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2019

## Ethos of the Underground: Precarious Communities in San Antonio DIY Music

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**Ethos of the Underground: Precarious Communities in San Antonio DIY Music**

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12/6/2019

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### **Ethos of the Underground: Precarious Communities in San Antonio DIY Music**

When Imagine Books & Records, a long-standing independent music venue in San Antonio, moved to a new location this summer, venue owner Don Hurd was surprised when several bands that had played at the venue volunteered to help with the move, expecting nothing in return. Although Don had worried about the time it would take to paint the walls, within days furniture was moved, walls were painted, and food was brought for everyone who had helped to share. Why would the community come together to do this, with nothing promised in return? Don's anecdote shows that in for the actors involved in San Antonio's diverse music scene -- musicians, venue owners and staff, audience members, and everyone else involved -- venues are more than just physical locations; they symbolize shared values as well as a communal home for those who frequent the venue.

In an era where streaming services dominate the music industry, and larger cities like San Antonio are becoming both more populated and more gentrified (a process that makes it progressively more difficult for independent venues to stay afloat, which in turn has a ripple effect on the city's community of musicians and artists), exploring what holds close-knit communities is vital. My ethnography focuses specifically on the independent or DIY ("do it yourself") music community in SA; while I group these terms together as "independent/DIY" in the ethnography to signal a shared value system, these terms differ somewhat. Independent

musicians/bands are artists who aren't famous or signed with major record labels (and independent venues are similar, tending to be personal or family-owned communal spaces), whereas "indie" or "DIY" is used by many of my informants as shorthand for a shared set of values and aesthetics, one that encourages community, inclusivity, and overall deviation from the mainstream music system in SA.

To survive in the SA DIY/indie scene, as one of my informants put it, "You can't get anywhere in this town if you don't talk." For actors in the scene, social connections are crucial because the entire system feeds on a collectively understood system of mutual aid and reciprocity, due to the precarity of being a musician (as illustrated in Imagine's renovation) people help one another in any way they can, and expect the same in return. Precarity, both financial and temporal, also gives rise to an emergent system of ethics for how bands, venues, and audiences interact -- paradoxically, "safe spaces" free of predatory or unkind behavior are encouraged in DIY due to the closely knit community (people need to take care of one another) but also are hard to implement in practice (the imperative for people to take care of one another makes it hard for actors to call one another out for violating communal norms.)

### **Literature Review**

I use the terms "DIY/indie" in conjunction to capture both the more concrete status of being independent musicians (my musician informants are not "popular" beyond San Antonio or signed with major record labels, and the venue owners I interviewed are small, locally-based, and finance their own venues), and the less tangible but equally important ethos and practices of DIY culture that my informants are part of. American DIY, which arose from the 1970s punk subculture and since has become more diverse -- encompassing a range of genres and mediums,

from music to experimental art, fashion, and filmmaking -- has been defined as “a collective resistance to commodified culture” (Gartside, 1998, pg. 59). In his 2017 ethnography of DIY house show culture David Verbuč notes that there are three ways in which DIY participants resist the mainstream culture of social isolation and transactional capitalism: opening up “houses, bodies, and scenes” to provide resources and social connections, promoting diversity and inclusivity through policies at shows (such as “safe space” signs and an overall “radical/anarchic” ethos), and rejecting profit-based transactions in favor of an established network of reciprocal giving amongst members, where acts of kindness are understood to be repaid in turn.

This last aspect of DIY -- the reciprocal sharing of gifts and resources among members -- connects to an emerging body of scholarship in the music scene: namely, how local musicians (particularly those embedded within indie/DIY contexts) continue in the scene despite the atmosphere of precarity involved in sustaining oneself as an independent musician. Although some dimension of “precariousness” can be viewed as endemic to being human and thus interdependent on others (Butler 2006), Clara Han (2018) emphasizes the role of historically contextualized forces such as neoliberalism and the destabilization of labor markets in creating not only our modern conceptions of precarity, but what Guy Standing (2015) sees as the “precariat,” a developing societal underclass defined by labor insecurity, reliance on an improvised “gig economy” of temporary jobs to stay afloat, and lack of a “collective voice” such as a union, which once could have protected workers’ rights. In the context of DIY or indie music scenes, precarity (for the individual musician, or for the collective community) is often caused by forces such as gentrification which threatens local music spaces (Holt 2014), lack of

public spaces and/or governmental support for DIY music (Verbuč 2017), and the difficulty young, working-class musicians face balancing more conventional jobs with a passion that isn't financially lucrative (Threadgold 2018.) Ethnographic studies on the music scenes in urban cities emphasize the paradox of musical precarity; even as actors struggle to differentiate themselves from the rest, they rely heavily on one another for resources as well as social connections (Chafe and Kaida 2019, Rogers 2008).

Due to these “structural and social limitations” that inflict precarity on the DIY/indie scene<sup>1</sup>, the subculture is very invested in creating “spaces” that benefit the scene; these spaces are more than just venues -- they often serve as “prefigurative<sup>2</sup> spaces” (Culton and Holtzman 273) where participants can embody the ethical practices that they want to see in the music scene -- or in society as a whole. DIY/indie-identified members often justify the precarity they have chosen to experience (as opposed to “going mainstream” or choosing another more conventionally successful lifestyle) by expressing their desire to be part of a scene that benefits the community (Hannerz 2015). DIY spaces (referring to both the physical space of a venue, and the ethos and aesthetics that become associated with the venue) serve as the “spatial backbone” or central hub where the scene can grow and evolve (Verbuč 2016.)

### **Methodology**

My object of study for this project was the San Antonio independent/DIY music scene and the actors that comprise this subculture -- musicians, venue owners and staff, people who

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<sup>1</sup> While some degree of precarity may be seen as authentic in the subculture (as opposed to the trope of “selling out”), ultimately DIY participants want there to be space(s) in the scene that are thriving and sustainable for the community.

<sup>2</sup> According to Carl Boggs, “prefigurative politics” is when a social organization or movement strives to embody “within the ongoing political practice of a movement ... those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.” (Boggs 1977, pg. 100)

manage indie record labels, and of course, the audience. I quickly realized many people in the scene take up multiple roles; vendors and venue owners who are musicians, musicians work backstage during concerts, and almost everyone in the scene is an audience member at each others' shows. This helped me gain a more complex understanding of the subculture, because I often spoke with people who could describe how the scene had changed over the years from multiple perspectives. My fieldwork alternated between 3 concert-based observations (at Imagine Books and Records, Princess Pass, and Brick at Blue Star) where I would watch what I could of the show and speak with any informants who were willing to talk, and 8 more structured interviews with individual artists and/or bands outside of concerts. Most of these structured interviews were set up in local coffeeshops in San Antonio. I found that the relatively quiet and cozy atmosphere made my informants feel comfortable giving their honest opinions on the music scene, whereas in busier environments such as a concert, I was aware of time and choose my questions more strategically.

I grew up in San Antonio and had passing familiarity with the local music scene at the beginning of the project: some of my friends in high school were part of a band (The Milk Theory, who we later interviewed), and I knew the indie band Mirame from a concert I attended last spring. This seemed to make informants more comfortable with me and to give me "social capital" in the scene, because I was "from here" and knew a few (but by no means all) of my informants already.

After reaching out to initial contacts who I already knew over social media (and sending upwards of 50 emails to SA-based artists on Bandcamp, a platform for independent artists to share their work), my informants oriented me towards future contacts in a snowball effect. I

began by asking who they would recommend that I talk to if I wanted to really understand the scene, and wrote the names down in my notes to review later. This method revealed a lot about how important social connections are to the community. The same practices that I used to gather informants are the ones that musicians use to book shows -- they get to know other people within music spaces, and then wait for what happens next. Social media was also crucial, and I would check Instagram and Facebook every few days to see what shows were happening over the weekend.

I believe my sample captured a range of diversity across gender and race that is indicative of the larger population, while also illustrating how the scene skews predominantly younger (most of my informants were between their late teens and mid-20s, although there were some older exceptions such as the Hurds) and either working-class or middle-class (this was something mostly discerned through context clues or informants' statements, for example about having to take multiple jobs to sustain their interest in musicianship.) However, a factor that limited my options for places I could go and people I could interview was geographic location. Not having a car, I took Lyft to meet with my informants (unless I was going with my SRD group members). Because many venues are an hour or more from campus, I chose to go to venues that were closer and cheaper via Lyft fare, excluding opportunities in other areas of the city (Mirame's album release party and Black Sheep Collective's recent art and music showcase are two examples of events that may have added richness to my ethnography, but that I couldn't attend.)

While I did make some environmental observations such as informants' appearances and venues' aesthetic qualities, I was most concerned with what informants *said* about the scene -- even during concert-based observations, I made an effort to talk to people who weren't playing a

set about what they thought of the show. Because I chose to go with this approach and not others (such as primarily focusing on the spatial aspects of shows, or the sonic qualities of the music that was playing at shows), my research reflects a preoccupation with understanding how the social world of the music scene operates through what my informants have to say about themselves and each other.

Because my topic of local music isn't particularly "sensitive" and this data is not being published (and all informants were OK with having their real name used) I chose not to use pseudonyms (except in the case of an informant at the Princess Pass concert that I attended, for reasons that will become more evident in my second ethnographic section.)

