

## THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

## WEBINAR

## EXPLORING THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN TRANSFORMATIVE PLACEMAKING

Washington, D.C.

Thursday, February 23, 2023

## KEYNOTE REMARKS:

THE HON. THOMAS "TOMMY" BATTLE, JR.

Mayor, Huntsville, Ala.

## PANEL DISCUSSION:

JENNIFER S. VEY

Senior Fellow, Brookings Metro; Director, Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking

STEVIE "DR. VIEW" JOHNSON

Founder and Executive Producer, Fire in Little Africa

VICTORIA JONES

Community Partnership Manager, tvg Hospitality; Singer/Songwriter

RENEE MCKENNEY

President, Tulsa Regional Tourism; Senior Vice President, Tulsa Regional Chamber

SHAIN SHAPIRO

Chairman, Sound Diplomacy; Executive Director, Center for Music Ecosystems

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**Jennifer Vey:** Good morning. I'm Jennifer Vey, a senior fellow and the director of the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking at Brookings Metro. Thanks so much to all of you for being with us today. So when we think about some of the country's great music cities, New Orleans, Atlanta, Nashville, Chicago, we might assume it was just the vagaries of history, of serendipitous events that brought the right people together in the right places at just the right time, in which a virtuous cycle of growth almost magically ensued. It's a romantic vision, almost mythic, really, and there's an element of truth to it.

Would New Orleans be a global center of jazz if it weren't for the confluence of diverse groups, groups of black artists playing together in Congo Square? Would Nashville have become the nucleus for country music if not for the creation in the late 1800s of both the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Ryman Auditorium? But music, through its singers and songwriters, its players and purveyors, its easy listeners and its most zealous fans, is embedded in every community, and every community can choose to value and support its local growth and development.

So on this note, I'm thrilled to be hosting today's webinar on the role of music in preserving and creating great places. With me today is an amazing group of artists and place-makers who are going to discuss how intentional efforts to nurture a vibrant local music, music ecosystem can create jobs, grow and attract talent, enhance tourism, foster connection and belonging, and make communities more engaging, more meaningful and more fun. It's a topic that has struck a chord, apparently, as several hundred of you have tuned in.

Our party favor for joining us is a playlist created by many of you and curated a little bit by us of best songs about cities or a particular city. In case you're wondering, one of the top songs tied based on repeat suggestions was New York, New York, which tells us there are either a lot of New Yorkers in the audience for that while, sure, it's a great song, many of you may need to expand your music horizons a little bit. This playlist, as well as the separate playlist of songs out of Tulsa and Huntsville that Shain Shapiro put together for us should help. You can find the Huntsville and Tulsa playlist on Spotify if you search for Tulsa and Huntsville Music Cities playlist. And we will have the cities playlist available on the event page and ultimately on Spotify at the conclusion of the webinar. So we hope you enjoyed them both.

So we're first going to hear today from Mayor Tommy Battle of Huntsville, Alabama, which has been on its own journey to become a great music city. Mayor Battle was elected to his fourth term

in 2020, and under his leadership, the city embarked on what was at the time, America's largest listening exercise around the city's music and cultural environment, a process which ultimately helped bolt Huntsville's status as a place to perform and enjoy music. So, Mayor Battle, I'll pass it on to you.

**Thomas Battle, Jr.:** Good. Thank you, Jennifer. And thank you for allowing us to kind of tell our story here. As we start to tell our story, and our story is a story of opportunity, how we took a, how we, we in Huntsville have leveraged music as an economic development driver. One of the biggest priorities that we had since, since I've come into office in the past 14 years has been quality of life. And of course music is a natural part of the discussion when you start talking about quality of life. Nearly five years ago we got very serious about music, and we decided that we needed to do a music survey, we called it a music audit, and but it was a lot more than that. It kind of gave us a picture where we could go and what we could do. And to toot our own horn— and this is pun intended— we were the first city in America to embark on a data driven journey to strategically amplify our music economy.

You know, this understanding of music's role forced us to assess what the music industry meant to us, what it meant to our quality of life. People know a lot about Huntsville, but they mainly know us as a space city, home to US Space and Rocket Center Space Camp and the rocket scientists who did the propulsion to help take America to the moon. Today we're, we're working to leverage that same pioneering spirit that came back then to become the nation's next big music city. Our mission is not only to create more, more dynamic music environment, from education to creation, production and performance, but also to create a diverse music ecosystem, one that strengthens our economy.

We partnered with Sound Diplomacy in late spring 2018. You've got Shain in here, a little bit later. We did it just to find the answers and also to create a roadmap on how to achieve this goal. And one of the things we expected, we had our first public meeting with an expected 25 people to be there, and there were almost 300 people at that meeting, it quickly showed us that we were on the right track. As we paved the way for the creation through our music audit, we came up with a household music board and as a governing body that is tasked with advising the city on new policies and refining current ones and helping our music, our music industry grow.

We then hired a full-time music officer, Matt Mandrella, in 2022 and created the Huntsville Music Office. And looking back, the audit also was a lot of Shain's work highlighted the need to

provide more venues for local, regional and national talent to perform. We already have some great facilities at our Von Braun Center with concert halls, arenas and a music hall, and they and we had a number of places that we could host smaller privately owned venues, but we lacked that large outdoor amphitheater, one that could really take our music ambitions to the next level.

In 2020, we approved funding for the Orion Amphitheater, an 8000-seat venue that opened in May of 2022. And you know, there's been a home run, few quality of life infrastructure projects have brought as much joy and accolades as Orion. Since opening in May, we've had more than 150,000 people who have enjoyed concerts from artists all across all genres. And, and people have participated in numerous community events at the amphitheater. This first year, Orion, Orion Amphitheater welcomed the nationally renowned artists like Dave Matthews Band, Stevie Nicks, Jason Isbell, Emmylou Harris, Widespread Panic and Josh Groban. And they all had glowing things to say about one of the newest venues out there in the, in the open-air market. The Orion is managed by our partners at tvg Hospitality, and they have gone above and beyond to make sure that we have a reputation that if you're going to do an outdoor or outdoor circuit, you want to come here.

