred to each of these factors.

Schuyler explains how the exchange of money can help or hinder a musician-listener relationship. Within this musical setting, an “entrepreneur” acted as the middleman, accepting the money from the audience members, and giving it to the musicians. Like Wade, Schuyler observes, “The lack of rapport between musicians and audience is exacerbated by the financial arrangements in commercial establishments.”³⁹ These arrangements break the spiritual bond between the performers and audience.

When I ask those who are familiar with Toad, among the first words of praise is the fact that customers never have to pay to get in. However, I spoke to one musician who said that the financial compensation is not great, and generally not the primary reason that musicians perform there. We are left to ponder what

³⁸ Wade. “Performance Practice in Indian Classical Music.” 16.

³⁹ Schuyler. “Berber Professional Musicians in Performance.” 120.

other motivations there are for the musicians in performing at Toad, and if a reciprocal relationship like that described by Wade and Schuyler is still in play.

The opportunity for publicity is certainly a factor, particularly for those bands that are privileged to perform on a weekly basis. One musician said, “Toad is my business card”—a prestigious venue that performers can fall back on while branching out and performing elsewhere on other nights of the week. Despite this, I learned that some have misgivings about continuing to perform there, preferring other bars in the area.

Despite the financial arrangement, I believe that a bond still exists between listener and musician at Toad. This results from the joy shared by musicians and listeners in the performance in this space, and in the artistic transformation that the musicians experience by playing there. Many musicians stressed that these qualities make Toad unique among other local bars.

Initial Visits and Observations

How I Occupy the Space

In explaining the relativity of space, David Harvey writes that “there are multiple geometries from which to choose and that the spatial frame depends crucially upon what it is that is being relativized and by whom.”⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Andrew Eisenberg cites McLuhan, Schafer, and others for developing the concept of “acoustic space” as “a set of reductive binary oppositions between the visual and the auditory, positing the former as analytical and the latter as

⁴⁰ Harvey. “Space As A Keyword.” 2.

emotional.”⁴¹ With these factors in mind, I set about to broaden my visual and aural reception of the music at Toad. In the process of becoming more familiar with the bar, I chose to sit in varying locations so as to see how each position influenced the aesthetic experience of a music set.

I soon discovered that, unless I sat near the entrance—in other words, as far away from the stage as possible—I had to use earplugs, as the music was painfully loud. The one exception to this was when the performing act was one singer playing acoustic guitar. However, when a full band was performing, the aural impact was overwhelming. Given the limited space of the interior and the fact that musicians often need to turn up the volume to be heard over chatter, I found that every seat in the establishment—apart from those near the entrance—constituted sitting close to the band.

The visual experience was less intense. The bar is sparse in decorations, compared to other pubs or restaurants. For example, there are no hung photographs of celebrated musicians who have visited, as there are at The Burren. Toad is kept dimly lit except at the end of the night, when the band has finished and the lights are turned up to encourage customers to leave. Compared to other music locations in the area, customers credit these elements with contributing to a sense of intimacy and comfort, within Toad.

⁴¹ Andrew Eisenberg. “Space.” 195.

Wednesdays

In February of 2015, on my second visit to the bar, I observed a band that performs every Wednesday, and whose repertoire features 60s-era rock and R&B covers. Robert, a local singer who performs in other projects outside of this band, leads the group. The bar was packed and the audience ranged from patrons in their twenties to sixties, though a substantial portion were middle-aged.

I paid attention to how the band occupies the limited performance space. Most prominently, Robert takes advantage of his forced positioning on the floor in front of the stage. I often observed him stepping forward into the audience and singing directly to the dancing audience members lining the aisle. He seemed to sync his immersion with peak moments in a song, such as during the final chorus of their rendition of “Let’s Go Get Stoned.” The audience’s exuberance, as well as the ease and informality demonstrated by Robert whenever he enters the crowd, gave the impression that many of them were friends of the band, or at least acquaintances and frequent attendees.

The rapport between this band and the audience shaped the experience of the performance, and was supported by the intimate space at Toad. During a set the following July, Robert suddenly announced, mid-song, that he was going to school the audience on “how to pick up chicks.” To the audience’s surprise, he lifted one of the women standing in front of him, slung her over his shoulder, and carried her up and down the aisle for a few moments. The woman did not visibly object, and the audience responded with laughter and applause.

Another example of unexpected intimacy occurred in the same set. The band was performing a folk song about Jesus, and during an instrumental break in the middle of the tune, Robert asked rhetorically into the microphone: “If people knew Jesus was black, how many churches would close?” Robert was presumably doing this in response to the gun violence committed against African Americans in the United States, the most recent tragedy being that at the church in Charleston less than a month earlier.

Later in the course of my field research, other interviewees, including guitarist Johnny, confirmed that Robert and the rest of the band has “a very loyal fanbase.” The unusually intimate contact enabled by the space at Toad supports and nurtures this relationship.

Monday Night

Monday nights are known as Blue Monday among staff and patrons. The 7 o’clock block features local blues artist Pete, who plays acoustic guitar and sings solo. He is followed by a full blues band in the second set of the evening, led by singer Jack. Like the singer Robert, Pete and the other blues musicians participate in additional musical projects to the ones featured at Toad.

I decided to visit one Monday night, despite Boston being hit by a major snowstorm. Upon my arrival, I found hardly any customers present. As it happened, half of the musicians did not show up that night, including the lead singer. In order to make up for this, the guitarist and drummer improvised and performed a set with Pete. Those in attendance loved this impromptu and

unexpected performance. Later, when I met Evan and described this occurrence, he expressed amusement and considered booking this trio as a separate act.

Over the following summer, a group of friends and I regularly attended Blue Monday sessions. This became a weekly routine. It was satisfying to cultivate a ritual of our own, and to perhaps become a part of this blues fanbase. Certain aspects of the band's performance appeared to be ritualistic. In particular, the singer Jack cultivated certain rituals in their interaction with the audience. During a cover of a Ray Charles song, Jack regularly led the audience in a vocal call-and-response ("*Yes, I believe*") at the chorus.

I pondered the spiritual significance of a musical space while conducting field research. The shared satisfaction of returning each week was in part fostered from knowing that certain familiar tunes in the band's repertoire would always elicit audience members to sing along during the chorus. This experience, coupled with reading Small simultaneously, led me to consider a similarity between the singer Jack and a church minister leading a congregation in song.

Additionally, whenever the guitarist would take a solo, Jack would retreat from the front of the stage and stand behind the guitarist in the corner, until it was his cue to sing the next verse. The significance of the spiritual role could also be tied to this behavior. It indicates humility and a desire not to be portrayed as the leader of the band—a perspective shared by a friend, who had visited Blue Monday both with me, and long before I started. However, she further postulated that this parallels the role of a spiritual leader, who does not seek adulation or

reverence for his role, and instead only means to impart wisdom, as well as spiritual and emotional fulfillment, to the listeners.