### **Collective Precarity in the SA DIY/Indie Music Scene**

*Joseph: "So you got a show [at a bar] in Houston, right? And you're on the downtown main street and you're doing a show. You're doing a good job, you're playing alright, the crowd is appreciating it, but you had to park far away because you got a U-Haul. This is part of what we get paid for: it's not just what we do on stage, just the fact that we had to haul everything in, and haul everything out. ... Let's say hypothetically, the Astros win while you're in Houston downtown on Main Street, and suddenly the three blocks surrounding you are completely closed ... And you have to lug 300 pounds of gear several blocks through smelly streets, drunk people, drunk car drivers, policemen, and then you gotta wait until 3:00 A.M. to get paid."*

*Brisa: "Because you have to wait until the bar closes. And that is the struggle of being a local musician. That's why when I say 'A venue paid us,' I'm like, 'God. I love when a venue pays us.'"*

— excerpted interview with Brisa and Joseph, two members of SA-based band The Milk Theory

Being a part of the San Antonio music scene can be a thankless job. Although musicians, venue owners and staff, and other members of the community put in substantial labor, there is no expectation of financial reward at the end of the day. When asked why they "keep going" in the music scene, my informants typically cited both a love of music and a desire to contribute to and

give back to their community, a sentiment which resonates<sup>3</sup> with Erik Hannerz' ethnographic work on the punk scenes in Sweden and Australia (2015). However, hopes of personal and communal longevity are juxtaposed against a backdrop of precarity, as my informants navigate an increasingly gentrified city that many perceive as lacking the infrastructure necessary to maintain a sustainable indie music environment.

The excerpted quote from Brisa and Joseph, lead singer and bassist (respectively) for indie band The Milk Theory, highlights a recurring concern for the musicians I interviewed: even after a “gig” ends, there's no guarantee that artists will be paid for their labor. Dominic and Daniel, members of the band Mr. Pidge, brought up San Antonio's lack of a musicians' union or guild that would offer labor protections for musicians; Dominic characterized working in music as “a ‘risky business,’ spur-of-the-moment type thing,” where artists take any gigs available, even if pay is uncertain. To minimize this uncertainty, bands gravitate towards smaller and independently-owned venues (as opposed to the more impersonal bars and larger venues), where they can build bonds of trust and become a part of the space — even as these venues are precarious themselves.

When I met with Yole Centeno, the current bassist for the popular SA punk band Amygdala, they told me about the venue they owned for a few months in 2017, The Line In-Between, which was “cool, but short-lived, due to gentrification ... I alone could barely keep up like 800 bucks for rent<sup>4</sup>, you know what I mean?” Yole sees their defunct venue as part of a

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<sup>3</sup> “Do you think I do this for myself, that we pay for own tours, lose money on pretty much every record we sell, and spend tens of hours every week to organize shows just to have fun? We do it so that everyone can enjoy bands, and be able to discuss politics and trade stuff. It is entirely for the scene” (Hannerz 101)

<sup>4</sup> In an interview that Paige collected, Don also identified the price of rent as a factor causing venues in SA to close down

larger “pattern of exclusion” threatening indie/DIY spaces, where investors “buy out” smaller music venues who cannot afford to buy the building they occupy while “the people who run some of the music venues on the St. Mary’s Strip own a monopoly.” When a venue is imperiled, this in turn affects all of the musicians and community members who rely on the shared space for resources and security.

Apart from financial concerns, precarity in the scene is temporal as well; informants share a common understanding that the “music scene” at any moment is both cyclical and ephemeral. Popular venues rise and fall, audiences and musicians alike grow out of the scene as age and responsibilities set in, and no band lasts forever (even four or five years is seen as an accomplishment.) Aidan and I spoke with former event manager of Imagine Books and Records, Ezra Hurd — in a resonant coincidence, it was his final day at the store he had worked at since high school, because he found another job and was preparing to move away. Ezra described how, while the scene around Imagine was strongest in its earliest years (around 2011-2014), every few years a “new wave” of high-schoolers appear to make the venue their own as the older crowd moves to other cities for jobs or college.

Cultivating an intentionally youth-tailored environment has allowed Imagine to avoid temporal precarity, by ensuring an influx of new teenage musicians and music fans every few years, who will remain at least until they get older and gain access to “adult” venues. Ston, a musician who I interviewed during a Halloween concert at Brick at Blue Star, remembered the early Imagine scene as one of many moments in the scene where “a new place opens up that has this inbuilt crowd, that allows for the seed of [a collective] to kind of flourish.” However, from Ston’s perspective “Imagine has lost its spark” as the high-schoolers who once inhabited the

space have grown up and left, and “there doesn’t seem to be anything that’s replaced [Imagine] with the type of momentum that it had a couple years ago.” Ston, like Yole, connected this lack of a main thriving venue to structural flaws within San Antonio such as inefficient public transportation system that makes it hard for people to go out and see shows, connecting the precarity of a venue with the city’s own perceived inability to sustain its music scene in the long-term.

Because my informants inhabit a social world where one venue’s precarity has ripple effects for the entire community, there appears to be a shared consensus that “to have a thriving community is having not one space, but multiple spaces, because if you have multiple spaces [for shows] music will continue to thrive, folks will continue to be booked, and the community just gets bigger.” (Yole) Don Hurd, owner of Imagine, spoke about how other venues in the city volunteered to help Imagine over the years. Alamo Music lent them equipment when the venue was experiencing sound issues, the owner of Limelight also helped them with sound and gave Imagine advice about their new space, and — curiously enough, given several informants’ distinctions between “big-venue” and “small-venue” culture — Paper Tiger lent Imagine the use of their building to host a fundraiser when they were low on funds. Don said that “without this help from Paper Tiger, Imagine Books may not be here now.”

These reciprocal networks of mutual aid, often constructed around venues that actors gravitate towards, can help members of the music community survive seriously adverse events. Ezra recounted a benefit the store held over the summer to support Cat Pozos, a music venue organizer whose family is dealing with immigration court fees and losing their home: “[Cat] helped us with a benefit [for Imagine] this summer, so I just told her, ‘Whatever you need from

us, we will help you.” Sometimes, reciprocal relations are embedded in a space’s physicality. Baldermar spoke about how house show venue South Newby has a communal area where musicians and other people in the scene can “hang out” and practice their instruments, even when shows aren’t being held. In other cases, the “economy of solidarity” is visible in more subtle practices; the way that bands help each other book gigs, and how my informants would readily give lists of their favorite venues and fellow bands whenever I asked, “So who do *you* listen to?”

### **Communal Spaces and Aesth/ethics**

*“We would just get tired of playing at bar shows. They have the legitimacy, it’s like a professional setting, but when you just take your hand, like when you do it DIY, when you set up a show at a house, there’s a lot more liberty to make the venue your own. ... The venue itself is an art piece. It’s something you walk into, it’s interactive.”*

-- excerpted interview with local musician Baldemar Esquivel

It’s often within the first five minutes of a show that you get the tone for how the rest of the night will go. When I went to Imagine Books and Records for the second time with Alyssa to see a lineup of bands that included Planetary, Mary Jane and the Fondas, and my roommate’s band Beachside Manor, I knew immediately from the colorful walls and Irma Hurd’s smile at the cash register that the rest of the show would be similarly cozy -- the audience was composed of mostly friends of the band members (us included), but the music was intense and Don encouraged the crowd to get close to the stage, so we could be part of the experience. The atmosphere at Brick at Blue Star’s Halloween show was less personal, but it had a fashionable and somewhat edgy “vibe”; independent vendors sold art near the walls (skeleton-themed portraits, earrings made of recycled trash) and there was an area outside where musicians talked and smoked cigarettes after their set. When I went to the Halloween show at Princess Pass, a

mid-sized house venue near Trinity, one of the first things that I saw was a sign on the front door, alerting the audience that they could talk to the venue organizers if “anyone makes you feel uncomfortable.”

As David Verbuč argues in his ethnographies of the American house show, the “space” provided by a DIY/indie music venue is the “spatial backbone” (Verbuč 2016) for everything that happens in the scene. Venues are where connections are made between fellow musicians and between musicians and the audience, where shows take place, and where the atmosphere of the collective scene is established. Particularly in the subculture of DIY music, where actors generally see themselves as standing in opposition to the norms of “mainstream music culture,” venue owners often strive to create environments that are “prefigurative”<sup>5</sup> or serve as a microcosm for their desired vision of society (Culton and Holtzman 2010). Verbuč explores how “spatial tactics” common to DIY such as “safe space” signs (Princess Pass), communal intimacy between the performers and the audience (Imagine), and all-ages show environments (enforced by Imagine, The Line In-Between) blend aesthetic dimensions of a space with the ethical to create what I will call aesth/ethics, alerting participants not only to what the environment will look like, but how they will be expected to act in such a space.

Although the aesthetic qualities of Imagine Books and Records (owned by the Hurd family) and those of The Line In-Between (now defunct, but once owned by Yole Centeno, current bassist for the DIY/punk band Amygdala) differ on the surface, with Imagine being less explicitly political<sup>6</sup> and more geared towards adolescents, and The Line In-Between being more

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<sup>5</sup> As Yole described, “you get to create an environment where, like, you’re not going to accept any homophobia, or any kind of -phobia shit, and you can just create a safe environment for people where they can enjoy going to your shows.”

<sup>6</sup> Irma did say that the space had liberal politics and “isn’t your average bookstore”

of a “radical/queer space” for people of all ages, the ethos are similar, as both Yole and the Hurds spoke of their spaces as an alternative to “bar culture.” Bar or club culture is a concept that is often shorthand in DIY for not just the physical venue of a bar (Yole spoke of La Botanica and Bang Bang Bar as DIY bars, because embodied DIY’s anti-establishment ethos), but a space that embodies hierarchy, age and class restrictions, and most importantly a lack of intimacy and safety for participants, so the antithesis of what DIY sets out to be (Verbuč 2016). Musicians also expressed their comparative dislike for playing in bars or bar culture-like non-DIY venues, not only because playing at impersonal spaces is more precarious in regards to pay and working conditions, but because they perceived the environment as different and less intimate.