And, you know, the, Orion is also going to probably be pretty popular and a very, topic of conversation at the 2023 Music Cities conference, which will be held here in October. This two-day global conference will explore the role of music in the development of cities, and Huntsville has a track record on that, and I think we can really tell that story. With delegates from all, from over 20 countries attending the convention we'll showcase and celebrate our amazing home and music efforts to hundreds in the industry, of industry professionals. Landing the Music Cities convention reinforces what we already know; it's an exciting time for music in Huntsville. Creating a more dynamic and diverse music ecosystem is something that we're taking seriously, because it strengthens our economy, and it also promotes tourism.

Looking forward, our Huntsville goals are simple: build an ecosystem with diverse people from buskers to on the street to those trying in the business to, to the nationally recognized acts. It includes church choirs, it includes people who run the lights and the sounds, those in the business office of the music ventures to the fans who buy the tickets. It's also, another goal is to increase community engagement in the use of music. Another goal is identifying educational opportunities with public and private schools, as well as the two-year colleges and universities. As Huntsville's economic

ecosystem grows, there's going to be a greater need for music jobs and the schools and colleges can create interest and also provide training.

We are also and one of our final two goals is to establish a music identity apart from places like Nashville, Memphis and Austin. And we've seen what that is, what the music scene has done for them. We will promote our local music scene in a way that becomes recognized on a national and regional scale. And finally, we'll create a music identity that will lure residential and commercial development. That's what, that's a key to this as a developmental tool. And we'll also build excitement with people who want to move here. Maybe they wanted to come see Jason Isbell here. They want to experience what Huntsville has to offer and what the Orion Amphitheater has to offer.

A big part of attracting visitors and new residents is attracting the best live music performances in the nation and ensuring that we have the facilities to accommodate them. And it's key to being part of that broader conversation about why you should move to Huntsville, Alabama. Our music scene plays a leading role in all these initiatives, and it's a rich, diverse and inclusive music ecosystem that is vital to our long-term strategy for smart growth. We're not Austin, we're not Nashville, and we're not Memphis, but we are Huntsville, and we're marching to the beat of our own drum as we become Alabama's music launchpad. Thank you for having me today.

**Jennifer Vey:** All right. Thanks so much, Mayor Battle for those inspiring words about Huntsville. I haven't had a chance to get down there yet, but everything you've said, I definitely know I need to and hope others feel the same way.

**Thomas Battle, Jr.:** Please come and visit.

**Jennifer Vey:** So I'd now like to introduce our panel, if everybody wants to get on camera. We have Shain Shapiro, the executive director for the Center of Music Ecosystems and the chair of Sound Diplomacy, Stevie "Dr. View" Johnson, who's the executive producer of Fire in Little Africa, Tulsa, Victoria Jones, the Community Partnership manager of tvG Hospitality, as well as a singer and songwriter, and Renee McKenney, who's the senior vice president of tourism at the Tulsa Regional Chamber and the President of Tulsa Regional Tourism. So first, I just want to thank all of you in the audience for being here today for what I know is going to be a pretty awesome conversation.

Before we get started, I just want to remind all of you in the audience that we'll have some time at the end for some Q&A and that you can submit questions during the course of the webinar by Twitter using hashtag music cities or by emailing events at Brookings dot edu. All right. So, Shain, I

want to start with you. Growing a robust music ecosystem requires engaging with people across all areas of the city to understand its strengths, where the gaps and barriers lie and what policies and investments ought to be employed to enhance music's role and impact.

So can you talk a little bit about Sound Diplomacy and the Center for Music Ecosystems and how your work supports cities to know and then ultimately grow their music ecosystems? And what are the core tenets of a thriving music ecosystem that cities should really be evaluating?

**Shain Shapiro:** Thank you very much. Thank you, Mayor Battle, if you're still here and nice to meet everybody. So for Sound Diplomacy, we're an economic consultancy. We work with cities, governments and large companies on music, entertainment, hospitality. The Center for Music Ecosystems is a 501(c)(3) that helps develop research to, as I say, help use music to solve problems. I'm trying to build it on the Brookings model of creating research that can help solve problems in communities.

And to explain with the music audit, what, the most important thing about a music audit or a music strategy is data. A lot of decisions get made in relation to the music economy based on things that have absolutely nothing to do with music, for example, housing policy or land use policy, zoning, workforce development. And music tends to be that thing that is perceived as what you do after work, not something that literally is work. And I can't tell you how many economic developers I speak to and explain that workforce development doesn't need to have a shovel, right. There are other ways to develop your workforce.

An audit is a suite of data around where your music is across all disciplines, genres, all levels from music teachers and choirs and churches straight through to the Orion-style kind of commercial style, you know, music industry. Where is the economic and ideal social impact of it, where the gaps are and also an assessment of the regulations related to how to grow your music economy. And music tends to touch on everything.

So when you do a music audit and you build that data, it identifies pathways that you can interact with, whether you're a city, an EDC, a CBB, any other of the acronyms and organizations that we have to look at how to really recognize and invest in and be more deliberate and intentional about your music ecosystem. And I think both Stevie and Victoria as well as Renee, can kind of talk about that intentionality that they approach to their business, which is really just an example of a, of work

that is done within a community that needs to be elevated by what a music audit or a music strategy can do.

**Jennifer Vey:** That's great. Super, super helpful and interesting. I don't think there's anybody else out there quite doing what you're doing. Certainly we, we at Brookings Metro do a lot of work on the space of economic development and really assessing what city and regional economies look like and what their strengths are. But you're in this unique space of doing this for the music industry, which is, which is really pretty fascinating. So both Huntsville and Tulsa actually went through this process. They engaged with Sound Diplomacy to conduct a music audit.