Despite the pleasure of joining my friends for Blue Monday, I grew tired of hearing the same setlist every week. I began to think of it as a ritualistic experience with the negative connotations associated with that word: as Small explains, an “action that has been repeated so many times that it has lost any meaning it may once have expressed...”⁴²

However, in putting out the idea that that is what the word *ritual* suggests, Small argues with dispensing of the notion that ritual is ever meaningless. He affirms that rituals are “an act of affirmation of community (‘This is who we are’), as an act of exploration (to try on identities to see who we think we are), and as an act of celebration (to rejoice in the knowledge of an identity not only possessed but also shared with others).”⁴³

In utilizing these terms, I do not mean to imply that there is any religious denomination that unifies the attendees at Toad. Instead, drawing from the likes of Small and Lefebvre, I seek to fortify the theory that there is a parallel between the perceived sacredness of both musical and religious spaces, and that the musicians can be viewed as the collaborating facilitators of that sacredness. The people attending each respective location are there, broadly speaking, for a common purpose. An evening in a location like Toad has the potential for culminating in a gratification for the musical events that unfold. This gratification is fortified by the fact that they are not alone, but are instead part of a community

⁴² Small. *Musicking*. 94.

⁴³ Small. *Musicking*. 95.

created by their gathering and participating (as well as the fact that they entered for free).

Writing about absolute space, Lefebvre said: “A moment comes when... a part of this space is assigned a new role, and henceforward appears as transcendent, as sacred (i.e. inhabited by divine forces, as magical and cosmic).”⁴⁴ This parallels some of the vocabulary used by interviewees to describe the phenomena that unfolds at Toad. Natalie, in particular, fondly referred to the space as “magical.” The space at Toad facilitates an intimacy that allows performers to create an experience that feels more engaged and involved, a unique and transcendent connection between musician and audience.

Familial/Ritualistic Implications

The Regulars

The seats at the bar corner nearest to the entrance are informally designated for the customers who the staff call “Toad Regulars”—mostly locals who attend on a daily or near-daily basis. On my first visit to Toad during the day, I sat near this area and spoke for a while to the bartender. The Regulars—a mix of men and women, no more than half-a-dozen—made up the majority of the patrons there at the time.

I wondered if I was intruding on their space by sitting near them. Later, while interviewing the bartender Natalie, I described this scenario to her and she laughed knowingly, confirming my suspicion. She described how, when an

⁴⁴ Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. 234.

outsider sits at this section of the bar, the Regulars will “hover” around the individual. Natalie emphasized that there is nothing threatening about this behavior, and that they don’t do anything to outright forbid others from sitting there. Instead, she explained that it is a way of asserting that “this is their bar.”

Later in my interaction with her, Natalie elaborated on exactly how much influence the Regulars hold at Toad. As I learned in the course of my attendance, bartenders are each allowed to give out two free drinks a night, so as to encourage customers to return. When Natalie first started working at Toad, the management was concerned about giving her the Friday shift previously held by a bartender with eighteen years of experience at Toad, and how this change would affect the reception of the Regulars. Also noteworthy was that Friday at Toad is reputed as one of the more rambunctious nights of the week, with a large turnout of college students.

Taking this into account, together with the fact that Natalie already had some familiarity with the Regulars from her time waitressing at Christopher’s, the managers instructed Natalie to give a free drink to each of the Regulars at every shift for the first month-and-a-half of her employment at Toad. This was done for the very specific purpose of “buttering them up” until it was certain they trusted the new bartender. The management wanted to insure their patronage, even when the bar was overly crowded on the weekends.

While discussing Friday nights, Natalie elaborated the Regulars’ impact on the staff and lineup at Toad. On almost every other night, a band is booked at 7 p.m. An exception is Sunday afternoons when customers are allowed to bring

their vinyl to listen to. Friday is the only night of the week when there is no musical program until 10 pm—“Nothing besides Toad being Toad. No music.”

However, Natalie told of how Evan will occasionally break from tradition and book an additional band for earlier in the evening. As she claims, it always “ruins the Regulars’ day,” even if it’s “a quiet singer-songwriter show,” and they feel pressured into leaving virtually every time. She describes The Regulars as being put off by the general rowdy mood of the space. However, Natalie herself speaks of that night with reverence, saying, “It holds a special place in my heart.”

In addition to using the earlier-mentioned spiritual concept, we can view the roles that Toad fulfills for musicians and listeners by considering terms defined by Raymond Williams in *Keywords*: specifically, *community* and *family*. As Williams explains, the former has been used to refer to a “social organization” that “describe[s] an existing set of relationships, or... an alternative set of relationships.”⁴⁵ He further maintains that, unlike other words defining organizations (such as “state” or “nation”), *community* consistently carries positive connotations.

The word *family*, Williams explains, is historically tied to the word *familiar*: “... on terms of friendship or intimate with someone; well known, well used to or habitual. These uses came from the experience of people living together in a household, in close relations with each other and well used to each other’s ways.”⁴⁶ He further clarifies that the presence of blood relations is not a defining element of this term, but that members of a “family” might share a kind of spiritual

⁴⁵ Williams. *Keywords*. 75-6.

⁴⁶ Williams. *Keywords*. 131.

kinship. In a religious setting, Williams explains, this is sometimes manifested in a shared belief in a “common father,” such as the practice within Christianity to use paternal titles to refer to God.⁴⁷

Again, while not indicating that any religious denomination is in play within this space, I find it helpful to incorporate this in order to illustrate the communal bonds that Toad fosters among regular patrons. Natalie illustrated this by describing how attendees who enter romantic relationships will wait until those relationships have lasted and grown before inviting their significant others to Toad to meet everyone:

“Another one of the Regulars... has started dating again. And of course, somebody was like, ‘Oh, bring her to Toad!’ And everyone starts laughing. Because of course you’re not gonna bring someone you just started dating to Toad. It’s like, if you met there, yeah. But if you’re like—The Regulars, besides being territorial of it, are like, ‘This is what I do without my significant other.’ Not that it’s like a strip club; it never gets rowdy like that. But it’s very ‘this-is-for-me.’”

This bar is a space that elicits such cherishment from regular patrons, that they treat it almost like a closely guarded secret. It demands time and cultivation of trust before they allow for the inclusion of others with whom they are involved, but who might be perceived as interlopers if trying to accompany them to Toad.

Other Ways of Occupying This Space

⁴⁷ Williams. *Keywords*. 132.

I learned more about how Regulars might occupy and perceive the space at Toad when I spoke to Emily, a college professor who has lived in Boston since attending graduate school there, and has visited Toad since its early years. She explained that years before, she had been a Regular who visited Toad and other venues with friends several times a week while in school. She observed that many of the same musicians who were staples of the scene there at the time are still there now, even if they no longer play in the same bands.

As Emily told me, she was fonder of Toad than her friends were, who found the narrow space confining. She described it as “the perfect space for if you want to hang back and talk to your friends, or if you want to listen to the music. I think... having to go to the bar that way, to go to the bathroom that way, you get to see everyone who’s there, you get to talk to everyone who’s there. I like the intimate space...”

Emily elaborated that one factor that ruined the experience for certain friends, prior to the ban on smoking, was the permitting of cigarette smoking inside such bars. Emily, a smoker, “never minded... It was like my living room in graduate school.” Indeed, she fondly associates Tir Na Nog with the memory of “The Nicotine Bear”: a white teddy bear that was set on the shelf behind the bar, and which had turned brown from cigarette smoke by the time Tir Na Nog had closed. This sense of familiar intimacy was an important part of her early experience with Toad.