DIY spaces and their aesth/ethics arise not only in oppositionality to bar culture and unsavory aspects of mainstream culture, but in response to perceived lack of character in their own subcultural circles (Culton and Holtzman 2010). According to Dominic and Daniel, two members of the band Mr. Pidge, the aesth/ethics of Princess Pass and its similar house show counterpart South Newby were crafted in direct response to “callout culture,” and more specifically a period when “bigger bands in San Antonio were being called out” for unethical behavior like harassment and abuse. As opposed to previous iterations of house shows with a laissez-faire environment where “the grandparents are asleep in the back, and people are just like doing DMT in the other room,” Dominic spoke of “safe space” signs, the venue organizers “being very deliberate with talking about show etiquette,” and more generally how, compared to house shows that he played at in 2016, “there’s a lot more that’s being said of accountability.” However, my experience at the Princess Pass Halloween concert brought me to a new line of questions -- what happens when signaled aesth/ethics of a space don’t match with reality, or

when a venue is perceived by its audience to have failed to live up to its promises of safety and inclusion?

### **Small Worlds, Precarious Ethics**

My two informants and I were standing outside in the small area outside the house show Princess Pass, while indoors people wearing Halloween costumes were dancing to a thrumming reverb and staticky strobe lights, and we were all furious. A few minutes ago, informant “Louisa” had told me that one of the members of the band currently playing<sup>7</sup> had been accused of sexual assault and misconduct by former partners (also, that she was considering whether to punch him in the face.) Not wanting to be part of the environment while the band in question was playing, Louisa and her friend led me outside to the backyard, where she informed me that the cops might be present to investigate for a noise complaint, but not to worry because she’d seen them before and they never did anything. This field visit made me reconsider much of what my informants had told me about the commitment of DIY venues to upholding safety for their participants. Louisa located the problem in a lack of gender diversity and “femme-bodied” people in venue organizing, which I think has some resonance; although DIY/indie spaces often attempt to challenge oppressive or alienating aspects of music culture, they also have the potential to replicate the same practices themselves and perpetuate violence onto marginalized groups (Verbuč 2015), largely because of the influence of cisheteropatriarchy and whiteness on who has power in DIY spaces and who gets to host shows. (Hannerz 2015) However, I believe that to understand why venues fail to live to their aesth/ethic promises, we must understand

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<sup>7</sup> The band and informant’s identity are protected for confidentiality, although other informants later in the data collection process affirmed that this was a situation (along with posts that I saw about the allegations on Twitter)

precarity, and in particular how the reciprocal and close relationships borne out of precarity can be harmful when it comes to enforcing accountability.

The intimacy and closeness that my informants identified as one of the main reasons they continue with the scene (despite it not being financially lucrative) is a hallmark of DIY culture, but it is also conditioned by precarity to some extent. Actors are dependent on one another for social connections as well as favors during moments of vulnerability -- when Imagine needed money, the venue would have gone under without the support of the SA music community, and Yole described how, when local bands are performing with touring bands, the local bands will get together and collectively agree to give the touring bands the money, because “they need it, they’re on the road, they need gas, a hotel room, maybe food, and whatnot.” While these enmeshed networks of reciprocity are instrumental in forming the DIY scene’s prefigurative ethics (members embody what they want to see in the scene, and what they want others to do for them in turn), they can also be harmful when actors need to hold each other accountable for unethical behavior. Brisa spoke about how she doesn’t want to “call out” bands who have been “really shitty” to The Milk Theory, because “I don’t want to be known as that band that does shit to other bands ... I know the struggle of being a local musician. On one hand, I could try to ruin their reputation, but it’s also like, ‘I don’t want to ruin [what’s] possibly their next meal. I don’t know if people have job, sometimes, or if they’re just relying on their, you know, gig income.’”

This sentiment bears striking resemblance to Clara Han’s 2012 ethnography on neighbors living in neoliberalism-caused precarity in Chile, having to balance inward hostility with the need to keep cultivated relationships of reciprocity: “Look, you can’t say ‘You’re a bad pay’ to someone’s face. These are your neighbors, or your cousin or aunt, sister-in-law ... You live with

them, greet them in the street, sometimes have to depend on them.” (Han 80) While this policy of not reporting mildly rude behavior in favor of acknowledging a shared vulnerability is essential for maintaining one’s social ties in the small DIY/indie music scene, where “we’re all very aware of each other” (Brisa), when the policy is extended to serious matters such as sexual assault, it creates an environment where “most people don’t want to hold their friends accountable for doing shitty things” (Yole), and even if a musician or band is blacklisted at one venue for unethical conduct, they can often move to another because “word doesn’t get out.” (Don) Relations of tolerance and reciprocity can both be an asset to and deeply detrimental to DIY, especially when silence around abuse causes a venue to break its aesth/ethic promises.

Yole and their nonbinary partner Sage, who was sitting with us at the Halcyon cafe and frequently contributing with their own perspective as a DIY music fan, were disgusted by what they saw as a culture of silence around abuse in DIY/indie spaces, but Sage still saw the potential of DIY/indie spaces to live up to their promises of inclusivity and accountability, as opposed to bar culture -- “[Bars and larger venues] are not going to cancel somebody on the lineup for having attacked somebody in the past. It's just like numbers to them. DIY spaces aren't like that, they actually care about what the environment feels like. ... Businessmen on St. Mary's Strip are not gonna hold accountability processes.”

### **Conclusion**

During my literature review, I read studies on how precarity shapes the lives of actors in the DIY/indie scene, and on the importance on space for the formation of the scene in the context of house shows, I did not see many articles that connected precarity to space, or space to ethics. In my analysis, I sought to bring the three concepts together and examine how they are deeply

interwoven in the subculture of DIY/indie music, and in San Antonio DIY more specifically -- I see my research as following not only previous scholarship that social scientists like Erik Hannerz and David Verbuc have written on participants in punk, DIY and indie subcultures, but also in the vein of comprehensive “deep-dive” ethnographies that focus on the musical culture in a specific city, such as Sara Cohen’s *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making* (1991).

In the subculture of DIY/indie that I studied, I found that, while my informants do experience precarity, it is of a different type than the mode of precarity that Clara Han, for example, studies in *Life in Debt* (2012). While none of my informants were experiencing abject poverty of the type that Han writes about (at least not to be knowledge), none of them had the capital needed to live comfortably off of music either, and the question of how musicians make money in the DIY/indie scene, which is purposefully oppositional to mainstream music and concepts of individualistic success, was very present -- and would make a fascinating future paper. However, my informants were equally or more invested in the precarity of the collective scene (constituted by threats such as gentrification encroaching on local venues, and the inevitability of young scene members moving away or otherwise leaving with time.)

I found that space is incredibly important to my informants’ lives, both because the effects of precarity on the San Antonio DIY/indie scene cause musicians to gravitate towards trusted spaces (as opposed to less personal, more mainstream venues), and because “spaces” in DIY allow participants in the subculture to imagine new ways of relating towards one another, along with providing the backdrop where the social connections of the scene take place. Drawing from David Verbuč’s ethnographies of DIY house shows, where he identified the ways in which

venue organizers use “spatial tactics” to merge aesthetic and ethical aspects of spaces, as well as my own observations, I created the term “aesth/ethics” to describe how aesthetic markers (“safe space” signs, brightly lit and all-ages environments) orient actors within venue spaces towards a certain set of relations and practices, along with forming part of the venue’s signature style or atmosphere which distances it from more sterile “bar culture” venues. However, I found that the ethics formed by precarity (which involve strong connections of reciprocity, as well as tolerating “bad” behavior from other actors in respect of a collective precarity/shared vulnerability) can have detrimental effects when it comes to aesth/ethics, because it can lead to actors prioritizing social connections over accountability and calling out abuse in DIY spaces.

If I were to continue with this project, one way I could continue would be trying to expand my range of data even further -- while I covered a lot of ethnographic terrain in terms of the places I was able to go to and the informants who were willing to talk to me, there are still venues I haven’t gone to that informants mentioned (such as Presa House, Black Dot Studios), and I feel that performing a detailed Verbuč-style ethnography of San Antonio DIY/indie venues (perhaps focusing on house shows, or otherwise comparing DIY culture in different areas of San Antonio) would be interesting. I could also take an opposite approach and do an ethnography of one venue over time, getting to know the social world around the venue as well as what kinds of ethical practices and relations are encouraged by the people who congregate around this space.

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## Field Notes

### **color-coding**

Purple - narrative

Blue - practices

Yellow - categories/concepts

Green - relations/actors

### **Interview with Mirame**

Vibrant and glittery was a good way to describe the Mirame members' outfits - Natassia, the lead singer, wore a neon green top, a black skirt, and translucent green alien-themed earrings. As I interviewed the members of the band (at Candlelight Coffeehouse), they seemed very friendly with each other -- there was a memorable moment when everyone started singing along/snapping their fingers/etc as the song "Pompeii" by Bastille was playing in the background, and they also finished each others' sentences multiple times during the interview. Natassia spoke about how they first met -- producer Angelo was a composition major at UTSA and he was friends with Natassia, along with some other classmates who were interested in music, and so he decided to bring everyone together. "I remember he was like, 'Yo, I know some other really cool people and we should start a band.'"