And I want to talk a little bit about that experience and kind of first starting with the local motivation for even doing this. So, Victoria, let's, let's start with you. So first, can you put your singer songwriter hat on for a minute? And how was your experience when this audit was happening? What was your experience as an artist looking in as this audit was actually being conducted? What did you and the others in the music industry actually hope to get out of this process?

**Victoria Jones:** On the outside looking in, in my experience as an artist, for one, also as a native of Huntsville, Alabama, when the music audit was going forth, I feel like it truly brought a sense of rare passion and camaraderie. And just across the city, for instance, you know, I know Mayor Battle, he kind of made a nod to this, but there was a coalition, so to speak, of artists and business leaders that presented before a city council as you know, the music audit went forth. And so, again, you saw a city unified, especially a city that normally, you know, it stays in that realm of, of NASA and aerospace, but also, we're heavy into engineering. So to see music and entertainment brought to the forefront, it again, it just kind of breathed new life into our city. And it also created a balance, something that was less stoic than before.

But as an artist, for sure, I feel like again, the audit just, just really showed us that, hey, music does live here and that we do have a music scene that is so hungry and eager to grow. Further than that, I think when the city partnered with Sound Diplomacy but also tvq hospitality, it just further created a staple that said, we're here and we're really going to do this. So yeah, in short, it's, it was truly all inspiring. And as a native here, it was like, wow, I, I feel even more inspired to stay in my, in my hometown. I think it's so easy to look at other cities and feel like you have to travel somewhere else to make it or to do something significant in music. But again, the sound audit and our city back in

and CBG hospitality, it just breathe new life into our whole community that said, hey, we can live and we can thrive here as well.

**Jennifer Vey:** That's great. Thanks so much for that. And yeah, it sounds like it sort of just injected some kind of hope and inspiration in the city, just knowing that the city, right, was starting to actually pay attention and have that intentionality around supporting their artists and music industry at large. So I want to pivot a little bit to Tulsa, Renee. So you're the leader of tourism in Tulsa, and by virtue of that, you're really working to ensure that Tulsa provides a great experience for, for visitors and other patrons and certainly for the people who live there as well. So you, can you talk a little bit about how do you view the role of music in what you do and why then did leaders in Tulsa even choose to invest in understanding and ultimately developing and working to develop its music economy?

**Renee McKenney:** Sure. Well, thank you. I think music is such a rich part of Tulsa's history and due to serious investments we put into this with history and really expanding that in the placemaking space. From a straightforward tourism lens, it has a leisure, an individual traveler and a large, any time you have a large conference or sporting event, we always want to thread through music. We have the Bob Dylan Center that just recently opened, the Woody Guthrie Center, the soon to be 100 year old Cain's Ballroom, which is legendary, the Sex Pistols performed there and it goes all the way back to Bob Wills days and the fully functional church studio, which is Leon Russell's Studio from the seventies and easily can be considered a museum in its own right, but it's also a, it was really the, the birth of Tulsa sound happen there. So starting the careers of Tom Petty and that's why Bob Dylan is back here.

But add on top of that, all the live music that we have every single night, we did over 1600 live performances in 2022. We have large concerts at the BRK, and the Tulsa Opera, Orchestra is amazing. We also have music that's really booked with all of our tribal partners, which makes Tulsa very unique. We have three tribal nations that are based right here in Tulsa, and it's an actual place you can build a literally, literal music vacation around because they all tie together. So we invested in this, in this sense that the many levels of tourism, it generates dollars and people will leave their money here in Tulsa, but they also have a great community shared value and great experience that feeds into the local business economy.



**Jennifer Vey:** And I was lucky enough through the Music Studies Conference this past fall that the Center for Music Ecosystems and others put on, I had the chance to be in Tulsa and definitely attest to all the fabulous music assets that you have and just really all around had a great time exploring the city and its music. Just one quick follow up question. So obviously you had, you had a lot of things to build on, like Cain's Ballroom, a lot of history that was already there. So how, when you undertook this whole effort, what were you kind of hoping to get? And then what, what did it kind of lead to? I mean, did you, have you seen a real change in the city as you started to kind of both market the, Tulsa as a music city to just continue to make those investments?

**Renee McKenney:** Oh, definitely. What we've seen just in the short term and as I mentioned before with those museums, but we also have these great artists that you're going to hear from today with Dr. View and that are Tulsans. And we are really trying to get into that where we're supporting our local artists and what they're doing because they're very special. It's really in our DNA here. And so as mentioned, all those assets of music, they're really irreplaceable venues. But the archives of these formative songwriters are here, and they continue to grow. And, and we work very closely and collaboratively together.

So hosting music cities was a real opportunity for all of us to be in the same room and to really not only have a sense of pride of what Tulsa is all about and that music is such a part of who we are, but we could celebrate that together. And really as a community, we're already seeing the fruits of our labor with that. The pandemic, when it first hit, we wanted to keep Tulsa music alive and clear and it was a contributor to our economy, even in the toughest of times. We did play Tulsa Music, which is very potent use of our Tulsa County ARPA Rescue funds. We were able to distribute that to artisans. We booked over, like I said, 1600 live music events, which just not only kept us going from an economic standpoint, but it really made sure that we took care of our own and that was really important to us.

So a big measurement of our success is that those activations continue to happen and continue to grow. And as we host events, we plug in our musicians through that and many of them we'll be taking with us even to South by Southwest in just a couple of weeks. So we continue to expose Tulsa's mind-blowing music scene and we really feel like we're on the map from that, from that space.

**Jennifer Vey:** And so you referenced Fire in Little, Little Africa and at the Music Cities Conference, we had a chance to see that documentary, which is really great.