In examining how we can interpret this viewpoint and the behavior of other Regulars within Toad, I again draw from Harvey, who illustrates how a residential house can be perceived through three different spatial frames: absolute, relative, and relational. While Toad does not “physical[ly] and legal[ly]” fulfill the first of these three where a residence is concerned, some of the criteria that are elemental to relative and relational space can be applied: “recreation... the sense of what is or is not a historic building, and its significance as a place of personal and collective memories, sentimental attachments, and the like.”⁴⁸ It goes without saying that for most people, a location like this very much fulfills the purpose of recreation. And as has been demonstrated, Toad and other venues like it have the potential for facilitating profound, tender associations for the experiences that unfold there. I suggest that, to many participants in addition to Emily, the analogy of Toad being like a home-away-from-home, or “living room,” would be a suitable comparison.

This sensibility is enhanced by some of the privileged treatment that the Regulars are given by the staff, as described by Natalie. I also perceived a genuine camaraderie between the Regulars and the bartenders, when I visited during the downtime earlier in the day. This approach to space might also account for the defensiveness—as described to me by Natalie, Evan, and others—that staff and regular customers sometimes feel when they are joined by loud customers, during musical performances when such behavior is

⁴⁸ Harvey. “Space As A Keyword.” 6.

inappropriate. This frustration, as well as the reception of the audience in general, is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Performance and Reception

In this chapter, I go deeper into my examination of the strategies musicians use within the challenging space at Toad, focusing both on performance and reception. I aim to address different conceptions of space.

In part, I will explore how some musicians occupy the spatial framework of the music scene at Toad—specifically, what has been characterized as a musical social space encompassing folk, bluegrass, and Americana. Today, the live music featured at Toad is much more diverse, featuring blues, funk, and other styles. And yet, some performers who do not play folk music have expressed uncertainty over how welcoming a reception they receive from the audience, despite being booked regularly.

Additionally, the logistics of the bar come into play, specifically the limited physical space and the sound system. Bands have found various ways to occupy the stage and the immediate area around it, and some who have been playing there for years are still learning to accommodate themselves to the room and the acoustics. For these reasons too, some musicians have expressed ambivalence about performing at Toad.

Ultimately, these factors will illustrate why, as the musicians themselves acknowledge, such obstacles contribute to and enhance the musical experience. Even as participants come to think of the bar as their own private domain and source of comfort, it also presents them with challenges that, if acknowledged and met, allow for artistic growth not as easily achieved at other locations. As

the musicians to whom I spoke observed, it is *because* an evening at Toad can prove difficult, that makes it worthwhile to those immersed in this space.

I complement this analysis with descriptions of performance by two musicians—the first in a recording studio, and the other at Toad. The two musicians unknowingly found common ground both in how they describe the challenges of playing in each setting, and in how they choose to prepare to meet those challenges.

Obstacles

Audience Behavior

When I first began paying attention to how musicians occupy a performance space, I observed that Session Americana likes to perform while sitting around a microphone set on a table, reminiscent of their first performance together. Despite Session Americana's origin being tied directly to the space within Toad, the band hardly ever performs there anymore. I asked Evan if it was because stage was not capable of accommodating everyone in the band. He instead emphasized that Session Americana is “a band that requires listening,” and that by the time they “reach[ed] critical mass,” they were causing lines out the door and down the street. Consequently, it was hard to be heard in Toad when attracting such large crowds.

With regard to performing in his own band, Evan compared The Lizard Lounge and Club Passim favorably to Toad. The former two, he explained, are roughly the same size, and are more conducive environments for “cultivat[ing] an

audience.” As he explained: “When a band connects with real people—like, a lot of bands in this town connect with musicians, but might not reach fans that are just normal people coming, paying money to come see you play.” At a location like The Lizard, there is a little more space between the stage and the bar, where talkers are usually situated. He observed that it was far easier to facilitate a silent audience at a location like here or Passim than at Toad.

Earlier, I mentioned the way that Toad Regulars like Emily controlled the level of audience chatter during a performance. The sense of family and community ownerships that The Regulars felt empowered them to enforce a listening environment in the bar. In one instance I observed audience members conversing loudly, though no Regulars directly confronted the perpetrators at the time. During a set by blues performer Pete, four young men were talking obtrusively throughout his playing. They were set at the table farthest from the stage, but their voices carried throughout the bar. I found myself annoyed with them, and sensed that the other customers scattered around the bar did as well.

At the conclusion of one song, Pete raised his sunglasses from his eyes, peered past the stage lights at the young men, and said softly into the microphone, “I don’t think this is gonna work.” A few minutes later—during which the men had not ceased their chatting—Pete finished another tune and asked into the microphone if one of the young men wanted to borrow the mic. In both instances, the men were so loud that they were oblivious to Pete’s criticism.

From my own repeated attendance of Blue Monday, I inferred that such a reception for Pete was not commonplace; people might chatter a bit, but he

usually commands silence. Months earlier, Natalie shared a similar story with me about a Friday night set by frequent performer Joseph:

“I finished work around 12, 12:30, and went to the other side of the bar. And the whole room was dancing. We took all the tables and chairs out, put them all in the back hallway, and it was the most fun. [The] whole room got into it, there was a huge dance circle... The experience was great. And I would tell people, “Oh you should [go], this is a really cool night.” The next time they played: it was a ghost town. It was like, ten people watching the band. It’s like, you never know [who’s going to come].”

Natalie also described a similar response when she covered for another bartender on a Blue Monday. While talking with me, she speculated about the factors that might alter the audience’s reception of the music, and suggested that the fault might actually lie with the musicians: “How much of it was the band? Like, when the band’s not all cohesive? Almost everyone who plays at Toad is [an] unbelievable musician, and most of the time [they] are playing great. But maybe they just are tired. Yeah, you have no idea.”

Despite the fact that not every interaction with Toad’s audience was stellar, Evan spoke fondly of the audience at Toad: “Even when the crowds get loud, talking, they’re listening. I think it’s... sort of an educated way [of listening]. I think the Regulars that have been going there for years, and new people that come in, kind of key in on it. Music’s an important piece, and I think they’re smart. I think it’s a smart audience most of the time, that is listening and expecting

something good.” This sense of active engagement between performer and audience is a defining aspect of the musical experience at Toad.

Writing about affect, Berger suggested: “Ideally, [musicians and listeners’] attendance to one another sparks a feedback loop in which audience and performer inspire one another to greater and greater levels of energy—a more and more heightened performance...” He further suggested that, depending on the genre of music, one musician might strive to “enter into the music and create sounds that invite the listener’s active engagement...” while another “seek[s] to bombard the crowd with such a powerful image of fun and such intense face-to-face interactions that they have no choice but to enter into the event.”⁴⁹

From everything I’ve observed and discussed with participants, especially from Evan, I believe that the musician who cares more about “active engagement” shapes the experience of Toad. As such, musicians and patrons are more likely to assert and enforce a reciprocal bond: musicians come to play, and the audience comes to listen. This ethos stands out at Toad in contrast to many Cambridge bars. With this understanding as a given, it is notable that the sound system at Toad is far from optimal, and that there is a lack of a staff member qualified to control that while the band is performing.