Angelo (the producer of the band) spoke about how the local music scene, during the time when Mirame was starting, was undergoing a "transformation ... At the time where we were starting, the local scene was going through like a transformation. The DIY, indie, kind of punkish-pop scene was going through its peak, and I realized that there was this new scene that was emerging, that was more vibrant. You've heard of bands like St. Dukes, and other bands like that? It was

just something that was emerging.” He said that while people were having these ideas for what the scene should be, they weren’t in bands yet, and it was only when they joined the group that this scene was able to take hold in San Antonio.

Angelo also spoke about his conception of what a scene is: “A scene is just a collective of people -- these people, their soul are looking for some kind of expansion of some sort, and in a way, specific bands are bringing it often.”

I asked what bands Mirame plays with; they spoke about fellow band Clunis, who play in Austin but are still part of the SA scene. Natassia said that Mirame is also trying to merge themselves into the Austin scene.

Because Mirame’s music catalogue covers multiple genres, Natassia said that “it’s interesting to see where they place us” when they get gigs at venues, “we’ve played with metal, we’ve played with like super Latin, we’ve played with like super indie, we opened up for Girlpool and that was interesting.” Angelo said that as opposed to being catalogued by genre, it’s an “energy thing” and their band brings an “energy that can be applied to any genre. Natassia and Angelo said that people come up to them after shows and compliment the energy they bring, as well as their authenticity. However, genre hasn’t been a big deal for them, although another band member said that sometimes, they get a show at a “more chill” venue that will ask them to tone their energy down a bit. In San Antonio, Mirame typically plays at Brick, Tiger House, Limelight (a few times), Imagine (they used to play there a lot), La Botanica, and Presa House.

I asked Angelo and Will (another member) to expand on the scene transformation they brought up before, and Will said that there was more genre fusion. Will has been in the scene since high school, and he said that “At the time [I was starting out], cats like Junkie and Sisyphus and Elnuh were kind of coming up, and the wave was kind of angsty and just like "real life"? Like it was just a different scene compared to what it is now, it kind of switched over these last couple of years to something more like, I would say just a different color, you know, a different shade. It went from like the way a passionfruit looks to like a fruit basket.” Angelo said that this is part of a broader shift in Texas music, but that he feels that Mirame is representing the San Antonio sound.

On what differentiates San Antonio from Austin as a music city -- the members said that San Antonio has more musicians who are people of color (as opposed to a whiter scene in Austin) and that “You can hear that in the music. You feel that in the vibe ... I dunno, you can say whatever you want about it but it’s definitely a different feeling.” The other difference is the genres -- there’s a lot more blues and country influence in Austin, for example

Who comes to Mirame shows? “Neo-hippies,” Natassia said. “People who come to our shows are looking for, as Angelo said --- Enlightenment is not the right word. It’s more like connection, freedom, because they know that they can dance or do whatever. We’ll join them.” Will added to this conversation: “We had this one girl in Dallas when we played on tour, and she said, ‘Usually

at shows, I don't feel like I can move, like I can connect with people, but you guys made me feel so free."

When I left the group for my next interview, they were playing a game of chess on the large couches, and seemed to be having a good time.

### **Brick at Blue Star**

The concert that Alyssa and I attended at the Brick building of Blue Star Contemporary was larger than the previous concert that I attended at Princess Pass last weekend -- the environment was sparser in a way, while being technically more crowded. Whereas at Princess Pass everyone had been huddled together in the main room of the house listening to the main band, at Brick there were two stages where different bands could set up simultaneously, and the crowds around the bands formed different formations. I noticed that there was a "core group" of audience members congregated nearest to the stage, and that these audience members would dance (I took a video of this girl dancing to a song by the local band "The Lost Project"), and that behind the couches, which formed a bit of a dividing line in the center of the space, there was another group of people. Surrounding the walls of Brick's large indoor space, there were a variety of vendors who were selling handmade items -- a man selling blackout/erasure poetry zines, people selling stickers with gothic designs and slogans like "Death and Rest" that were not out of place at this rock show, and a woman who I had met at a previous Brick event (as well as another music event earlier this semester, when our project was just beginning - the "Black + Brown Punk Festival" at La Botanica on St. Mary's) who was selling earrings and jewelry made of recycled and found

items such as Arizona Tea cans and paper from the covers of albums like The Strokes “Is This It.”

This woman, “Cynthia”\* was our first informant of the night. We found out that, in addition to her role as a vendor, Cynthia plays in another local SA band, Yo Existo; she spoke of fond memories of the San Antonio “music scene” (and all of our informants seemed to know what we were talking about when I said “the San Antonio music scene” without further prompting) as a welcoming space where bands “really support one another” (a direct quote that also came up in altered ways from other respondents.) Although the temperature on the patio outside of Brick was very cold, Cynthia, an Asian woman in around her mid-30s who was wearing a yellow beanie hat and a denim jacket, seemed happy to talk to us about the music subculture, and she mentioned several other bands who she listens to such as punk/metal band Amygdala and Ghost Police.

Next, we talked to another vendor who was selling art prints, and later her boyfriend who has been active in the music scene since around 2014. The vendor “Amanda” had been a part of the music scene since high school, and she vividly recounted house shows that she attended as a teenager, where she said that despite the shows she attended being intimidating with “rowdy bands ... a crazy mosh pit,” the people she met were very welcoming and accepting of her, and she had good memories of that time. She mentioned Imagine Books + Records as a music venue that she often attended growing up (even if as she got older she has left this subculture behind somewhat, due to not having time to attend shows), and said that she found this event through

Facebook (her “partner” as she described him has a friend on Facebook who advertises art) and was attending as a vendor for the first time.

When our interview with Amanda was complete, she introduced us to her boyfriend “Antonio,” who described himself as having a lot of experience in the world of San Antonio music. We (I, Alyssa, and a friend that she brought to the concert) went outside to the patio to talk, and despite the fact that there were some small chairs in the area -- granted, they were positioned around small circular tables with filled ashtrays inside -- Antonio decided to sit cross-legged on the floor, and I joined him to talk. He was tall, with curly black hair and tan skin, and was wearing a black T-shirt with a band name on it, and a lightweight jacket. We started with how Antonio “got into music,” and he recounted how his dad played a number of instruments, and he decided to start his own “weird indie rock band” (direct quote) in 2014. The lifecycle of his band started when he “hit up” a major promoter (I wish he had given us the name of which promoter in particular) and began getting invites in a manner which he described as something akin to a spiderweb, where he would be invited to a show, met other bands, and these bands would invite him to other shows. In this process, he said that Facebook and social media (although he only uses Facebook) are essential for a band in San Antonio to use, to meet people and become connected to local bands, even if you don’t see them in person. Antonio described seeing “music memes” posted by other bands on Facebook that made him feel closer to those bands, and also finding events and concerts to attend through Facebook. He also gave some criticism of the San Antonio music scene as a somewhat insulated and cliquish (the word “cliquish” was used directly by another informant later on in the night) space, where people would attend their

friend's events not because they really liked the music, but because they wanted to support their friends' shows, and few bands were doing something truly unique that made them stand out.

There was a memorable moment during our interview where Antonio, who had been animated and expressive during this entire conversation - like Cynthia, he seemed very eager to talk about music - did an impression of a band that was currently performing inside, "Vintage Pictures." He said that their performance routine was a good representation of the formulated patterns that bands would fall into during concerts: they would play their music for a bit, pause, say "WE'RE VINTAGE PICTURES," something about how their day was going and wanting to thank the venue, and then continue. When asked if there was a band that *was* doing something unique, he mentioned Verisimilitude, who had a "hippie-ish" aesthetic and were "really cool in the music scene," but later said that they, too, had become formulated and rehearsed in their performances.

According to our next informant "Travis" (who is also a member of San Antonio DSA's steering committee, in an interesting turn of events), who was playing a series of System of a Down covers with the band "Porridge Fist" at 11, the San Antonio music scene is thriving, but self-contained; he said that the average band in San Antonio is "stranger" or quirkier than bands in other cities such as Austin, perhaps in an effort to stand out -- he gave the illustrative example of "a punk band with an accordionist." When asked how bands in San Antonio support one another, he described it as a project of "mutual aid" where courteousness and doing things with no real incentive were encouraged.

After we talked to Travis, he introduced us to our final musician-informant of the night, “Jeffrey,” who had been in a number of bands, gone to New York for a while, and then come back to San Antonio a few weeks before this event. Ston, who had gotten into music via being homeschooled and some of his friends being in a death metal band in 2011 (which is very bizarre description and I wish we could have asked him more - like I didn’t expect there to be a large overlap between homeschoolers and death metal enthusiasts) said that the main difference that he saw between New York band culture and San Antonio band culture was that there was more “Southern hospitality” here, and doing things like going to other bands’ houses wasn’t considered strange here. He also said some intriguing things about how every few years a new space would pop up in San Antonio that would be the go-to destination for upcoming indie artists, and that Imagine Books + Records had “lost its spark” because its main audience as well as the demographic of its performers were high-school aged and college-aged musicians who had since grown up and gotten out of San Antonio for college. He also connected this to what to him was a broader trend of millennials and Gen Z wanting to get away from San Antonio, and questioned whether venues and music festival organizers were really using their resources appropriately to cultivate the music scene.

\*pseudonyms are being used for informants, to preserve confidentiality

### **The Milk Theory**

Aidan and I conducted an interview with Brisa Shaw and Joseph Peterson, two members of the band The Milk Theory, which had started out in San Antonio -- I went to high school with both

of them -- before moving to Austin when the members went to college. Brisa and Joseph were speaking to us via Skype from Joseph's car in an HEB parking lot, but they seemed excited to speak with us all the same. The conversation started with Imagine Books + Records, where The Milk Theory played their first show; their bass player (Michael, nicknamed "Panama") had booked a show without their knowledge and given them a week or two to prepare (because of actions like this, I remember that Michael/Panama was kicked out of the band during our senior year, although this wasn't brought up in our interview.) After this initial show, other bands would invite TMT to shows at or around Imagine Books + Records, until a point around 3 months in where Brisa said that they were expected to book shows themselves, and bands would stop inviting them to places. The last show that TMT booked was a tour of Texas at Fitzgerald's (in San Antonio), and Brisa said that Fitzgerald's was "more professional than most people are." The process for booking venues, according to Brisa, is sending a short email with information about the band and style of music, and then the venue decides "if they even want to respond to us."