**Renee McKenney:** It's amazing, really powerful.

**Jennifer Vey:** It's amazing, something so, so special, really. And so for those who haven't had an opportunity to see it, but you're going to hear more about it in a second, it, this Fire in Little Africa brought together the top musicians and visual artists in Oklahoma, in Tulsa and Oklahoma, to commemorate the centennial of the horrific 1921 massacre. And it's really been a vital part of Tulsa's music story and these last few years. So, Dr. View, I want to hear from you. Can you just talk to us about Fire in Little Africa? First of all, what inspired it and then what grew out of it? And also just how did it, how did it help bring the community together?

**Stevie "Dr. View" Johnson:** Sure. Thank you for having me. Fire in Little Africa is a multi-media hip hop project. It consists of a 21-track hip hop album. We have a documentary as well, roughly 45 minutes. We have a curriculum so the songs that made the album, we collaborated with a local collective called Tri-City Collective here in Tulsa, it's ran by educators, musicians, poets, particularly who work in Tulsa Public Schools. And so the songs, we flipped into a K-12 curriculum by state and federal standards, as well as two podcasts where we, one is just Fire in Little Africa. We literally interviewed every artist creative on the project to talk about their experiences, as well as a fireside chat with Dr. View, where I talk with activists not only in the community but other, as I say, other Black Wall streets around the world, because we feel that not only is this a Tulsa story, but this is a Black story as well when we think about the history, Red Summer and other massacres that have happened around the country that maybe people are not aware about.

And so in relation to this project, it was really about getting the record straight about our history. In the early 1900s, Oklahoma have the most Black towns in the country. It was on the verge of becoming an all-Black state. The Black dollars circulated almost 20, 25 times before it left the community. The historic Greenwood District really was, for us, by us in what we talk about today is everything is us. And so they really had their own businesses, shops and, and schools and, and literally had everything that they really needed. And that was taken away a hundred years ago. And so as we were looking at, you know, the centennial coming up, there was a lot of conversations around Watchmen and Lovecraft Country. And, you know, LeBron James is doing a documentary and Russell Westbrook is doing a documentary.

And me being an academic as well as a DJ and a producer who did a nontraditional dissertation was like, how do I prioritize and center on the localized voices direct descendants of these individuals who have lost families and businesses? And so we galvanized 60 artists not just from Tulsa, but from the state of Oklahoma, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and on and on, because this is a Oklahoma project. And we recorded the project in five days, not in recording studios. So the Greenwood Cultural Center and Skyline Mansion, which was formerly a KKK house, mansion, that is now repurposed into a Black creative space. We recorded 143 songs in five days right before the pandemic shut us down, and we're sitting on 143 songs, and we had to get creative. We got a Zoom account, we had a artists committee and literally had a Google, Google drive, and we shared the music, had our headphones and [inaudible] it from 143 songs to 21 songs in the span of three months.

At the time, I worked for the Bob Dylan Center and Bob Dylan's publicist, Larry Jenkins, used to be president CEO of Sony Records in the early nineties and just got a meeting with Larry. And Larry was like, this is amazing work and Ethiopia is going to love this. And I didn't know who Ethiopia Habtemariam was at the time, but she was the former chairwoman of Motown Records. So I say all of that to say this was just a project, an educational idea that transformed to a movement. Motown was never part of the plan. We really just wanted to get artists in the space to commemorate the legacy of Tulsa historically in the district, but all those things came into play because we were really focused on getting the story right, but it helped us develop intergenerational bridges amongst the community.

Charlie Wilson is on the album; Charlie Wilson is from Tulsa. Gap Band stands for Greenwood, Archer and Pine. And so the ability to have folks who are from Tulsa who never would have thought they would be able to get on a record with Charlie Wilson and not just get on a song, but like really have a time to have conversations with him and for him to articulate his story and the history that he knows in relation to this place was really one of the most liberatory opportunities that we could have done. So that was really the main thing. Get the record straight. How do we provide access and meet people where they're at? So some people may want to listen to an album, some people may want to look at the documentary first. Some parents may be like, I need to look at this curriculum before I can allow my child to listen to the album. And then we had a podcast, so that was really the whole intent.

**Jennifer Vey:** So yeah, I mean, it's again, it's, it's really fantastic. And I think you have some slides, right? Maybe we could just show a few of those so you can kind of tell us what we're seeing.

**Stevie "Dr. View" Johnson:** Sure. This is the album artwork. This is actually in front of the Skyline Mansion. If you all can feel on the outside. It's the, it's the remains of 1921. So for us, it's like, how do we warp past, present and future? So you have the past, the remains, the present future of the present photo, and then the actual content is the future that we hope to give to the next legacy of the folks here in Tulsa. This is actually in the Green Greenwood Cultural Center. As I mentioned, we didn't have recording studios. And so you see it says the Royal Hotel. The top left, we named, we had six studio set up, each, each studio was named after a business that was massacred 100 years ago. So it says the Royal Hotel. At the bottom left, there's actually photos of survivors that are in this actual room. So imagine writing or recording, producing in this, in this little space with these photos of direct of, of survivors of the massacre.

So, yeah, this is just us taking up space with what we have. You know, people are singing in the kitchen. People are playing in the, on the piano trying to get a, you know, a vibe, just thinking, just trying to create and we're literally just trying to make something out of nothing. This is the Skyline Mansion; the top left is the actual the basement of the mansion. I equated it to like organized noise with OutKast and Goodie Mob. But yeah, it's just the chandelier was actually moving the entire time as we were recording in that space, which was kind of like some spiritual, spiritual things happening. But yeah, we literally just took up the space that we had and made something out of nothing.

**Jennifer Vey:** So I'll put you on the spot just a second. Were there any big surprises or something you didn't expect that came out of this? In the days that you were in the in the studio and doing the recording.