Navigating Acoustics Within the Bar

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the PA speakers in Toad are hung near the ceiling on opposite walls near the stage. The control system and plug outlets

⁴⁹ Berger. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*. 156.

are on the wall to the left of the stage, and are controlled by the musicians. This is in contrast to most other music bars, where the system is set offstage on a table. A technician runs the system in consultation with the band to find the appropriate mix during the performance.

When I spoke to Natalie, she said that there is no staff member appointed to assist the musicians with sound checks before each show: “I have no idea what to do with the machines, where the mics plug in. Nothing. It makes absolutely no sense to me. I have read the instruction book, had Evan explain it. It’s like, right in through one ear and out the other.” It is left to the musicians to determine on their own how the sound is. At times, I have heard performers start a set, then ask the audience how the sound is between songs.

One musician gave perspective on the challenge of navigating the sound in Toad: “If you can get your volume right, then you can really play to the room, you can really deliver the song. And the volume needs to be low enough to where that can happen. And a lot of that depends on how many bodies are in the room. Now it’s a very talky, it’s a very chatty room. So what ends up happening is, the volume gets turned up.” Others have called the sound “problematic” and expressed similar difficulties in arriving at the right volume, mix, and balance. Instead, musicians struggle to accommodate themselves to the sound and space. Thus, the acoustics and the limited space sometimes intensify each other in a way that is undesirable for participants. Some musicians feel a need to turn up the volume in order to be heard; yet on some nights this may encourage audience members talking over the music to only talk louder. And as has been

observed, if the volume is too loud in this particular room, the music does not successfully “deliver”—it fails to resonate with listeners because it is overbearing, coupled with the distraction of talkers sitting nearby.

For these reasons, some musicians do express favor for other venues that offer privileges such as a technician to operate the sound system. Other musicians continue to play at Toad, despite the logistical issues and the lack of a cover charge. This, coupled with a feeling among some of these musicians that they do not wholly belong within the folk scene cultivated by Cambridge bars, contributes to ambivalence about playing at Toad.

These factors raise the question of what musicians stand to gain by performing at Toad instead of other locations. I draw from my interviews with musicians who perform there despite feeling that their music does not fit into the repertoire associated with Toad. Their own assessments of how performing at Toad has influenced their musicianship will be coupled with analyses of folk and bluegrass, respectively drawn from Bohlman and Cantwell. This illustrates how the musical experience at this bar represents, to musicians, an artistic and performative growth that, by their acknowledgement, is not replicated at other venues.

The “Folk” Scene

Toad—and arguably, the space that is the surrounding Cambridge-Somerville music scene—has developed a reputation for prominently hosting folk/bluegrass repertoire. This has been cultivated by the bands featured at many

venues, such as The Burren and Club Passim. This association has been verified by some of the participants to whom I spoke. Carolyn described her music as “singer-songwriter-Americana,” (or “y’all-ternative,” as she used to say in the 1990s), and when asking for my own opinion, did not refute me when I observed a quality of “earthiness” that I associate with country music.

In part, I suspected that Evan’s status as a member of a popular local folk band, as well as former touring musician with alternative-country singer Kim Richey, amplifies the association of the bar with the folk scene. However, as Evan described, many folk musicians who have gone on to have “interesting” careers, performed at Toad shortly after it opened. The early careers of Boston performers like Patty Griffin and Martin Sexton paralleled the inception of Toad, which was among the venues where these and other musicians played in the early 1990s. This connection with roots music has clearly contributed to Toad’s modern reputation.

The intimacy created by the unique space at Toad played a role in shaping Cambridge’s current folk scene. Emily explained that many of the musicians who are at Toad now, were present back then as well, among them blues singer Pete. She categorized many of these musicians as “singer-songwriters,” mirroring Carolyn’s assessment of her own music, and opined that music listeners reflexively associate that designation with folk music.

This perspective was mirrored by another teacher and frequent attendee, Katie, when I asked her outright how she might categorize the sound at Toad. She did not like the term “Americana,” but confirmed that Toad does have that

“rootsy... authentic” vibe. She also emphasized the fact that many of the musicians are not restricted to one band, and frequently collaborate with each other: “Everybody does kind of lend to each other’s styles... Everybody knows everybody. There is a real scene...”

Yet as I learned on the second night I visited, “folk” or “bluegrass” do not strictly encompass all the bands that perform there. When I heard singer-songwriter Kyle perform, he was playing solo on an acoustic guitar. Yet there was something about his song structure and style that reminded me of soul icon Curtis Mayfield. When I later told him this, Kyle responded appreciatively and confirmed that others have expressed similar opinions upon hearing him.

In fact, this is demonstrated notably by more than half of the bands that play Toad on a permanent weekly basis. These groups perform a variety of genres including blues, jazz-rock, soul, and funk.

The Musicians’ Perspectives on the Musical Space

Keeping in mind the varied styles of some of the residential bands, I asked Katie if the space at Toad has become more “versatile” in the genres it offers. She replied that musicians “[don’t] feel as much part of [the scene]... Because as Somerville and Cambridge get ‘yuppified,’ and a lot of the working musicians are forced out because they can’t afford the rent, they don’t feel that they really live in the community anymore... But there aren’t any other places to play, so [they have] to keep trekking in.” Carolyn also confirmed to me that musicians performing in Somerville are “priced out” and forced to move to other towns

nearby. As she explained, the distance precludes bandmates from meeting in town to rehearse. The economics of space in a rising real estate market increasingly freeze musicians out of the local community.

In addition to the constraints of economic space, stylistic space creates other boundaries between the musicians and audience. I saw this sense of not belonging in the community's stylistic space in my interactions with bandmates Johnny and Kevin. They, as well as frequent collaborator Carolyn, grew up with backgrounds in jazz, and credit this with influencing their style. Johnny, for one, cited *Bitches Brew* and Frank Zappa as early prominent influences, and expressed enjoyment for Nigerian musicians like Fela Kuti and Sunny Ade. In explaining this, he affirmed that, as much as he loves roots-rock and Americana, as does Kevin, he is grateful that their band was not "born out" of that Cambridge scene.

In Kevin's opinion: "The sound we were making was really distasteful for the usual patrons of Toad. Because, y'know, the Cambridge sound is like, mandolins, and folky, rootsy. And we were playing weird notes." He credits the experience of playing out with singer-songwriters like Carolyn with gaining his band a Toad residency, or "a foothold in the Cambridge mountain." While Johnny acknowledges that, with the passage of time, the band has gleaned a greater sense of respect from the Toad audience, Kevin told me that he is still uncertain to what extent the band are accepted in this space. He expressed discontent with "music [being used as] another tool to be divisive, like 'us and them.'"

Despite these ambivalent feelings, Johnny was quick to acknowledge that, when the band was first playing out in the Cambridge area, Toad was the focal point (“my ground zero”), the location that they could fall back on, boosted by their weekly performances. Similarly, Kevin expressed gratitude for the staff and audience members who were supportive when his band first began performing there, and continue to be. He went on to observe that, if the trajectory of the band’s musical career had been different—if they had found permanent booking at a different location—then “we would not be half the band we are.” In his assessment, the bar is “the best thing for this band ever. There’s no question.” He would further elaborate that the challenges at Toad, rather than being seen as difficulties that prevent musicians from giving satisfying performances, can instead be perceived as formidable obstacles, the conquering of which earns one maturation as an artist.

