

# Soundcheck:

Retaining and growing  
performance venues in Toronto





# Context

Since the 1950s, Toronto has attracted and developed world-class musicians and a robust supporting industry. Since that time, the City has supported a healthy ecosystem of performers, venues, presenters, and audiences. Local live music venues (LMVs) of all sizes have become **de facto community hubs** welcoming a diverse spectrum of music fans, industry professionals, and artists.

Live music venues in Toronto generate an **annual economic impact of \$850M and provide 10,500 full time-equivalent jobs**.

In recent years, however, pressures including rising land values, development and gentrification, and shifts in the economy have contributed to **increasing fragility** in the music sector. Many iconic venues have closed; and many others face a very uncertain future.

Toronto's iconic Phoenix Concert Theatre set to close



blogTO



Music

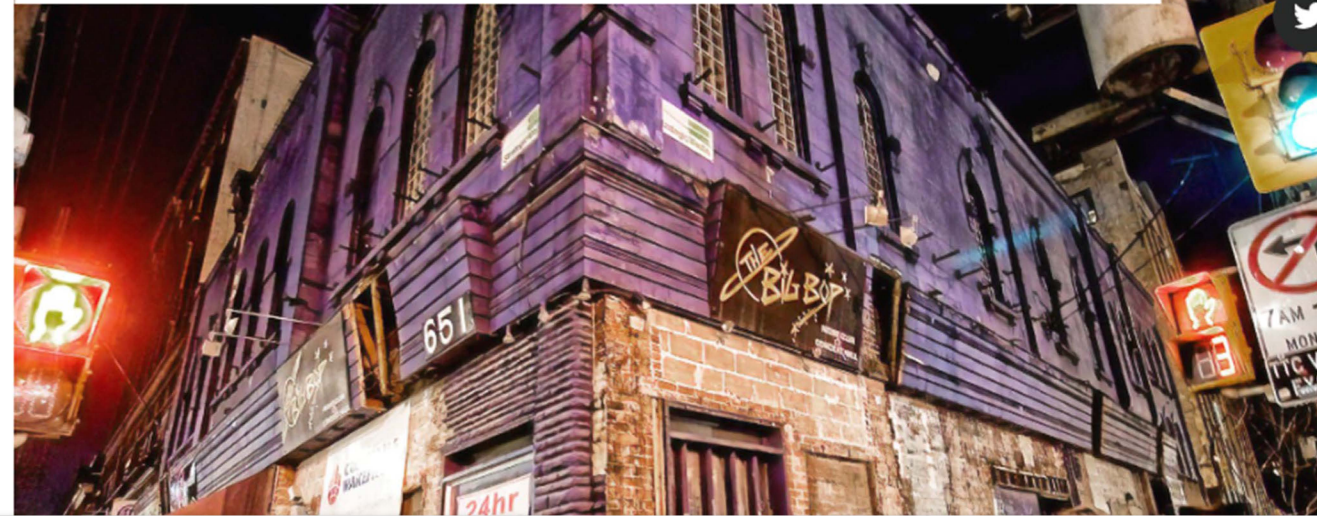
aubrey Posted on April 17, 2015

Report In

## Geary Avenue music scene under threat due to red tape



## 15 iconic music venues we lost in Toronto over the last decade

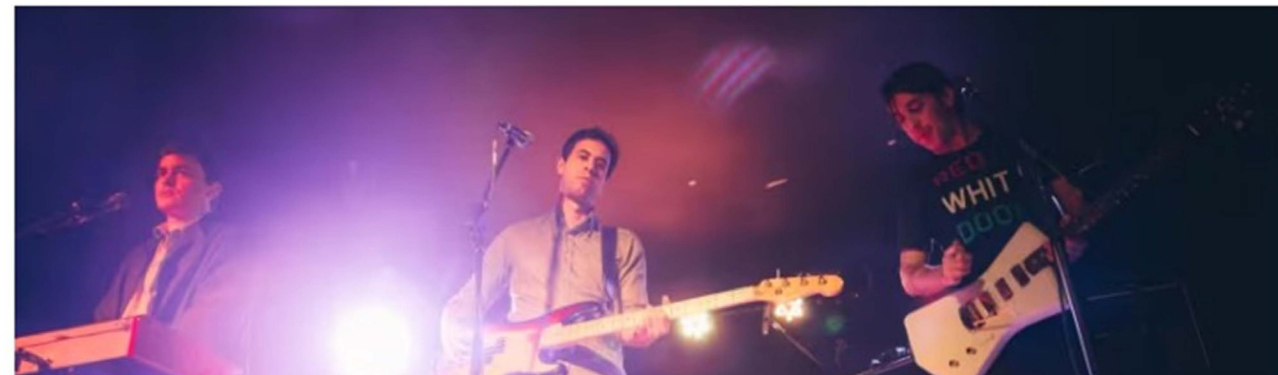


## Where have all the small concert venues gone?

Three music industry insiders from across Canada weigh in on the decline of grassroots performance spaces



Amelia Eqbal · CBC Arts · Posted: Oct 10, 2023 4:54 PM EDT | Last Updated: October 10, 2023