**Stevie "Dr. View" Johnson:** I think it was just a beauty to see you know, hip hop is a very competitive genre. And I mean, when you think about, you know, collective, Wu-Tang, I mean, there's so many things that are happening at once, and so getting 60 people to put their egos to the side for purpose, I was, I was worried about, you know, that particular piece where people really came together in the spirit of really commemorating this, this body of work. And I think that was the most beautiful thing that I ever witnessed.

**Jennifer Vey:** Wow, it's great and I encourage everybody in the audience, if you haven't listened to the album or the podcast or seen the documentary, definitely do so. So I want to talk a little

bit about some of the specific strategies that Huntsville and Tulsa and other cities, talk a little bit about that, have employed to improve their music ecosystems for artists and others in the music industry, but also for neighborhoods and really for cities as a whole.

So come back to Victoria. So you talk a little bit about what you thought the music audit did for Huntsville, both kind of within and outside the, the music community itself and that kind of hope and inspiration. But can you talk a little bit about some of the specific policy changes and some of the investments that came out of it and what they've done to transform the city over these last several years and I guess as part of it, what do you see moving forward like in the future? Are there things that the city still hopes to do or improvements that could still be made, challenges that you've kind of seen along the way and that the city is going to keep on working on?

**Victoria Jones:** Absolutely. So as, as Mayor Battle kind of gave nods to, the music audit, it pinpointed economic drivers and things that we could invest in as a city to propel us forward within music. And so some of those things that were highlighted were that, for one, we needed to bring back major festivals. We had a huge festival called a Big Spring Park, you know, that's, it kind of it died and now it's kind of in a season of like, okay, how we how will we resurrect this? Also, it pinpointed that we needed to focus on music education, which was something that was lacking in a lot of our schools here in the U.S. as you see, a lot of music is just being taken out of schools. So we had to find ways of how do we integrate music into the curriculum. But then Huntsville City Schools and I feel like organizations like Microwave Dave Music Foundation, you know, they answered a lot of those calls.

Another policy change that I feel like just kind of came out of the sound audit was the awareness to create a pipeline. I feel like oftentimes when we think about music, we just think about the artists and we think about, okay, that's somebody with an instrument without seeing that the music industry in itself, it can be a huge economic driver for a city, but also it works to amplify so many other industries at the same time. So when again, when you think about an amazing concert, even here at the Orion Amphitheater, yes, you see these national talents, but you also see an elevation of food and beverage.

You also see an elevation of production. And so, again, I think through the sound audit and, and through the city appointing, you know, our first music board and our first music officer, it brought things to the forefront of, hey, how do we intentionally move the needle to make music continue to be the forefront? But also, how do we create a pipeline where generations, again, they don't have to

move from this city, they can actively find jobs, they can find jobs in whatever sphere that they truly want to work in within the music industry. So, yeah, in short, again, those are some of the major, the, the most major things that I've seen evolve.

I think another thing that's on the radar of our city leaders, also here at tvG Hospitality, we hope to foster even a local talent. Again, it's so easy to, you know, have designated stages and say, oh, you know, this person, they're of this level, they're here. But now the city is answering the call to create venues where, again, you, an artist that is up and coming, they can be at open mic and then another artist that is sophisticating their brand and and and you know, garners an amazing fanbase, they can go to something like the lumber yard and then who knows down the line they can come here to the Orion Amphitheater. So again, I think it's just that intentionality of how do we create a pipeline for for artists to grow and thrive and then two, how do we attract other industries to see that, that truly this is the boat that lifts all tides. So.

**Jennifer Vey:** And are there, so as you think towards the future, are there still some challenges? I mean, were there challenges in this process of getting some of this done and things that you're still working on in Huntsville?

**Victoria Jones:** Absolutely. There's still a lot of challenges. Even from the sound decimals that certain venues had. You know, there's, there's those things. But I think the biggest challenge now is backing up a little bit, Huntsville has a very unique history in a sense, yes, we had our NASA. But also when you think about, you know, the civil rights age, you know, naturally there's a lot of things within the city that has, has been segregated. And so I think the music audit and even just the Orion, like being here the way that we seek to amplify our community with community events and backing up a little bit, tvG won the contract to run the Orion Amphitheater, and the city was very intentional in giving us that because we have an amazing leader, his name is Ryan Murphy. He actually comes from St. Augustine's Amphitheater. And when our city leaders went down there to Florida and they saw how he was able to bring in all these amazing national acts, but also it still be a place where the community could come.

So when you think about community events, for instance, here at the Orion, we've had CulturA was it, it was a huge Latin inspired festival, we saw 3000 people come out and it was it was, it was Hispanics, of course, but Mexicans and, and Panamanians like seeing literally a community of people all come together, rallied around a community event, that's something that sets us apart

because outside of other venues of, you know, having those 30 to 40 big shows and going Black, we have our commitment to have 365 days of community programming. And so again, things like pride festivals or again CulturA, like it's all these inner workings to make sure that the community still feels connected here. So again, that's a challenge in itself of just showing people, hey, you're invited, and so many other areas in Huntsville, that wasn't the case. So again, I think that's one.

And then the other challenge that is, again, is at the forefront of everyone's mind, creating venues is great. But for an artist, how do we make sure that, you know, there's transparency and baselines of pay? Like, it's one thing to have all kinds of venues, but how do we ensure that, you know, an artist can, can be paid well and they, they, they feel like they're lucrative enough to thrive in the community. So, yeah, in short, there's a lot of things on our city's radar and even within our team of what we want to amplify in this community. But a lot of things are, a lot of great things have already been fostered, so.

**Jennifer Vey:** Yeah, you've raised some great points where I think you're right, oftentimes we think about music from kind of a standpoint of the entertainment value right out of that for the listeners and a little bit less so maybe not just for the performers and the artists, but also for all those other people that, that are key to making the industry thrive. So it's, it's really interesting to hear about like how you know, how Huntsville's been working to build on some of that.