After we discussed venues, the conversation drifted to The Milk Theory's relationship to other local bands, and Joseph said that on average, 1 out of 5 other bands TMT has played with before are "assholes." Criteria Joseph and Brisa brought up for bad conduct in the music scene included being the opening act and inviting a large fanbase (which would be around 20 to 30 people), not acknowledging any of the other bands during the set, and then often announcing something like "We're all going to dinner after," and leaving with all of the audience members that had come out to see them -- apparently this is common behavior, but considered very rude by the

informants. Although Brisa described feeling irritated by these actions, she said that she doesn't like to "call out" bands who are rude (unless their behavior is predatory or otherwise dangerous in nature) because **"I don't want to be known as that band that does shit to other bands ... I know the struggle of being a local musician."** We took this opportunity to ask Brisa and Joseph what comprised the "struggle" as they put it of being a local musician, and **Joseph gave a vividly described story, presumably from a few days ago, of coming down from the high of an energetic performance and trying to pack everything up in a busy Houston street amidst the baseball World Series, where they were "hauling 300 pounds of gear" with no help in a "street filled with drunk people and cops" (because a major sports game was going on.)** Because of these regular ordeals -- trying to find parking, unhauling and packing up equipment -- **Brisa said that she loves when venues like Imagine Books "actually pay us."**

The conversation moved into a discussion of (our question) what the distinctive sound of San Antonio independent/DIY music was, to which Brisa immediately said that "there isn't one." She said that when she, Joseph, and the other members of The Milk Theory were getting started around 2015-2016 the sound was "surf punk," which Joseph said was very strange for a landlocked city in the Southwest. Examples of surf punk given were Junkie, Flowershop, and Elnuh, and Brisa said that this sound was most highly concentrated in local house shows, as a "catharsis" (direct quote) from Brisa for young high school and college-aged people who wanted to "get out of San Antonio." **(I'm going to listen more closely to this part of the interview, because the reasoning she gave for surf punk being popular was interesting and I don't know if I'm capturing it well here - she mentioned that San Antonio doesn't have as many**

music/nightlife events as other big cities in Texas, and that this leads to boredom and a need for catharsis in the form of loud/heavy music, so this might be an explanation for surf punk's popularity?) Another reason Brisa mentioned for why surf punk of all genres became popular is that it's "high energy, easy to play, easy to soften or make harder." Joseph brought up the concept of member-sharing, where San Antonio musicians are often in three or more bands simultaneously (Joseph was a bassist in Vintage Pictures, another band that started at Communications Arts High School/Taft, for around a year) -- surf punk, metal, and rock, according to Joseph, are vital genres to learn because they're "specialized" and once you learn them, you can play with a variety of bands. If the sound when TMT was starting out was surf punk, Brisa said that "it's definitely died down." The new genre, according to our informants (who admitted that they haven't been in the SA scene for a while, but still keep in touch with musician friends) is "less aggressive ... **if you want to know what the current sound looks like, listen to Dream Place and Vintage Pictures.**" This wasn't really a compliment - Brisa said that every song by Vintage Pictures sounds like reformulated Two Door Cinema Club (an early 2010s indie rock band - Aidan and I both understood when she made this reference.) Our final question was about the relationship between The Milk Theory and their audience. Brisa said that while TMT had lost some of their core audience after they moved away from San Antonio, and similar bands who came up during the same time period split up or moved away, there was still an "asleep audience" waiting to wake up.

What they said about connections with other bands:

Apparently it's common for **“the owner (of a venue) [to be] a guitarist in a band that played with our band three years ago,”** which was a great encapsulation of what our informants said about the insularity of the music scene. Brisa said that if she checks Instagram on any band, she'll find many bands she knows following them, although she doesn't place as much primacy on social media for networking compared to in-person interaction.

### **Interview with Baldemar Esquivel III**

At La Madeleine Cafe and Bakery, I interviewed Baldemar Esquivel III, a local musician who goes to school at San Antonio College (SAC) and does a solo act. He was wearing a beige cap and a black jacket, and he usually looked away from me when he spoke. My first question to him was how he got into the San Antonio music scene, and he said that he got into **hardcore bands** around his sophomore year. One of the first bands he played in was called “The Void,” -- “that's kind of how I got my start.”

I asked him what the process typically is of booking a show, and he made a distinction between **“shows where bars need bands,”** and **“shows where actual effort is made”** at other types of venues. At the beginning, his shows were frequented by **“random old people”** who were part of the rock scene, but slowly The Void began amassing a wider audience. Baldemar said that Nathan, who plays drums in multiple bands, asked The Void if they wanted to play at more **shows**

Baldemar said that he prefers house shows to other venues because “it’s like a DIY approach, so it’s more casual.” However, he described problems with “poorly set up houses: where he “has to work around things like space, laws” -- he described one show with a lot of promotion, where the police arrived because house shows are often “technically running an ‘illegitimate venue.’” He said that it’s important to “make sure that everyone’s promoting the show,” and recounted a situation in San Marcos where the promoter didn’t show up and seemed unaware of the standards around promoting a concert. However, Baldemar said that “it’s not always a set standard” regarding how shows are hosted, promoted, etc., especially from city to city. Overall, “the more coordination, the better -- if they don’t [communicate with us], that’s bad.”

Regarding genre, Baldemar said that bands like to “play with other bands that sound similar [to them],” but that it’s also important to “bring the right acts that can stand alone on their own.” He gave an example of the SA hardcore scene, where he said that this is very visible. While performing with similar bands has benefits, Baldemar cautioned that “when you operate in a certain circle -- things can get real stale, real quick,” referring to bands that only play with each other. He also said that a lot of lineups at venues are “almost the same show,” because of this overlap.

We spoke about Baldemar’s last show at San Marcos, and he said that it taught him that “improvising is crucial ... no show ever goes as planned, so it’s best to observe Murphy’s Law<sup>8</sup>.” When speaking about the differences between San Antonio and other cities such as San Marcos,

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<sup>8</sup> Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.

Baldemar said that San Antonio is a growing market in music, and a lot of people are moving here -- often because of gentrification, he said. He described the San Antonio music scene as one that can be “stagnant,” but on the other hand there are many talented people, even if the “infrastructure” isn’t present to bring more attention to local music. According to Baldemar, Austin has a bigger market for music than San Antonio, but it’s also harder to get known, and there’s an “oversaturation” of musicians in the city.

Baldemar described the current popular aesthetics/sounds in the DIY scene as “vintage/VHS stuff,” “some surf textures and West Coast sounds,” but said that *“DIY isn’t a genre -- it’s a lifestyle ... it’s a matter of taking things into your own hands, getting away from bar shows, and overall having more independence and liberty over your music.”* **(note to self -- listen to this portion of the interview again)** With DIY music environments, Baldemar said, “the venue itself is an art piece.” His favorite venue to go to is the “old-ass building” South Newby, on New Braunfels on the Ea because it’s “awesome to see in DIY where resources are kind of like shared” in music spaces, and that it’s also cool when people can meet and connect. He said that even when shows aren’t being held in South Newby, it’s still this communal space where musicians and other people involved in the scene can hang out, practice their instruments, and anything else they might need.

Baldemar said that there were definitely times when his friend and bandmate (?) Matt has reached out to other musicians -- he gave this funny story of **[relisten to interview to get more of this -- this band that Baldemar is friends with did a project where other bands would**

recount fun memories that they had with them in video format, and Baldemar gave the account of how one of the members of this band saved him from getting trampled in a mosh pit]. He said that there are a lot of ways for musicians to connect through projects, helping each other out, etc. While he characterized his initial decision to establish a solo project as something that “took a lot of selfishness,” he said that being involved in the music scene is all about helping others and just talking to people: “*You can’t do anything in this town if you don’t talk.*” According to Baldemar, when he and one of his friends were young, they would go to shows and pretend to be professional photographers, taking pictures of bands on little disposable cameras, just networking and talking.

Baldemar said that “social media is really big” when it comes to promoting music. Even though Facebook is a “dying thing,” and he feels weird when other bands use it, he said that people will see his page and think it’s cool. “You can have the best bands [at your event], but if no one knows about it, they won’t go.”

### **Interview with Dominic and Daniel from the band Mr. Pidge**

I met Dominic and Daniel, two members of the local SA band Mr. Pidge, at Candlelight Coffeehouse around 6 p.m. -- there was a singer-songwriter who was getting ready to perform at Candlelight, and Dominic (one half of the duo, Dominic had curly brown hair, wire-rimmed glasses, and wore a somewhat formal-seeming white blouse) was talking with the musician as he

prepared his instruments to perform. It was somewhat crowded in Candlelight, so we went outside to talk.

Dominic said that he got into the San Antonio music scene by way of the “jazz scene” (during our conversation, he and Daniel both referred to jazz musicians/musicians in general as “cats,” which is 1920s jazz slang -- I thought that was interesting) -- he spoke of doing jazz shows at various locations as well as participating in jazz at University of the Incarnate Word (UIW.) He said that the way to get into the jazz scene is by attending jazz gigs and getting to know more established jazz “cats.” He said that there was a jazz gig near Olmos Pharmacy that he used to frequent, and that the previous popular hub was a pizzeria. Daniel, who was wearing an orange beanie, had gotten into music from the “theatre side of things,” as a pit musician (at classical venues like the Majestic Theatre.)