Toad features logistical components that can potentially affect a performance adversely. Some musicians have acknowledged that the environment of is not conducive for their performance style, and the reception they intend to cultivate. However, others acknowledge, and acclimate themselves to, the difficulties in play. By their own assessments, they are the better for this test of their abilities, as it enables musical growth and makes them more seasoned performers. Even when pushing musical boundaries, the experience of playing at Toad is seen as transformative to these musicians, as Johnny expressed to me: “It’s been fucking great. It’s been completely instrumental. That’s why [our band is] as badass as we are, is because we play there.”

Defining “Folk”

Are there specific stylistic factors in “folk music” that make it work especially well when presented at Toad? When I speak about folk music at Toad, I use the term more broadly to encompass the genre referred to as “singer-songwriter.” However, this term can be, and is, applied to musicians across various genres apart from roots or Americana, such as soul artists like Mayfield and Bill Withers.

Here, I again draw from Williams, as well as ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman and American studies scholar Robert Cantwell, for their examinations of musical genres associated with Toad, folk, and to a lesser extent bluegrass. These analyses illustrate not only further emphasize how music can foster a sense of community among musicians and listeners. They also draw significance to the sacredness that is associated with live music, paralleling the spiritual roles that musicians in a space like Toad fulfill. Perhaps most critically, this theory highlights the transformative aspect of live music—the notion that a performance, while bringing pleasure to participants, also presents challenges for the musicians to overcome, and that the end results are not always foreseeable.

I especially find Williams’ discussion of “folk music” helpful, defining “folk” as “typically friendly and informal, people seen by one of themselves rather than from above or outside, though this sense has also been assumed or exploited in certain forms of commercial culture.”⁵⁰ This encompasses not only the mood fostered in and by the space at Toad, but also the laxness with which staff treat

⁵⁰ Williams. *Keywords*. 136.

boundaries in this space, for the benefit of both musicians and listeners.

Musicians have highlighted not only the flexibility they are afforded in using audience seats as part of their performance space, but also the fact that the listeners themselves are sometimes permitted to occupy the space in atypical ways, such as being allowed to sit on the bar or moving the seats to allow for sufficient dance room.

While participants do not categorize some of the music featured at Toad as folk, this does not negate the notion that these performers play a significant role in the ritual cultivated by this “folk” space. Bohlman explains that many societies have criteria to determine what is and is not folk music. As he writes, “That complexity necessarily precludes any isolation of folk music as a phenomenon timeless and unchanging. The particular changeability of folk music in a given society thus depends on what dichotomies it demonstrates, what other genres it is in contact with, and what social functions it complements. These may reveal a society with a high degree of stratification or relatively little cultural differentiation. But whatever the form of complexity a society manifests, folk music participates in it.”⁵¹ Citing Hiromi Lorraine Sakata, Bohlman further emphasizes that, rather than by musical qualities, folk music is distinguished within various societies by factors such as setting, historical association, and function.

If one of the two hypothetical societies Bohlman describes could be applied to the social space at Toad, it would fall into the former category of a

⁵¹ Philip Bohlman. *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. 90.

setting with “a high degree of stratification.” Mirroring Williams’ description of the term “folk” being associated with a sense of informality, the management demonstrate a flexibility in booking musical talent whose repertoire—be it blues, funk, R&B, or New Orleans jazz—does not neatly fall under the social space historically associated with “folk music.”

Yet the term “folk music” can still be used to encompass this social space in the sense that the musicians fulfill the other criteria for “folk” that Bohlman lists. Many of these performers have played in various bands at Toad since its inception, and thus are playing a part in Toad’s history and lineage. Perhaps most significantly, all bands there must fulfill the same function of immersing themselves in the limited physical space, learning to use it to their advantage, and delivering an entertaining and gratifying performance to audiences who themselves perceive Toad as a ritualized, sacred space. By fulfilling this function, Toad and all of its inhabitants are a folk space.

In addition to “folk,” I draw attention to the term “bluegrass” and how Cantwell analyzes it. I do this in part to further emphasize the connection between music and the sacred, which Cantwell explains has historically played a significant role in bluegrass. More integral to my thesis, he emphasizes how bluegrass performers, in playing to a live audience, undergo trials of creative endurance that make for a creative transformation, an experience that establishes them—both to themselves and to listeners—as accomplished musicians. While bluegrass is not a genre that encompasses a majority of the

music featured at Toad, this crucial component of live bluegrass is paralleled by the musical experience in play at the bar.

Cantwell writes that bluegrass “swept into the social and psychic space occupied a century ago by religion and by religious revivals and camp meetings.” Quoting Arthur Moore, he draws comparisons between the behaviors occurring in these two settings, describing how some listen “pious[ly]” while others engage in leisurely activities such as drinking and gambling.⁵² Further, he compares bluegrass performers as having the magnetic qualities of religious leaders preaching to the congregation. We see this paralleled specifically in the call-and-response during Jack and the blues band’s set.

Cantwell also lists several subgenres of bluegrass that are distinguished by the using the names of household rooms, such as kitchen music and parlor music—a vivid manifestation of how physical space can be descriptively and evocatively applied to music. So too, live performance is called front-porch bluegrass because “it is out there where everyone can see it...” Cantwell further writes: “[Its] form depends largely upon the nature of the audience and the occasion... Bluegrass grew up in a concert setting, and it is in concert that the bluegrass musician and the bluegrass band are most fully realized; it is in concert, too, that the music and the musician must ultimately be proved. For though bluegrass, like jazz, is the cooperative activity of living musicians, it is also, like jazz, an exhibition of that activity: thus whether he learned his music in the kitchen, the parlor, the back porch, or the barn, the musician must finally try

⁵² Robert Cantwell. *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003. 38.

himself on the front porch, under the pressure of others' attention and on the swell of the moment."⁵³

These observations about bluegrass performance are applicable to the musical experience at Toad, especially in regard to audience reception. As Cantwell observes, this reception—the process of the music being tried and tested live—is essential to the cultivation of a bluegrass identity. It is this element, as well as its improvisatory nature and the highlighted importance of “cooperative activity,” that bluegrass shares with jazz.

This relates to the accounts of Toad performers who are unable to rehearse because of extenuating circumstances, such as living too far apart. Among them are Kevin and Johnny's band. As an alternative to face-to-face rehearsals, Kevin will write and record tunes and send them to the rest of the band, who will practice their parts alone. In effect, a Tuesday night performance at Toad *is* a rehearsal. By waiting to find out how they “cooperate” when playing new material, Kevin and the others, in the spirit of front-porch bluegrass, are “trying themselves on the front porch”—often not fully certain of how the audience, or the performers themselves, will receive the end result. In this way, space at Toad is not only an immediate encounter between audience and musicians. It is often filled with the energy, creativity, and freshness of a first-time, front porch performance.

⁵³ Cantwell. *Bluegrass Breakdown*. 148.

How Musicians Occupy Space at Toad

While interviewing Evan, I asked him about his band's most recent album. He spoke about the dynamic and impromptu nature of the recording process: "Every time you go into a recording studio, no matter how big you are or how little you are, you are reinventing the history of recording all over again." He continued: "You got a close mic, you're gonna go far away, you have one mic in the middle of the room with everybody sitting around it, or you can have multiple mics, you gonna put everybody in an iso[lation] booth. *It's like you go through the whole thing all over again.*" He explained that their band took an unorthodox approach and decided not to rehearse their material. Rather, they learned the songs as they were playing them in the recording process.