So with that, I actually want to turn it back to Renee. So in Tulsa, obviously focusing on investing in marketing, you know, a lot of great spaces and attractions, but also building that talent and building the music workforce more generally. So you talk about some of Tulsa's music assets. Can you talk a little bit more about like how you've invested in trying to ensure those assets, including, you know, the talent, the workforce are supported and amplified, and how are you even measuring this, are you keeping kind of data on, on how you're measuring success and, and also to understand like, hey, here are some areas that we want to continue to improve in.

**Renee McKenney:** Sure. No, I think data is really the key with economic impact because we always have to have a formula as to what we're doing. But when you start doing like the studies and illustrating your community, just not only from a public but also a private entities and reaching out to our community to see who would invest and support in music. And one thing I want to say with Dr. View, I mean, we, it's all about collaboration. We met early on, and he shared stories with me and, and with Kelsey, and all of us got together.

I'm also on the state level, I'm really working to build funding for cultural tourism. So with cultural tourism, we can really focus on our 13 Black towns, and we can focus on the civil rights trails. And we, Senator Matthews, who's also a Tulsan, we just got that passed through committee. So we're really excited to have another funding mechanism that we can put towards cultural festivals, cultural events, and really tying together the Claire Luper Center in Oklahoma City and Greenwood Rising here and putting music throughout that. We also have Route 66, which is celebrating its 100-year anniversary. So as we gear up for that, where do we celebrate the music venues and the artisans along Route 66, which, you know, we are the capital of Route 66 with 28 miles.

And so with that, we, we want to make sure that we're threading through music really in every single economic driven opportunity that we have so that we can fund those things, we can support our artists, and then we can with our, our, our ROI we'll be able to, through geofencing, see what venues are being used, how we're lifting those up. And then we're in a mid-five-year Tulsa music strategy that we're devising in conjunction with Sound Diplomacy. So all of that, we are data driven because that's how we get our story out there. But it also ties into all the great successes that we're having on a regional and state level.

**Jennifer Vey:** It's great. So coming back at that review, you know, as we think about kind of the future, of Tulsa, and where this goes, what are the next steps specifically for Fire in Little Africa, both kind of for itself, but also like other impacts of it that you think it's going to continue to have on Tulsa and the state of Oklahoma? And, you know, as we think about that or talk about it, you know, there are so many things that are obviously really unique about that effort but are there pieces of it or facets of it that other places could learn from or kind of adapt to maybe their own context.

**Stevie "Dr. View" Johnson:** Sure. I'm going to try to tie those in, in one response. So I think the biggest thing, you know, we are a collective, a community where we recognize the blueprint is already there. It's not something that we have to create. And so the biggest thing is ownership and space. And for us in particular, you know, I own the IP of Fire in Little Africa now, so I have some space to, to move and navigate in the ways that I believe and as well as the community believes that we should be moving.

So, for example, we've developed our own nontraditional tour. So the question is, how do you get 60 people on the road, particularly with, you know, booking venues, selling tickets, and then, you know, those ticket sales? Like for me, it doesn't make sense from a traditional way of doing. But, you



know, this project is, is educational. And, and for me, particularly being right now, I'm currently in Cambridge at Harvard, I'm a part of the 2023 Nasir Jones, named after Nas, hip hop fellowship. And so we are developing what's called Fire in Little Africa University, which is a nontraditional tour.

So how do we get to predominately white institutions, HBCUs, tribal colleges, Hispanic serving institutions, museums, education conferences? How do we get into those spaces that particularly will welcome us and provide us a guarantee that we could actually distribute amongst ourselves and develop opportunities where we can do a documentary screening, which we did at the Music City Convention and in a panel discussion so we can do a performance with, you know, a seven piece band and a 7 piece all Black youth orchestra, which is what we're doing at Harvard.

But we can also do a curriculum workshop, which a lot of these artists have been trained by the, the collective that develop the curriculum to go into these classrooms. So it's different to say, oh, Dr. View, you know, I don't rap. But if Dr. View, you recorded a song, it, it's the impact is bigger from actually going into the classroom spaces and talking to these students about what I'm actually trying to convey in this record. And so those are the ways that we have been thinking about as a, as an entity, how do we, how do we make sure that the 1921 Tulsa race massacre doesn't happen again from an economic opportunity standpoint for creators? And so we were looking at, hey, we have our own 501(c)(3) organization. Everything is us. We're focused on recruiting and training and retaining the talent that we have.

So how do we get all these, the resources and support to train people to be better songwriters and better photographers? And, you know, how do we look at it from what is Maslow's hierarchy of needs for creative, particularly in Tulsa, and what are those elements we need to develop and we have the people in place to do that, how do we create, how do we eliminate barriers so that, you know, someone who doesn't have a [inaudible] degree can still be in a place to teach and share their work? And so those are the ways that we're looking at.

So in relation to no other, no cities, it's really just trusting who you have and believing in those individuals and, and allowing them to create opportunities for themselves to, to be collaborative. Like I didn't create Fire in Little Africa by myself, I'm not on all 21 tracks. And so it was a collaborative opportunity. And I think when we talk about history in relation to space and place and recruiting and retaining people, all those things are factors in determining if a person wants to come live in a particular area. And so I think those are just my recommendations of, you know, we all have a history,

good, bad, and ugly. I think once we're able to align and make sure that the artists, creators, the policy makers, folks in the chamber, nonprofit organizations are in alignment, but also centering the artists, then things start to move. And I think Fire in Little Africa is a great example of that.