Dominic characterized getting booked for jazz “gigs” as a snowball effect; get introduced to new people at jazz sessions, “getting gigs” with people that you met, and it “grows exponentially” from there. “You go to a gig, you meet all these new people, then you go to another gig ...” In an interesting turn of events regarding this, there was a singer-songwriter act in Candlelight that was going on while we were talking (we were in the outside section of the building, and he was performing inside), and Dominic knew the musician from a previous open mic. However, Daniel and Dominic said that the indie scene is a little bit different. They said that some current trends in the DIY/indie scene are bedroom pop and producers, “YouTube musicians,” and also said that San Antonio is going through a renaissance of multimedia creations.

From there we talked for a bit about job prospects in San Antonio for musicians. Daniel said that gigs and teaching are important -- he works both as a musician and music teacher. Dominic said that getting booked at formal events like weddings (he just came from playing at a local shop in La Cantera) is important for how a lot of musicians "make a living," even though "not a lot of indie bands get booked at weddings": usually bands will play covers, top 40s hits, or jazz. They also emphasized how many musicians have second jobs or accept work in other aspects of music production (like sound, lights, setting up equipment for other bands, etc.) and how all of that is equally important. Dominic said that it's possible to see the multitasking that musicians are expected to do to make money "in a positive light," because it allows them to pick up multiple skills and contribute to the scene in different ways. Dominic said, "There's another gig [that] I'm playing at later -- I just got asked an hour ago ... Music is sort of a 'risky business,' spur-of-the-moment type thing." However, Daniel said that the unfortunate side of this is when something happens and "venues say 'we can't pay you.'"

This took us to a brief discussion of the perceived lack of unions for musicians in San Antonio **[note to group - this is interesting! hadn't rly thought of this for some reason wrt financial side of being a musician]**. Dominic said that traditionally in larger cities, a union would protect musicians (ensuring things like fair pay and workers' protections), but in San Antonio, only the Majestic Theatre requires that musicians be part of a union. **[will relisten - i'm p sure this is what he said or at least v similar]** Daniel compared this to the theatre business, where actors, for example, are required to be part of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) -- no equivalence of this

exists in San Antonio for musicians. Dominic said that “as artists ... time is precious” and that he generally doesn’t like to play at events without being paid for his time, but there are certain situations where, if he’s rehearsed/practiced for a show for a large amount of time, he will decide to perform even if the pay isn’t great. On the subject of musicians and finances, he said that “there’s no insurance plan for a lot of people here” so musicians generally take gigs as they come, even if the conditions aren’t the best.

However, Dominic and Daniel said that they hadn’t had many “super dishonest” experiences at venues, and that “most try to be as good-faith as possible.” Daniel said that for indie bands, mom & pop shows are a different experience that feels more intimate.

Dominic said that he used to fill in for a lot of bands, such as Slomobile, Vintage Pictures, 16 Psyche, and Ramparts. Daniel said that it’s “really cool” when you try to learn another indie set, because each band has its own established set of songs and particular quirks -- “it’s a test of musicianship. ... Learning [another band’s] songs gives a test of character, of respect [of others’ work.]”

**[conversation about technology and how the 21st century “revolutionised musicianship” --  
relisten to the interview]**

When discussing his own collaborations with other musicians as a producer, Dominic gave the example of King Coffee **[I think that’s his name?]** as someone he looked up to in the music

world, although KC isn't in San Antonio. King Coffee became popular through the middle 2010s trend of "Simpsonswave" music videos (that would have music tracks over video footage of "The Simpsons" -- sort of a 90s nostalgia aesthetic); KC's style of being a producer involves a mix of collaborating with other artists, sending emails to other musicians, and having an in-depth portfolio of past music achievements. Daniel also mentioned the importance of having a "back catalogue," of music, defined as a collection of all the works that an artist has previously produced. Daniel said that this "Simpsonswave" aesthetic that KC cultivated was related to a broader trend of aesthetics currently popular in the indie/DIY scene, such as artists painting on walls or having some sort of interactive art element, and an overall 90s nostalgic look (they cited Mac DeMarco as a reference point.) Basically, "90s nostalgia with neon colors," in Dominic's words. Dominic said that trends repeat themselves, but there are bands that follow them, and bands that break them.

The conversation moved to the "house show" venue Princess Pass in particular -- Dominic seemed fascinated by how it was both similar to, and different from "house shows" that had been popularised in the past: "not a typical house." Old house shows, Daniel said, were more about "people doing DMT and then a group of people playing Smash Bros in the corner, and it wasn't uncommon for the house to be someone's family home, and for someone's grandfather to be asleep in the back room. Princess Pass, according to Dominic and Daniel, is more formalized or "premeditated" (direct quote) as something that would be more like an "actual music venue" (as opposed to the highly casual and intimate vibe of a traditional house show). They also thought that the atmosphere at Princess Pass is reflective of how "callout culture" has grown [i don't

**think they meant this in some negative/pejorative way? despite the connotations of that word in popular discourse]** after some bands in the SA indie scene (they didn't name which ones) had been "called out" for abusive or unsafe behavior. According to them, the signs at Princess Pass and South Newby that say things like "This is a safe space" or "Please let us know if anyone makes you uncomfortable" are indicative of a larger shift in indie/DIY culture in San Antonio where venues are "being more deliberate with show etiquette." Princess Pass and South Newby are both different from other music venues because their audience demographics skew more from 16 to mid-20s, while venues on St. Mary's Strip tend to be 18 and up -- "It's a different dynamic," either Dominic or Daniel said at one point.

Daniel talked a bit about having lived in Kansas and being in the DIY community there, and how there was a lot of "weird competition" there with other bands -- Dominic and Daniel said that while there is some competition and individualism in the SA music community, there is also this "collective culture." Dominic said that while others may refer to this culture as "cliquishness," he sees it as musicians with similar styles and artistic perspectives helping each other to succeed. He gave the example of how Mr. Pidge tends to play with the bands Mírame and St. Dukes, and how these bands all embody a similar style: "we're all funky, but not in the same way." Dominic said that this type of self-selection makes it easier for the audience, as "you know that going into *this* show you're going to get *this* experience." They also said that the people of San Antonio have very diverse taste when it comes to music, and that San Antonio is a very cozy music scene environment (if perhaps in a way that some see as inhibiting artistic growth.) Dominic said that

this is a “prime time for a renaissance” in San Antonio music, comparing it to the grunge scene in 90s Seattle, which was going through a similar boom of visibility/growth.

There was also a fun moment during this interview where we were talking about Imagine Books and Records (a venue whose owners Aidan and I interviewed last week) and they asked if I knew Ezra, referring to him as the “godfather of the indie rock scene” who sort of knows everyone in the area.

### **Imagine Books + Records (Don, Gavin, and Matt)**

Walking into Imagine Books + Records, we were greeted by floor-to-ceiling walls of books and an older white man wearing an orange button-down shirt doing a crossword puzzle at one end of a long wooden table; this man was Don Hurd, owner of the bookstore. Don said that he had gotten into bands when he was young, and that he had always wanted to create a place where artists are welcomed and feel valued. As we were talking, I noticed a large white van outside -- Don said that the van contained the members of Akira, the El Paso band that would be playing in Imagine around 8. Don described the music-related aspect of Imagine as a place where “we have mosh pits in the store,” (Imagine Books + Records is known as “the loudest bookstore in Texas”) and said that wherever he goes, he sees bands that he knows -- he mentioned several bands that Aidan and I had heard of before, such as Vintage Pictures, Noise Quota, and St. Dukes.

When going over the process of how Imagine Books + Records books bands for shows, Don said that while sometimes, they will be contacted by a band who wants to put on a show, but otherwise the process involves a lot of calling people and messaging people on Facebook, starting with the headliner band and then getting other local bands to play with them. We went from there to asking Don about whether he felt that social media was an important part of the music subculture (especially when it comes to booking bands) and he said that social media was a “tool” and a way to message people, but “social interactions are what’s important ... if you want to make connections, you start by going to a lot of other shows you’re not a part of.” Integral to what he described was a code of etiquette for musicians: you come at the beginning of the show, you stay until the end, and you talk to a lot of people and get to know them. Also essential to the code of etiquette, according to Don, was striving to promote your show; if a band failed to do so (via word of mouth, flyers, social media, etc.) Don said that Imagine would still be willing to have them play in the store, but that they would take note of it.

We asked if Don had observed any major changes in the “music scene” since he started out in the music business, and he said that due to the Internet and YouTube making it easier to learn and perfect different genres and songs, that musicians were “a lot better” than they used to be. He gave an example using Paul McCartney’s “Mrs. Vanderbilt,” saying that if he wanted to learn Mrs. Vanderbilt, he would play the record enough that he learned the chords, but now he could just Google it to watch a tutorial, and learn the song faster; due to this, there is now “more talent, and more bands.”