I was struck by this similarity between Evan's opinion about the difficulties of the recording studio, and Kevin's perspective on the experience of performing at Toad. Over an extended period of time, Kevin and his band rearranged not only the level on the PA system, but their own positioning on and around the stage in order to acclimate to the aural space. The presentation of their material was worked out in the process of performing. The constraints of the sound system at Toad both presented a challenge to performers, and created a unique relationship between the musician and the musical space. Kevin echoed what other musicians shared about the bar:

"Toad... it's like a part... *It's like the other member of the band.* It demands something new from you every time. It's weird, I don't know what it is. *It almost sounds different in there every time...* I set everything the same, everything

coming out of my amp is the same, I want to duplicate the badass sound I had last week. Yet this week, it's not the same, it's different. Like what the hell, what

is—*[jokingly despairing]* ‘What do you want from me, Toad?’”

This image of Toad as an additional member of the band underscores the power of this performance space on musicians. When I asked, Kevin expressed great fondness for other bars around the area, but indicated that he did not find them “as inspiring” as Toad. He explained, “I think I’m super-accustomed to this place, for sure... When the rooms... have personality. Some are dark, some are warm, some are ridiculous... I think what’s different about Toad is that, I find that the personality in there changes...” While he does play at other venues, Kevin said, “I won’t have that same connection with the room.” But when he plays at Toad, “I feel like I have somewhat of an understanding of how it breathes in there.” This personification of the bar as a living, breathing entity shows the power of space to shape a musician’s approach to performance.

How Physical Space Can “Exist”

In his article “Considering Space In Recorded Music,” William Moylan refers to the perceived performance environment as the “overall space where the ‘performance’ that is the music ‘recording’ is heard as taking place.”⁵⁴ Among the characteristics of the PPE that Moylan outlines, are “frequency alterations” to the sound; “how those alterations unfold over time”; “ratio of direct to reverberant

⁵⁴ William Moylan. “Considering Space In Recorded Music.” *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field*. Ed. Frith, Simon; Zagorski-Thomas, Simon. Burlington, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012. Accessed at: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/ruthmann/PWYM/moylanspace.pdf>

sound”; and “unfolding dynamic relationships between the direct sound and reflections/reverberation.”

Moylan further writes that sound sources can “be placed as a section within the ensemble on the sound stage,” and that the factors of such a given environment “fuse with the sound quality... [and] provide the illusion of placement in a unique physical space. These created environments may be realistic or have sound qualities that defy our natural physics...”⁵⁵

Moylan goes into great detail concerning “spatial dimension characteristics” and how a listener might choose to evaluate a recording. He concludes that these qualities have the potential to, among other things: influence musical relationships; “provide added dimensions to instruments and voices”; and “contribute to a convincing presentation of the song.”⁵⁶

While Moylan is talking about listening to recordings through an electronic media rather than listening to and viewing an amplified live performance, I suggest that his description can be applied to performance space as well. His notion of a created musical environment that defies natural physics parallels Kevin’s perspective of the performance experience at Toad. Under challenging circumstances, where managing the sound and inhabiting the limited physical space prove to be taxing, a musician creates a personal and compelling spatial analogy for this environment. Rather than comparing the bar to another metaphorical space like the ones mentioned previously, the musician gives life to the bar, thinking of it as a living, “breathing” entity with an evolving personality,

⁵⁵ Moylan. “Considering Space In Recorded Music.” 166.

⁵⁶ Moylan. “Considering Space In Recorded Music.” 168.

but with the specific position of a bandmate: a coworker who is quick to challenge, and with whom there must be cooperation for success.

Musicians, staff, and customers stressed that participating in this location requires both cooperation and compromise. There has to be: in such close quarters, it is close to impossible for an individual to avoid invading others' personal space. Many musicians feel that performing in Toad is a "trial by fire," and that once you have mastered that room you can perform anywhere.

I do not imply that similar tests are not undertaken by repeated performing at other bars in the Cambridge musical space. I instead observe that, while many bars in Cambridge and Somerville have their own character, the experience of Toad, and what it means to musicians like Johnny or Kevin, is entirely unique. Playing in the bar necessitates negotiating an intimate space for many who are infused with a sense of community and family, and who have their own perceptions of the decorum in this space. While the interior creates an enforced closeness between performers and audience that makes for auditory challenges, it also facilitates a level of interaction among participants that enables such an intense and satisfying musical experience that it at times approaches the feeling of a transformative ritual.

Chapter Four: Additional Phenomena and Conclusions

There are times during the week when Toad is not Toad, in the ways that make the bar and its experience so unique. In this section, I identify elements that work in contradistinction to the experience at Toad I have described at this point. Various factors during the weekend performances create a very different vibe and experience at the bar. I wish to incorporate two accounts of additional phenomena, one at Toad and the other at The Lizard Lounge just down the street. The first pertains to weekend performances at Toad, an experience previously alluded to, but not explored in depth.

Friday Night

Friday through Sunday are given to musicians who play at Toad less frequently, or who are performing there for the first time. Often, these musicians are visiting from out of state. Musicians with residencies who perform during the week do not like the weekends, and according to staff, neither do The Regulars. While lauding Toad for its reputation of featuring quality music during the “programmed” residency weeknights, Kevin was laughingly dismissive of the weekends: “Those are the nights you don’t want to go to Toad. Don’t go on Friday or Saturday. Those nights are rookie nights... just party nights... They’re [the staff and bar] making money, that’s what they do. It’s just sloppy.”

Others described how the audience during the weekends had no appreciation for the special quality of the space at Toad, and the potential for a transformative experience between musicians and listeners. Johnny observed:

“The kids that go in there don’t have the vested interest in the room the way. First of all, they’re younger. All of us, the usual crowd is 30s to 50s and beyond. But Friday and Saturday, those kids, they don’t have momentum. They don’t see the big picture...”

He continued, “Kevin and I... agreed to meet at Toad, and we saw this great fucking band there. And I actually had a [confrontational] moment with some idiot where I was trying to get by with a beer... It’s not the same. It’s simply because it’s just young people who are still trying to figure out their place in the universe, and whatever, all that goes with that... More often than not, you’ll want to avoid it.” The elements that made the bar so special were missing when a younger audience merely treated Toad as a place to drink, talk loudly and socialize.

I also heard accounts of the rare altercations that occur there on the weekends, occurrences that never happen during the week. Natalie spoke about the only time that a punch was thrown inside Toad, shortly before she arrived to work at 9 pm on a Saturday night. The band that night was performing their first set at Toad. They were not associated in any way with the fight, but they were not invited back since the disagreement occurred during their set.

Natalie described another dramatic quarrel that occurred on a Thursday night, during the residential set of Baker Thomas Band. This escalated until the two drunken patrons were thrown out for hostile behavior. One of them called the police on the bar, but the charge was dismissed as baseless. The two patrons were banned from visiting Toad again.

Factors such as these compelled me to avoid Toad on weekends. Even though bands such as Fandango packed the bar during the week, the space was held with a level of respect where an argument or fight would be unthinkable. One of the special aspects of Toad is the cooperation between the musicians and audience, but on the weekend, factors can occur that create a very different atmosphere. Such was the time when a burlesque dancer accompanied the musicians performing on a Friday night.