**Jennifer Vey:** Well, clearly, I mean so much that that other cities can learn from this process, which is a great segue way back to Shain. So Shain, you worked in and studied a lot of cities around the globe, not just cities, but, but really very rural areas as well. And I know you have a lot of great stories to convey. And in fact, you've written a book that will be coming out later this year, I think, that I assume tells a lot of those stories. So based on all you've learned from doing this work, what are, what do you see as some of the biggest ways that music can transform places? And can you talk a little bit about some of the stories and examples outside of Tulsa and Huntsville?

**Shain Shapiro:** Mmhmm. Yeah. You know, first off, I think I always say, you know, music is the only thing that we don't need to live but can't live without, right. And COVID, for example, was this incredible use case about the value of music. Without music, would we have genuinely all made it mentally through the challenges that we all faced locked in our homes? And, you know, so it's what, and I have been very lucky, we've worked in about 120, 130 places around the world and in over 30 countries. And one thing I've realized is that the opportunities that are available within music, not just to develop your music economy for the sake of developing your music economy, but as Victoria said, with the Orion, developing your music economy for the sake of growing and developing something else, right, the food and beverage offer at the Orion and also the area that the Orion is in didn't exist really, and doesn't and isn't the same without the music that's happening.

And so what we see, you know, first off, I constantly see music being unintentionally undervalued, socially, culturally and economically. And I know there's some questions about how do you pick and choose what music you analyze. And the answer to that is you don't. The data that you collect in the city when you do a music audit must capture all disciplines, all genres, all cultures, all, all musics. Because, you know, when I say the word music, it means everyone internalizes that word differently, right? When I say because we all think about that band or that artist or that composer that we love, and often we, decisions are made in communities based on that, they're not based on being analytical, they're based on the music that I recognize as the music that I like.

And so some amazing examples, obviously yes, there's Tulsa and Huntsville. We've worked in, I think, 30 or 40 odd cities across America. And if we're talking just about the states here, there's a

great initiative in Madison, Wisconsin, that we've been very lucky to be a part of, which is really about inequity and racism. So there was a music and equity task force set up by this incredible academic named Karen Reese long before we were involved. And the, and the city actually funded, funded and participated in a task force to look at why, frankly, when you looked at the licensing code, hip hop was essentially illegal in Madison, Wisconsin, because it was very, very difficult to stage a hip hop gig there. And there was a lot of you know, a lot of shows being canceled or being stopped that shouldn't have been, purely because of the people that were involved or where they were.

So, you know, I and I'm saying this from my perspective, I can't profess to say that the entire situation has been fixed, but the city has embarked with a grassroots organization called Greater Madison Music City, which you can all Google. We, we produced some of the data for them, but there's been a community engagement process about, first off, recognizing that there was a problem. That's really important. Accepting that there's a problem and then starting to take the solutions to fix it. In Indianapolis, another incredible city with a very good brunch scene, if anyone here is in Indianapolis, a lot of like the Play Tulsa Music program, which Renee talked about, which was ARPA money essentially to get local promoters and buyers to hire local artists to perform. And subsidizing or supporting that performance through ARPA money in Indianapolis, it was a similar initiative, just a lot of city ARPA money was dedicated to venues and that was because we had data to demonstrate the importance of those venues to the city.

And you know, every music audit, we've also worked in eastern Kentucky, rural eastern Kentucky, in a place called Morehead in Appalachia, and we developed a music audit in partnership with the county, with the city, county and a few private companies with the sole purpose of repealing the wet dry vote there because it was a dry county and a wet city. And so it was very, very difficult to attract investment into Rowan County because it was dry. So, because you can't sell booze. So there was, so we helped we are a small part of that but helped produce that data. Long story short, a referendum last year was successful, and the wet dry has been repealed.

So again, the, and I'm hoping that people recognize that the whole purpose of the music audit is both for the internal benefit of your music economy, but the external benefit of music on everything else. Music is this incredible tool to really understand your workforce development strategy as Renee says, your tourism strategy, and equally or probably even more important, community development and equity, because it's a way that you can talk to people in a language that we all understand

because that's the one language we all share is music, and do it in such a way that we can talk about quite difficult things, but using a medium that we all understand.

So I hope that that's a few different examples of music being able to, I hope, transform places. And this has happened all over the world. I'm here in London, in the UK and we have our own story here of, of, of the work that we have done related to music policy. And I'm happy to share with anyone obviously listening after.

**Jennifer Vey:** Yeah that's, that's great. And I think this, this some of the questions from the audience in fact this first question I want to ask is, is kind of a nice segue from that. So just reminder hashtag music cities and you can email us events dot Brookings dot edu if you have any questions. We did get some questions ahead of time that, that as you were registering some audience members gave to us. We got a few versions of this first question I'm going to ask so, and so I, and I think it's something that's actually going to interest a lot of folks in the audience. So how can a city that actually has a music legacy, maybe a pretty strong music scene already, how can they convince both local and, and even state leaders that the music industry actually deserves to be supported?

So you all have been pretty successful in this. But, you know, one of the audience members actually said specifically like they feel like they've tried everything, right. They've used a lot of strategies, a lot of messaging, and they still haven't been able to break through. And I think this is true for, for the arts in general often. I mean, you've touched on some of this, you know, leaders not recognizing the importance. So maybe Shain back to you, though, I'd love maybe to hear from all of you, but even Renee as somebody who's involved in the city, you know. So what do you do? I mean, how do you how do you break those barriers?

**Shain Shapiro:** It takes a long time. You, you need, you need local advocates. So if you are, you have to build partnerships locally. The story of how I ended up in Huntsville pitching to Mayor Battle came through to local advocates. The first time I was told to go to Huntsville, I asked, where's Huntsville? Because I didn't know where it was. And, but and so that's the first thing. The second thing is we, you have to speak the language to the person that you're speaking to. That's really important.

And I'm a music guy, I come from the music industry. That's where I spent my entire life working. I am not an urban planner, I'm not an economic developer, I'm not Renee tourism expert, but I have learned that I need to learn the lexicon. And when I'm speaking to a workforce developer, then we have to articulate the role that music plays in workforce development. Same as how does music

bring more heads and beds? How does music create wider, better community placemaking strategies?