Our conversation moved to genre. Don said that “there’s always been a definitive genre -- Tejano Conjunto,” but that for younger San Antonians, “it’s an indie rock city.” We learned that Imagine Books + Records hosts indie rock, hip-hop and metal nights, that punk rock bands are getting more rare because it’s harder to find “true punk” (in an earlier exchange, Don had said that the response to a lot of punk-identified bands in San Antonio was, “This is not punk. This is pop-punk.”), and singer-songwriter events aren’t common because they don’t tend to draw a large audience, so if a singer-songwriter musician wants to play they will be grouped in with other genres. We spoke briefly about Imagine Books + Records’ fourth anniversary celebration a few weeks ago, which Don described as “really nice.” He said that while the first night didn’t draw a large audience and was considered by multiple venues in San Antonio to be a “weird night” where not many people in the city were out, that the second and third nights of the celebration were much better. Most of the bands that had been invited for the celebration were “sentimental favorites,” not necessarily bands that had been there since the beginning (Imagine Books + Records opened in 2011, and Don said that it’s rare to see a band that stays together for more than 4-5 years.) When asked why bands tend to break up, Don said that this is usually do to the pressures of life after graduating college or around the age 22; citing local band Envision Love as an example, Don said that they “all went to college, got degrees, have families now.” Because of this, there aren’t many musicians in San Antonio, according to Don, who are full-time musicians; when talking about another artist, Don differentiated between work and passion -- “that’s his day job, not what he loves.” The primary audience for Imagine Books + Records is high-school age teenagers, due to the venue’s inclusive atmosphere and lack of alcohol (while some events are BYOB, Don said that for events where high school bands are

exclusively performing, drinks are prohibited in the space) and people in their early 20s. “It’s cool to see parents drop their kids off to watch a band,” Don said.

At this point in the conversation (about 30 to 40 minutes into our interview/field visit), two Latinx teenagers entered the store -- Gavin, a 16 year old who visits Imagine often, had curly brown hair and was wearing a green Adidas hoodie and jeans; Matt, who works in the store and does some administrative work [I can’t remember his age but I think he said he was around 18-19], was wearing a black “Museum of Death” hoodie and a knitted hat. We introduced ourselves to Gavin and Matt and explained some of the details of our project, and Gavin said that Imagine Books + Records was like “a home to him.” Gavin and Matt started coming to Imagine Books + Records when Gavin was 13, and they described it as a snowball process of just bringing new people: “Dylan started bringing Fish, Fish started bringing Chase, Chase started bringing Carlos...” He, Matt, and Don kept up a friendly banter during the course of our interview with the three of them, and it was clear that they knew each other well. The conversation shifted to the differences between San Antonio and Austin, and Gavin said that it was “really tough to play in Austin now” and that many major venues had shut down, so it was difficult to find a place to play if you weren’t a band with an established following. Gavin and Matt aren’t currently involved in the music scene (other than as audience members + Matt’s role at Imagine), but they are in the process of forming their own “emo/math rock” band, inspired by the sound of bands like Tiny Moving Parts.

On the topic of connections, Don relayed a story about, when Imagine Books + Records was moving stores (past informants had told us about this, and for some reason I imagined that it was a substantial move, but in reality it was “about 5 doors down” from their original location) “so many bands we’ve worked with in the past came here to help us ... and it was beautiful.” Once the details of the move were announced on social media, all of these bands had come to Imagine to help with the moving process; Don recalled that he had worried about the time it would take to paint the walls, but that there were “15 or 16 hands” painting the walls, which made the process much faster and easier. During this process, apparently one of the bands brought tacos for everyone to eat while they were working.

We had talked about what characteristics are indicative of a *good* band who Imagine would want to book (semi-popular genre, interacts with other bands, does own promotional material), and Gavin said that Imagine was where “a lot of bands in here [referencing the city] get started.” I asked Gavin and Matt if there were any popular and/or “up and coming” bands in the city, and they listed St. Dukes, Vintage Pictures, Other Plans, Dream Place, and Mirame (band names that I’ve come to hear frequently so far in our field visits.) Matt referenced a concert that Imagine had held a week or two ago, featuring newer bands Go, Sleep Schedule, and Como Coyote. He also mentioned that Como Coyote was the new project of one of the members of Dream Place, and Gavin and Matt said that it was common for bands to share members (giving an example of a musician who was once in three bands around the same time period.)

I asked if there were any bands that Imagine Books + Records would prefer not to book or interact with. Don said that, other than dangerous misconduct and “allegations” (the whole conversation was a bit euphemistic as to the nature of these “allegations,” but I gathered that he was referring to situations like sexual assault), there wouldn’t be any major factors that would bar a band from performing. Gavin said that if the Imagine staff hear reports of “bad behavior,” that “we kind of don’t invite them.” However, Don said that word usually *doesn’t* get out about these situations in the wider San Antonio community, and that it’s not uncommon for a band that has been kicked out of a particular venue to continue performing places otherwise -- he brought up the example of a popular house venue where the owner (and musician) has abuse allegations against him, but many local DIY/indie bands still perform there, and concluded with the phrase “Be a decent human being!”

While Imagine Books + Records is known chiefly as a music space (although there was a robust-seeming bookstore component -- Aidan and I walked around the bookstore for a while between interviews and found books on a variety of topics), Don said that he occupies a certain role as “consoler-in-chief” and that “people come here with their problems” -- anything from mental health and depression, to people experiencing homelessness -- and Don fills the role of listening to their problems and providing encouragement. “People meet here, gain friends here, and get to listen to a lot of local bands.” Families in the area whose kids frequent the venue will visit when they’re around the area, just to say hello. Don said that he and Matt, for example, spent an entire afternoon last week eating “TV Dinners” and reading the science fiction magazine *Starlog* (which was on the table where Don had been filling out the crossword.) While

she wasn't at the store during our interview (of if so, we didn't get to meet her), Don said that his wife Irma also plays a large role in the store and "Everyone knows her."

While we were talking with Don, Gavin and Matt, people started entering the store, and were having conversations in small groups around the books section. Don pointed out one group of people as the family of Michael, the lead singer of the band Akira who would be playing tonight.

We were soon able to talk with Ezra Hurd, the events coordinator of Imagine Books + Records; tonight was the last show that he would be performing (I had seen an Instagram post earlier from Imagine Books + Records that detailed the fact that Ezra was leaving to pursue a full-time job and other commitments elsewhere), and he seemed very sad to be leaving. Periodically during our conversation with Ezra, he would get up and talk to customers and/or audience members in the shop, asking them how their day was and if there was anything that they needed (for example, a young man wearing a yellow flannel jacket and black ripped jeans -- Michael from Akira -- asked if there was wheelchair access in Imagine during the concert, and Ezra stopped talking with us for a few minutes to help him.)

Ezra had been working at Imagine Books + Records for six years, since his junior or senior year of high school, "event coordinating, bringing all of the people in." He said that every few years, Imagine Books + Records gets another "wave" of people in the music community -- high schoolers who frequent the venue, perform in bands, and watch their friends' bands for a few years, only to move away as the cycle perpetuates itself anew. "The first community was my dad

and his friends from the 80s,” he said, but then some “kids” from his high school came into the shop during finals and did an impromptu show called “Musicians Need Food,” and from then on Ezra made it a point to encourage his classmates to come to Imagine. The first bands to start playing at the venue included Envision Love -- “we would work with them for about 4 years” -- and Octahedron. Ezra characterized this period as “the strongest point of our community,” (direct quote) at Imagine, with a 4 year anniversary in 2015 that was very popular and well-attended. He also mentioned Dominic Walsh of KRTU (**a good person to interview**), who used to work at Imagine; apparently, there was one time where Dominic was behind Ezra in traffic, and Dominic “got out of his car and gave me a hug.” 2015 was also the beginning of Imagine Fest, a weeklong annual festival that Ezra helped organize during his college years from 2015 to 2019. Of Imagine Fest, Ezra said that “There were bands that should not have been playing at Imagine [**I assume because of their popularity?**] that came out.” One of these bands, Jupiter Thief, contained two members who would go on to be part of the popular band BROCKHAMPTON.

### **Concert @ princess pass**

The atmosphere of the show at Princess Pass initially felt very -- I think cozy might be the wrong word, but another word along those lines may be accurate? It felt small, not only because several people I know (from Trinity, as well as some informants from my Intro to Anth project, in a fun twist of events) were in attendance. Entering the space where people were “checking” in, I noticed first how many people were in costumes. I saw the local musician Samantha Flowers, who was wearing a glittery devil costume, as well as this student from Trinity who was wearing

a cow costume (meant to be a pun, like “holy cow.”) This topic of costumes came up later - one of my friends/informants was wearing the same Britney Spears costume as another person (Polly Ann Rocha, a musician herself, who I might interview at a later date) and a humorous interaction between the two of them took place.

The band that was playing when I walked in the house, Noise Quota, had a lot of reverb and hard guitar, and there were some “retro” black-and-white Mickey Mouse clips playing on a projector behind them, with some flashing lights and other effects that made the videos match up with the music. In addition to the Mickey Mouse, there was a 90s anime that was also used in a similar way. The layout of the house was a small white-walled kitchen area where people were talking in groups (with a bowl of red fruit punch on one of the counters), an area with couches and vendors selling merchandise to the side (one vendor was selling earrings with an intriguing semi-kitschy aesthetic -- large velvet teddy bear earrings, earrings that were composed of tiny computer parts, and another vendor was selling merchandise for the bands Secret Kink and Noise Quota.)

When walking in to the main concert space, there was a white piece of paper taped to the wall in front of the entrance that said something about Princess Pass being a “safe space,” and that if anyone made us (the concert-goers) feel uncomfortable, we could tell one of the venue organizers and leave. There was also a similar note to the right of the living room where the performances were going on, adjoining the bathroom. These sentiments were ultimately complicated by the fact that multiple informants during the night told me or expressed knowledge of that a member of one of the bands performing this night has been accused of

sexual misconduct towards minors. I learned of this fact a few hours before I entered the contact space, as one of my informants for the Intro to Anth project had told me about this when I mentioned that I was going to a concert at Princess Pass, but he wasn't sure if the member involved was still in the band (from what I saw, he is still in the band.) **[in subsequent interviews, another informant also expressed knowledge of this being a situation w the band mentioned -- I'm sort of struggling w how to depict this situation in these field notes? it's obviously difficult for everyone involved and I want to write abt it respectfully, but it seems like an important aspect to include here]** And definitely, knowing this information made the concert environment feel different than had I not known about this before arriving.