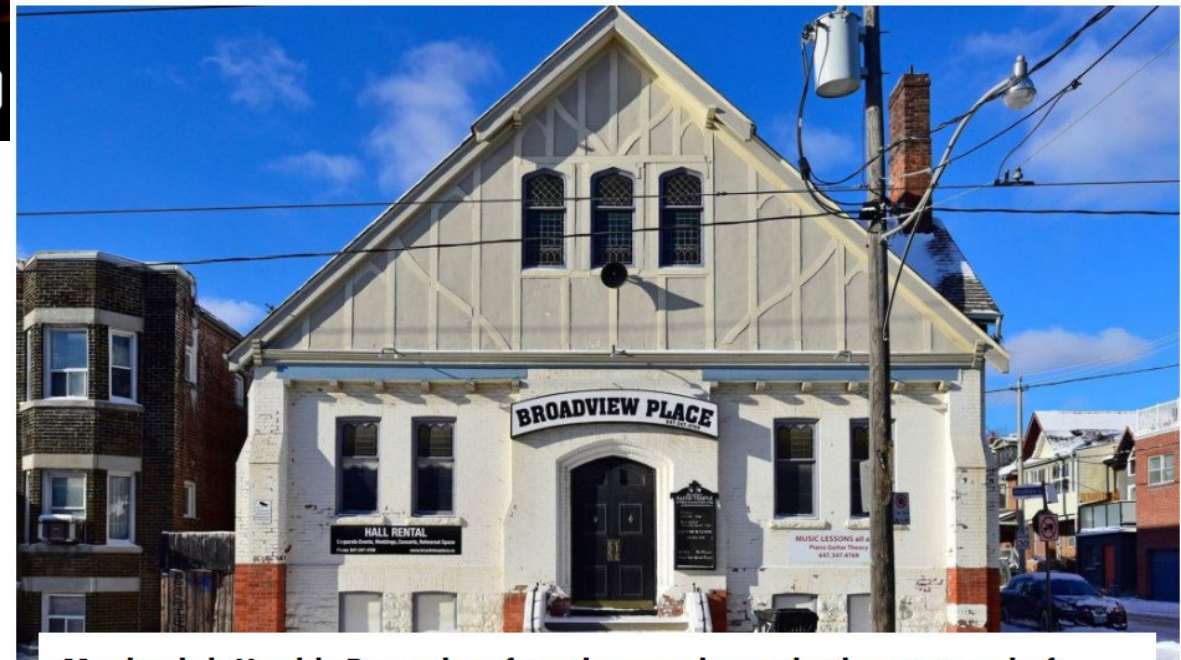


# Goals

- 1) **Increase protection for existing music space** (venues, rehearsal spaces, recording studios, music hubs, etc), recognizing that very few operators own the building they're leasing premises within
- 2) **Create flexibility and incentives for cultural entrepreneurs to launch new music spaces**, whether in areas not currently zoned for cultural / entertainment uses, or in new developments through incenting developers, or through partnerships with different types of spaces and those holding the keys

## Related work – recent / ongoing:

- Citywide consultations on **night economy**, leading to **updated zoning / licensing framework** for bars, restaurants, entertainment venues
  - More flexibility in use of floor space for entertainment
  - Permission for nightclubs outside downtown
  - New license category ("Entertainment Place of Assembly" to accurately capture LMVs
- "Geary Works" planning study leading to greater site-specific flexibility of uses on Geary Ave
- **Agent of Change** process safeguarding existing LMVs from after-the-fact noise complaints from new residents
- **50% property tax reduction** for LMVs via 'Creative Co-Location Facilities Property Tax Subclass'
- Provision of below market rate "meanwhile" lease of City-owned property to support community-led and operated interdisciplinary arts hub – 'It's Ok\*' Studios on Queen St West
- Development of Music Strategy, Culture Plan