And I work, you have to work really, really hard to tailor that message. And often the data that you need to tailor it doesn't exist. But that's the opportunity, right? To say by collecting this data, then we can all, you know, speak that language. And, and, and lastly— I saw the message from Karen, 5 minutes— recognize that it's equally important about the role that music plays in the wider community as much as growing, investing in music for music's sake is one thing, investing for music for the wider community's sake is a completely different thing. And that's where you have to focus is how can music make everything else better, right? Which is I guess the really, what I've tried to do in my book, which comes out.

**Renee McKenney:** Now and if I may, I think Shain, just to piggyback on that, is that what we do is so intentional. I mean, every press release we send out, everything that we do, we're making sure that we're galvanizing our music community in that story. And, you know, even an example, we had Bruce Springsteen here the other night. Every single museum made sure that we were welcoming that group, they were coming in from all over the country to come to our museums, to come to Bob Dylan, to learn about Woody Guthrie. I mean, learn about all of these things while they were here and even things like Rotary Club yesterday, we bring in our, our music talent in our museums that that highlight that so that they tell the story. So it's just a continuum all the time of making sure that we elevate music as who Tulsa is.

**Jennifer Vey:** Dr. View, just sort of a follow up question on that. So through your effort, you've gotten in the schools, right, and you developed this educational curriculum. Was that a hurdle or had so much of the groundwork has already been laid that, you know, it was, you had an easier entree, or did you have to do some convincing?

**Stevie "Dr. View" Johnson:** I mean, definitely not being from Tulsa, I had to just let people know who I am, like they know me as a as a DJ and a producer. But like, who is the human behind like, this work? So once people were able to see, once I was able to make myself accessible and, and meeting people, like literally, I literally remember getting phone calls from my boss like, hey, are you working today? I'm like, yeah, I'm actually in a community, like, I'm talking to people. So I think that is once that thing kind of took care of itself, like I was able to move in and galvanize and put people in position to be successful.

But I also want to go back to your original question in relation to our work is, you know, branding is everything. And when you're attaching yourselves to big brands like a Motown or Fire in Little Africa, you know, people start to see that. And so even working with Renee around this idea of ad value equivalency, being able to see like the amount of impressions that we have received from Rolling Stone and NPR and connecting that to the city of Tulsa also to say like, hey, this is what we've done in the span of a year in relation to the city. Like we really need to have some conversation with how we're supporting people. So I think those are some critical things for sure.

**Jennifer Vey:** It's great. And I know we're coming close to time so this might be a quick answer. It's a big question. But Victoria, I'm going to ask you to see if you can give a relatively short answer to it, we could probably have another hour on this. But one of the questions that came in was how does music particularly help to activate areas of disinvestment in a city? And I think that probably means through, you know, through venues, but also through workforce, workforce supports and other things. And what are some of the specific strategies that can be employed in those communities and what have you seen in Huntsville.

**Victoria Jones:** So again, I just want to make sure I understand the question correct. So how can we use utilize music to activate spaces, correct?

**Jennifer Vey:** Yeah. And I think particularly the question is in the communities that maybe haven't seen a lot of that kind of investment.

**Victoria Jones:** Yeah. I think it's all about integration. When it comes down again, I feel like a good example is even here at the Orion Amphitheater, we seek to solve that through cultural and community events. And so, you know, making sure that we're partnering with certain entities that usually are disenfranchised, I feel like a great example is our LGBTQ community. We're in Alabama, we're in the Bible Belt. How do we make sure that these communities feel like they have a place?

One of the things that we did, we found major partners within those communities and we're like, hey, let's host, let's host a community event here. Let's amplify music, let's amplify your organization, that's one way. I also think, again, through marketing and branding, it's again showing people that they are, they're invited and that they're welcomed in this space. I feel like that's huge. And then another and another instance, sponsorships. Sometimes finding those sponsorships that, you know, for, for certain people in the city who don't have access, like, you know, they might not have the mobility to come or, or transportation is like, how do we drive sponsorships in a way that

amplifies a great cause but also brings people to the event or to the property or, or to the initiative or anything that we're trying to amplify. So in short, again, I feel like, yeah, just, just driving traffic, connecting with people and branding it correctly. I think that's how you can do that.

**Jennifer Vey:** Shain, you want to follow up.

**Shain Shapiro:** And yeah, I can be a bit nerdy and wonky here, just if there's any, so first off, I know that lots of communities are competing for new market tax credits as the government has just instilled a whole pile of money related to that. Those are dedicated obviously to disadvantaged census tracts. There's two projects that we're working on that are linking affordable housing and cultural and creative space together as an application for new market tax credits. Tax credits, as I understand it, are for the housing, but the savings that the developer makes on the housing can then be applied to building creative and cultural space. And that's kind of the arrangement that we're looking at.

The other thing is looking at different metrics when you're trying to raise a TIF, for example, if you're going to build a hotel, there's a few projects that we've worked on related to hotels, both on the raising of TIF, but also incentives that are being created by both state and local governments. There are no direct incentives that I know to build music stuff, so to speak, but there are lots of and you know, there are lots of pathways. You know, even in Alabama, there are to incorporating music into a wider scheme that music can be the differentiator. And that's where we have to think about is how music can really be that additional link to either, you know, creating a new pot of money or, or identifying sources of, sources of investment that the city or the community can leverage using music.

**Jennifer Vey:** So basically being creative and building your career [inaudible] in short. All right. Well, we are at time. Thanks so much to all of you for joining us. Thanks so much to our audience. Everybody should check out the two playlists, Fire in Little Africa and all those materials. There's a lot out there and just, really just so appreciative, this has been a fantastic conversation. Have a great day, everyone.