Toad was filled to capacity. The door-guy on duty that night allowed us in after we promised not to crowd the entrance. We moved as close to the stage as possible. I made my way through the crowd, was soon separated from my companions.

This was the first time I heard a New Orleans jazz band playing at Toad. As is typical, the drummer was given priority positioning in the corner of the stage with his kit. A singer sat on a stool and played acoustic guitar. Next to them, another member played upright bassist. The brass players were placed on the floor in front of and to the side of the stage, and the keyboard player sat at a bench on the floor, adjacent to the drummer's kit.

The most curious aspect of the performance was the presence of a burlesque performer, who danced onstage next to the musicians. She kept her clothes on throughout the performance. In the course of the evening, she introduced herself by her stage name to the audience, and plugged another upcoming show that would feature both her and The Soggy Po' Boys. While doing so, she incorporated as many double entendres referring to her derriere as

possible, and referred to the band as “these assholes.” During one song, she got up from the floor—where she had been alternately talking and dancing with customers—and danced on the bench, between the keyboard player and myself. At the conclusion of the song, the bouncer appeared and ordered her down from the bench.

This is not to say that the band was not well received that night. They performed a variety of tunes—some originals, some covers—in a jazz-blues-vocal style that won them a tremendous reception. During a solo, the trumpet player abruptly made his way through the crowd in the direction of the entrance. The act—and the response it received from the audience—was worthy of the most popular regular performers at Toad.

Still, the experience on a weekend was substantially different. There was a sense that drunken college students violated the special nature of the space at the bar. The crowded room held the possibility of violence, rather than close camaraderie. The music was strong but something felt “off.” Toad was not Toad.

Space and Phenomena in Other Locations

In the course of my research, I broadened my perspectives on musical space by attending performances at other bars in the area. Some of these bars, such as The Plough & Stars and Bull McCabe’s, formerly Tir Na Nog, had very similar interior layouts. One notable difference is that The Plough has no stage; the musicians instead play on the floor.

An initial impression of the audience was that they were relatively inattentive to the music. While the audience was customarily clapping and cheering after each song, they were seemingly not paying as close attention as the audience at Toad usually did. Instead, most of them were conversing over food. However, this perspective was contrasted with those of musicians who play there. They expressed an appreciation not only for the audience's attention, but also for the sound quality in The Plough.

This raises the question of whether other Cambridge bars offer the same aesthetic experiences to musicians and listeners as Toad, but without the hurdle of a confining physical space. Like at Toad, bands performing at both McCabe's and The Plough are situated at the back of the room, adjacent at the bar. Yet at both, especially at The Plough, it is much easier for listeners to get up, move around, and retreat to the restroom area without disturbing the musicians.

This perspective was enhanced by a more recent attendance at The Plough to hear a brass band (not dissimilar from The Soggy Po' Boys' performance). The Late Risers' show unfolded very much like a typical performance at Toad: the audience was rapt and lively; and the musicians were relatively free to move in the space. They did in fact move forward and immerse themselves into the dancing crowd while playing. The lack of a stage at The Plough allows the musicians to arrange themselves as they see fit within that space, as opposed to within Toad where they are confined to specific spots on and around the stage, which may be less than ideal.

Cocek Brass Band at The Lizard Lounge

I also visited The Lizard Lounge to hear Cocek Brass Band, who were described to me as playing Balkan music but whose website lists a variety of influences, including Afrobeat and klezmer. The band featured some of the same musicians who I later observed in the New Orleans band at The Plough, and just as they had done at that bar, walked into the dancing audience while performing.

At The Lizard Lounge, the musicians expended their performance space even further. In the middle of a song, they began walking up the stairs, leading from the Lounge up into the Cambridge Common restaurant on the ground level. I joined the procession of dancing and clapping audience members who followed them. Before long, we were all encircling the square-shaped bar in the center of the restaurant, while alternately laughing and bemused customers looked on. After a minute or two, the procession returned to the Lounge in the basement level.

Regarding how musicians and listeners alike occupy physical space, this last instance might have been the most profound and amusing performative phenomena I observed in the course of my research. While I had seen similar behavior—both from this same band at different locations, and from other performers—no band had expanded the performance space in such an extreme manner. Functionally, I noted that brass players are privileged to occupy the performance space in ways that other musicians cannot. These musicians are unplugged, and not bound to cords or amplification. Their instruments are highly portable, all of which makes it possible for them to move freely within a

performance space. In addition, brass bands have a long tradition of marching and moving while performing, such as in parades, sports events, and funeral processions.⁵⁷

My purpose in telling this anecdote is to contrast how musicians can, and do, occupy and utilize spaces of differing locations, as well as to raise additional questions for further research. One might consider whether a Cocek performance like the one I observed, would be conducive at a location like Toad. The spatial relationship between The Lizard and Cambridge is not unlike that of Toad and Christopher's. However, one can walk from The Lizard to the upstairs restaurant without going outdoors. This fosters a sense that the two locations are, to an extent, a single establishment, since they share a roof. Conversely, customers are not allowed to use the hallway between Christopher's and Toad, and must instead exit one in order to enter the other.

If a band like Cocek were to perform at Toad, they would likely have to restrict their movements, similar to how other musicians have performed there. This is in part due to the limited space at Toad, especially on a crowded night. But additionally, a procession of musicians and audience into Christopher's would be less practical, since everyone would have to proceed out onto the street. Another question to raise is whether the management at Christopher's would be as flexible as Cambridge Common towards this behavior.

Other clubs create and enforce their own social spaces, dictating how performance and reception are meant to unfold in ways that differ from Toad. At

⁵⁷ Erving Goffman.. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956. 14.

Club Passim, tables take up the area in front of the stage, which precludes dancing. There is no bar in the room; drinks are ordered from an adjacent room where patrons pick them up, or else a waitress brings orders into the audience. Where Toad sometimes allows or imposes silence, Passim gives the impression that a quiet audience is integral to every performance. While some of the rowdier bands at Toad would not be compatible with this space, other musicians who play at both venues favor Passim for this quality.

The physical space at other venues allows for certain other privileges not as easily achieved at Toad. Many venues permit bands to sell CDs and other merchandise during performances. At Toad, musicians typically feature CDs inside an open guitar case in the corner adjacent to the stage. Conversely there is enough space in locations like The Middle East and Thunder Road Music Club to allow for boutiques that prominently display merchandise without encroaching on the space of either the musicians or audience.

Even though Toad has branched out and features performers outside the realm of folk music, certain genres are not played there. After attending performances of Afrobeat and dub at The Middle East and Bull McCabe's, it occurred to me that Toad does not tend such music from the African diaspora. This was confirmed in my interview with Evan, who opined that The Lizard Lounge might be of greater interest to an ethnomusicologist, as that bar hosts more "global" music than one would hear at Toad. The African American music featured at Toad—blues, R&B, New Orleans-style jazz—is being performed, with some exceptions, by white musicians for white audiences.

Entering Into the Music

These factors illustrate how these various musical spaces have their own components that allow for certain behaviors and actions to take place. Some of these behaviors are unique to a specific bar, while others overlap and are carried out in multiple locations, but in methods that contrast.