**Music club Hugh's Room has found a new home in the east end of Toronto**

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# Council Direction on Live Music Venues

- **Protecting live music spaces in Toronto (2016)**
- **Balancing Music Venues and New Development (2017)**
- **City-owned Space for DIY Music Organizations (2020)**
- **Making Space to save the arts in Toronto (2021)**
- **Musician rehearsal spaces in the City of Toronto (2021)**
- **Protecting music venues across Toronto (2022)**
- **Review of Zoning Regulations for Outdoor Patios on Private Property (2023)**
- **Assist Hugh's Room to secure space on Broadview Avenue (2024)**
- **Support for the Relocation of the It's Ok\* Community Arts Studio (2024)**

# Existing Regulations

- **Official Plan and Zoning**
- Compliance with the City's **Licensing By-law**, and ensure they obtain the proper licence (if applicable) and adhere to any licensing requirements.
- A change in a business use may also require a new **business licence**.
- Compliance with the **Noise By-law** where applicable (which regulates the level of sounds, not the content or where it is being played).



# Problem Statement

- There is widespread **lack of property ownership** and few community-focused operating models in the local music sector.
- Historically, municipal government has had **limited tools to deploy in protecting cultural assets** against a backdrop of rising land values and development pressures.
- With no limit on allowable commercial rent increases, and little leverage for tenants when a property is slated for redevelopment, LMVs continue to face the threat of closures due to **economic pressures** that directly threaten the health of the music ecosystem as a whole.
- **QUESTION: How do we reverse the trend and create the conditions for Toronto to continue to flourish as a City that nurtures music?**



**Yonge Street: The Heart of Music City**

For decades, Yonge Street was the place to hear ground-breaking artists and trend-setting genres. Toronto grew into a music city with Yonge Street's bars and venues at its heart.



# Case Studies: The Phoenix

## Key Issues:

- Lack of protections and levers for cultural institutions
- Pandemic impacts
- Rents and operating costs
- Ownership and tenure

Toronto

## Curtains closing for Toronto's Phoenix Concert Theatre, which hosted Stones and Dylan

Toronto's famed Phoenix Concert Theatre is closing its doors after more than 33 years



[David Friend](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jun 05, 2024 4:14 PM EDT | Last Updated: June 5



# Case Studies: The Silver Dollar



## Key Issues:

- Venue retained by City but issues with leasing ongoing
- Rents and operating costs