I suggest that what allows for these diverse behaviors to occur, is the respective social space that has been cultivated by each bar. Musicians and audience members have various motivations for participating and goals to aspire to, which are manifested in some of the phenomena I have described through this ethnography. As Berger writes, “In the simplest dynamic, the players’ shaping of experience is influenced by their goals in music making, and these in turn are influenced by the scene to which the players belong and the larger society in which they are situated.”⁵⁸ Toad is perhaps more convenient for certain purposes than for others. Only on a few occasions did I observe performers selling merchandise; perhaps they would aspire to do so in other locations with greater physical space. However, it does not necessarily mean that this did not occur on many more occasions when I happened to not be present.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have examined the role musical space in influencing musical performance, and how that space shapes the nature of experience for musicians and listeners. The space of Toad provides a unique vantage point for

⁵⁸ Berger. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*. 169.

this examination. The patrons who frequent this bar believe that it is a unique venue that attracts serious, committed music listeners. As Kevin related, “people make it a destination for checking out music, people who still care about music. There’s not many of them left.”

Even with the acoustic challenges at Toad, the venue promotes an approach to performance that creates an intense energy and intimacy. Harris Berger recognizes this dynamic in his discussion of affect and performance: “The avoidance of [self] reflection on the stage leads us to the issue of affect. The reader may wonder how the musicians could play with feeling or have fun on stage in the aurally deprived conditions described above... For now we can observe that all of the players cite the excitement of live performance, the energy of the crowd, and ‘entrance into the music’ as ways of overcoming the problems of a bad sound system...”⁵⁹

Berger explains how one musician defines “entering into the music”: “[He] strongly related to the opposition between inviting and compelling attention and explained that he had no desire to draw the crowd into the performance. On the contrary, his goal is to... [hold] the sound firmly and richly in the center of experience; the audience, he said, can follow him there if they so chose.”⁶⁰

The problematic spatial framework and audio setup within Toad constantly create challenges for the performers. Voices carry throughout the bar, regardless of how distant the speakers are from the music. The sound system is substandard and even those with years of experience have trouble achieving a

⁵⁹ Berger. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*. 153.

⁶⁰ Berger. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*. 137.

good mix. Still, musicians draw pleasure from the experience of performing. The audience's reception allows them to enter the musical experience with unusual intensity. The lack of boundaries between musician and listener in this tiny space, and the physical contact between musicians and audience only seems to deepen this experience.

Berger continues: “[The] practice of ‘entering into the music’ has important implication for our understanding of the role of affect in the [musician’s] organization of attention. The music... entails flows of sound phenomena, irrespective of whether they are imaginations or perceptions; ‘entering into the music’ means experiencing these flows with great intensity and shuffling their affective aspects to the center of [the musician’s] experience. It is through intense attention to the ‘music’... and interaction with the audience that a satisfying experience is achieved... [For some musicians] feelings of fun and energy are near the center of any good experience of rock performance.”⁶¹

This very much encompasses the musical performance at Toad. The crowding of people into this space and thrusting of a barrage of sound at the listeners create a unique experience. This intensity is experienced positively and many devoted patrons return on a regular basis. Berger explains this performer-audience interaction as “a feedback loop in which audience and performer inspire one another to greater and greater levels of energy—a more and more heightened performance, a more intense grasping-of-the-other-with-fun...” where musicians “seek to bombard the crowd with such a powerful image of fun and

⁶¹ Berger. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*. 153-4.

such intense face-to-face interactions that they have no choice but to enter into the event.”⁶²

I also find it helpful to analyze the space at Toad using Goffman’s concept of a “front” in regard to performance space. It is defined as “the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance.”⁶³ Among the “standard parts” of a front that Goffman examines is the setting, which encompass such factors as overall physical layout of a space. Goffman explains that the setting typically “stays put,” only in rare instances does the setting “follow” the performer.

However, in Toad, the “front,” that is, the space of the club, is atypically flexible. Johnny observed, “You can take tables away! What other business establishment is gonna let you remove tables where customers are gonna sit?” Here, he was discussing how the staff members accommodate musicians who need seating at the bench on the floor. This flexibility in determining the interior space benefits the audience as well. This was the case during a particularly lively performance, where the staff obligingly moved the tables and cleared space so they and the audience could dance freely to the music. At these times, the experience of the music becomes the main determinant, trumping economic factors such as selling drinks, or even safety concerns as the bar fills beyond comfortable capacity.

⁶² Berger. *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*. 156.

⁶³ Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. 14.

The space that is created allows the performers and the audience to build a unique relationship through music performed. As Small observed, it also allows for a relationship with sound: “ideal relationships as we imagine them to be and allow us to learn about them by experiencing them. The modeling is reciprocal, as is implied by the three words I have used persistently through this book: in exploring we learn, from the sounds and from one another, the nature of the relationships; in affirming we teach one another about the relationships; and in celebrating we bring together the teaching and the learning in an act of social solidarity.”⁶⁴

Toad is a space that fulfills a variety of purposes. Its intimate interior, as well as and the ritual regular attendees have cultivated around it, allow for participants to think of it as an extension of one’s home. The interactions that take place within this setting also demonstrate it to be revered as a sacred premises. Perhaps most compelling is its status as an entity with its own personality which performing musicians must acknowledge and compromise with in order to achieve the end result, which has repeatedly been acknowledged to be musical growth.

It is unusual to find a performance space with such a profound presence that it is referred to as “a member of the band.” But Toad elicits strong feelings from musicians, audience, and staff. For many performers, regulars, and audience members, Toad presents a powerful, unique way to experience music, even as the space—crowded, tiny, and acoustically challenged—is less than

⁶⁴ Small. *Musicking*. 218.

ideal. Yet the constraints that this bar puts on musicians and performers are the very factors that make Toad breathe and come alive.

The modes of thought and action in play at Toad are representative of a liminal process, and of the “sense of communal belonging and reformulations of self-identity.”⁶⁵ Among the components of liminality, the notion of an unstructuredness to this space is essential to comprehending how live music is performed and received here. In part, the unstructuredness within Toad is manifested by the relaxed attitude the staff have in letting musicians and listeners occupy the physical space in unusual ways, for the purpose of fostering intimacy. Participants reverently make the claim that this flexibility is unique among music bars in the area.

Further, this unstructuredness is manifested in how the musicians and audience members perceive themselves within this space, and their interactions with it. At times, these ways participants perceive the bar environment do not align with how one normally perceives the physical world. As Jenny Ryan observes: “In the imagination we transport ourselves into alternate universes of possibility with the comforting knowledge that the real world will be waiting for us when we return.”⁶⁶ This music bar is made to exist as an organism whose physical qualities must be acknowledged, and with which the participants must negotiate. This is an ever-evolving process that depends in no small part on the number of participants and how they occupy the physical space. Yet as

⁶⁵ Ryan, Jenny. “Weaving The Underground Web: Neo-Tribalism and Psytrance On Tribe.net.” *The Local Scenes and Global Culture of Psytrance*. Ed. St. John, Graham. New York: Routledge, 2010. 187.

⁶⁶ Ryan. “Weaving The Underground Web.” 199.

musicians and audience members consistently testify, this musical experience leaves them captivated, and with the sense of having participated in a transformative rite of passage that facilitated artistic maturation.

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