# Case Studies: Revue Cinema

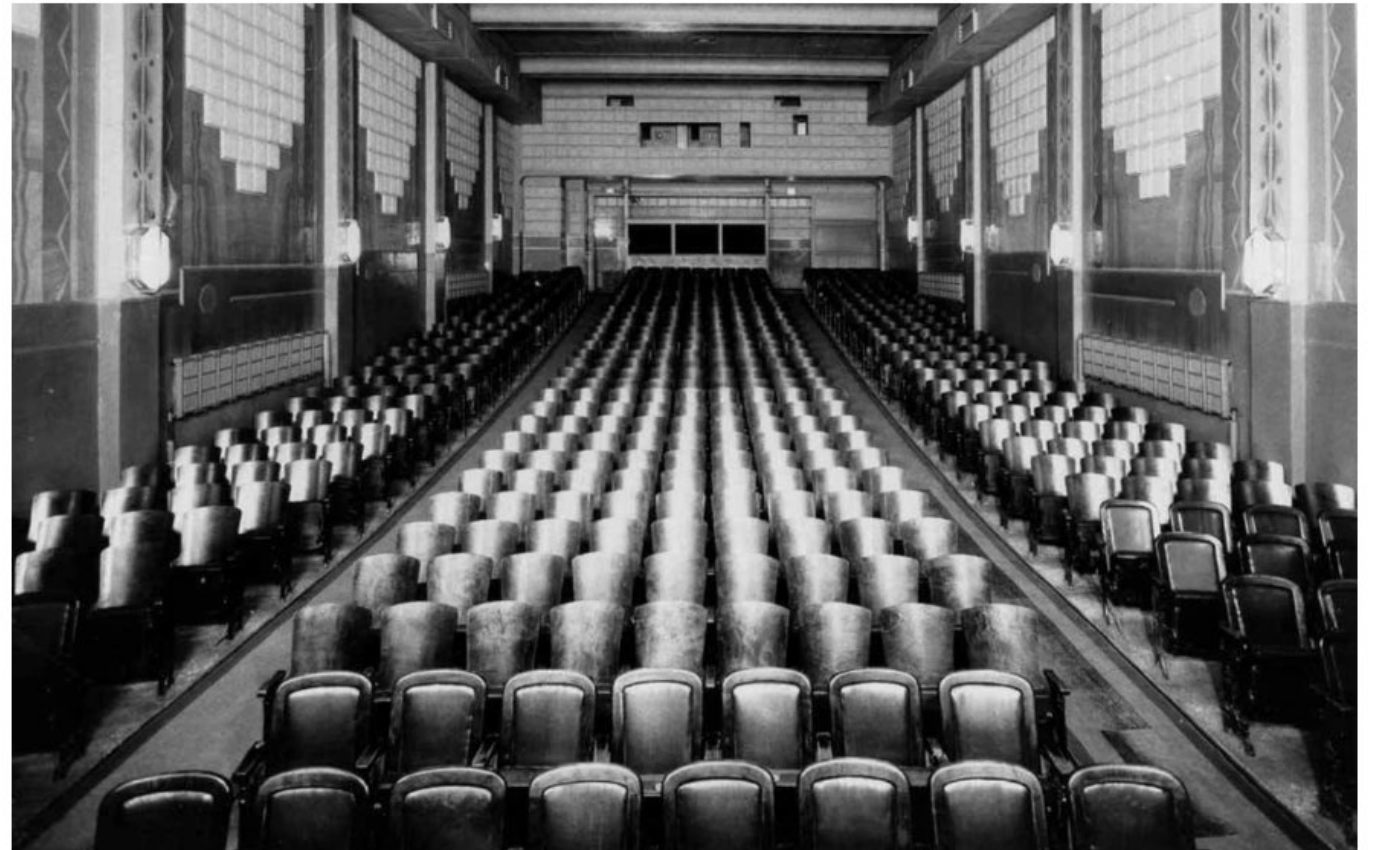
- **Key Issues:**
- Rent Pressures/Increases.
- Competing interests between landlords and tenants.
- Comparable case to music venues



## Guillermo del Toro Joins the Fight to Save Historic Toronto Arts & Culture Hub, The Revue Cinema

As the volunteer board that runs the cinema faces a potential takeover by the building landlords, thousands of film, art and music lovers — including the Oscar-winning director del Toro — have joined the chorus emphasizing the theatre's importance to Toronto's cultural life.

By Rosie Long Decter | Jul 04, 2024





# Focus Areas for discussion

- Expand and deepen existing initiatives? (e.g. build on ZBL and OP permissions)
- **Protective policies + incentives**
  - Protections for all venues regardless of size, profile (e.g. no net loss)
- **Live Music Venues – Policy, Use and Regulatory Changes**
- **Supporting infrastructure (e.g. rehearsal, DIY, flex space) – Policy, Use and Regulatory Changes**
- **'Future forward' venues?**
  - Performance with live instruments + electronic music + music community flex space

# Potential Stakeholders

- **City Stakeholders:**

- Economic Development Music Office, Night Economy team (VEO Office)
- City Planning and Development Review
- Buildings & MLS
- Legal Services

- **Institutional Stakeholders**

- Grassroots Music Organizations
- Toronto Music Advisory Committee
- Business Improvement Areas

- **Private stakeholders:**

- Venue owners
- People employed in this sector
- Musicians and Promoters
- Audiences
- Adjacent land owners

- **Working Groups:**

- Night Economy External Working Group

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# Proposed Work Plan

**Test with internal stakeholders – September 2024**

**Introduce concept to Councillors – October 2024**

**Present to Toronto Music Advisory Committee – Fall 2024**

**Motion to Council – November 2024**

**Strike Working Group + Terms of Reference**



# Questions

- Can you suggest key issues that we may not have captured?
- What other stakeholders need to be considered?
- Any input on scope (whole venue ecosystem vs smaller vs other adjacent uses like the Revue Cinema)?

# Contact Staff for more information

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