I met one of my other Intro to Anth informants, "Louisa," a few minutes after arriving -- she was sitting on the couches in the living room area where the band Noise Quota was playing, alongside two of her friends who she introduced me to. When the band that had been accused started playing, Louisa moved to a couch farther in the back (near the "lobby"/vendor space) and started complaining about the member's behavior (and the behavior of the venue, for letting this member continue performing.) Specifically, she said that this was the outcome of venues like Princess Pass being male-dominated spaces, as opposed to being a space created by women or "femme-bodied" people. Louisa said that she still goes to Princess Pass often for shows **[I wish I could have asked for her reasoning behind this?]** even though, at around midnight, the "cops" often come to investigate noise violations. Louisa characterized these occurrences as more annoying than anything, and said that by this point the police are familiar with and nonthreatening to her (because she attends this venue so often.) She did recount one incident

where she was at Princess Pass and the police entered via the laundry room (or something similar,) violating rules of entering the venue without a warrant. This seemed to be an isolated incident, however. As the aforementioned band continued to play, Louisa and one of her friends wandered to the outdoor space surrounding the house, out of a desire not to hear this band or be part of that environment.

I walked outside with them, and soon got the opportunity to interview the Trinity student in the cow costume, "Claire," who asked to be referred to by a pseudonym. We sat down on an unused table in the outdoor space and began to talk. Claire said that, despite not being in a band, she got involved with the house show Princess Pass because one of her friends was dating a guy in a band, she became friends with him through this. She "hung out with him" a lot and got more into the indie music scene -- "We were hanging out, smoking a lot of weed, playing a lot of music, it was great ... I just come out here to support [the band]." She said that although she doesn't play an instrument, she has "a little bit of credibility" because of her wide taste in music, but that she still "is pretty naive" doesn't have knowledge of music forms such as jazz. This is a contrast from Claire's musician friends at this venue because "all of these guys play so many instruments" and know about jazz, and this makes Claire jealous. Princess Pass is the only show that Claire goes to (although she's gone to some shows in Houston where people "would play in their front yards" when she was in high school), and she said that it's "pretty unique ... this is the next level, it's a step up from the front yard to the whole house."

We spoke about the origins of Princess Pass as a venue (it was originally owned by members of the IX fraternity, but is now an independent venue) from its beginnings until now. Claire said that Constantine, one of the former Trinity IXs (who was in one of the bands playing tonight) stayed in the house once he graduated and it was advertised that it was “no longer gonna be part of the IXs ... they just decided to move on, I guess.” Despite being familiar with some band members, Claire doesn’t know most of the people in the audience, but she said that this doesn’t bother her because PP is an open environment where you can strike up a conversation with anyone. She also said that PP is more intimate than other venues because of the way in which the show is set up, because *“It’s so intimate. Like you’re all on the same level. If you go to Paper Tiger or just like any other concert like ACL or anything, they’re always on a stage and above you, and I really like it when you’re up here on the same level with them. And I mean all these people obviously know the bands that are here. Everyone is friends and they just want to support each other, so it’s a really like welcoming, happy environment. I don’t see why there would be any problems there.”*

Claire asked how I heard of Princess Pass, because she didn’t think it was advertised or well-known at Trinity. (I told her about my project, and following local musicians on social media.) Claire said that it’s cool that PP has an instagram of their own, and also that most of the owners [I’m a bit unclear about what she meant in this part?] of the house had moved away.

### Interview w/ Chord Organ Tapes

According to Jose Anita Rocha, the current manager of indie cassette label Chord Organ Tapes, his label got started when he was working with someone else who was running a label, but then he realized that they were “shady” and that other people said that they were stealing other people’s ideas. This turned him off of labels, but then he found a guy online who goes by Abasement and they thought about starting a label. It was just an idea in April, but by May it was “full-fledged ... it was all happening pretty fast.”

Jose was motivated by his desire to create a more “ethical” record label -- “I knew a couple of other labels who were doing it the right way, unlike the label I was with previously ... I just wanted to do it right.” He said that cassettes were making a comeback, and that he had been collecting them from an early age. Cassettes, apparently, are among the cheapest forms of music distribution: “it cost about a dollar for each tape.” Although Jose has found some success, he said that it’s been very difficult to get local bands in San Antonio to engage with his label, so most of the artists he works with are not from San Antonio. A lot of the artists he works with are from Tyler, Texas, and around the country -- he even has one artist from Sweden working with him.

Jose said that he goes to Imagine Books and Records a lot “they have a lot of local artists there, and it’s a great show, not too crowded,” but said that the last time he went there was six months ago, because it’s “a bit out of the way” in terms of distance. He’s been going to Imagine for a little under two years to attend concerts.

Jose said that although he doesn't know why, cassette tapes seem to be making a comeback -- for example, he said that the Jonas Brothers just got back together and are making cassettes of their music, which proves that there's "really a market for it now." Companies are also making cassette players again.

Jose said that he usually finds artists from the label online -- he started by emailing people on Bandcamp, but also some people submit emails, and if it "goes with the flow of the label" he'll pick it up. The predominant sound of Chord Organ Tapes is "bedroom pop, some jangle in there," and if people who play different genres like metal contact him, he typically declines because it doesn't fit in with the sound of the label.

Chord Organ Tapes is going on a temporary hiatus after his girlfriend lost her job (and with that "half of the house's income") so he is putting off any further releases, but he clarified that she found a new job and things have "calmed down," so he is talking to a few people about future releases. He said "For anyone who's thinking about running a little tape label, don't expect any income from it. I barely break even, and at times I don't even break even from a release. It's kind of just gotta be something you're really into."

I asked Jose why he's still pursuing his tape business even though it, as he said, isn't especially lucrative, and he said that it was for the benefit of musicians who "don't get the recognition they deserve." He said that he'll be able to "call it quits" with his business at the moment that an artist he works with can get picked up by a "legitimate label ... where they can actually pay them,

because I can't afford to pay anyone." The current deal that Chord Organ Tapes has worked out with the musicians on their label is that he'll make 35 copies of the tape, give them 10 to keep or sell at their live shows, and sell 25 -- any money from the 25 that he sells will "pretty much go back into the label."

Jose said that it's hard to get your name out there as a musician -- "If I release an album one day, there's 100 people releasing their own album the same day." As a label, Jose said that "there's only so far" he can promote an album on Instagram and Twitter before it just starts being seen and shared by the same circles of people. He spoke about the misconception that labels are comprised of a large team of people, when as far as smaller labels go, there's often "just this one guy" (as it is in COT's case), and that he has his own work and responsibilities to take care of, which can make promoting albums difficult. However, he keeps doing it because "if I can help one musician who really deserves it make it out there, that's pretty much worth it."

We talked for a bit about social media in regards to promotion -- Jose said that it was very important; between other forms of social media and Bandcamp, he said that it was crazy how far albums could travel in terms of their audience. He said that he's had people from New Zealand, South Korea, and Sweden purchase his cassettes, which was surprising to him because the shipping costs from the US to other countries are "not cheap." The reason fans go this far, according to Jose is that the musicians he works with make songs that "touch people." He recounted getting random emails from people saying "This album helped me so much," which he

forwards to the artists themselves, and said that this helps the artists keep going and making music.

I asked Jose about the last album that Chord Organ Tapes put out, *The West Hollywood Broken Hearts Club* by A.D. Wells, and he said that Wells messaged him “out of nowhere” and, although Jose said that he wasn’t going to release it, he listened to the album and found that it was “different from your typical Bandcamp project,” where everything sounds very similar. He listened to it a few times, and even though he was in a difficult situation financially, he decided to upload Wells’ album. He spoke of Wells positively, saying that his popularity as a musician was growing and he had developed a bit of a fanbase in California, so he was glad to be working with him.

### **Interview with Yole, bassist from Amygdala**

I interviewed Yole, bassist for the San Antonio punk band Amygdala, at a coffeeshop called Halcyon. They were there with their partner Sage, who also asked/answered questions about music at various parts of the interview.

Yole started out by saying that there can be a lot of competition in the SA music scene, so you “have to do things yourself,” -- they said that the DIY scene (involving house shows, “mom and pop” stores) forms in contrast to larger venues like Paper Tiger, who often “don’t take your band seriously.” Yole said that to them, the DIY music scene means helping people through difficult times. They said that San Antonio is pretty “notorious” for having things like food drives, warm

clothing drives, and overall “giving back to the community.” [i’m a bit uncertain whether they’re talking abt the music scene in general or the city more broadly? although not all DIY projects/environments are specifically music-related]

I asked Yole how they got started in the music scene, and they said that they were going to big rock concerts from 12 to 16 years old at “bigger venues” and then they discovered DIY through activist projects like Food Not Bombs. “The people involved with Food Not Bombs at the time were these local legends [of the band] Ecocide, with my friend Brian played in ... that was my first introduction to like, heavy music and DIY.” Yole said that what makes the DIY music environment unique is that “you get to create an environment where, like, you’re not going to accept any homophobia, or any kind of -phobia shit, and you can just create a safe environment for people where they can enjoy going to your shows, and that’s why DIY is important to me. Bigger venues don’t care about people’s safety -- usually they don’t.”

I asked Yole if they’ve ever performed at a bigger venue, and they said that they have, and while some experiences were OK, other times the experience is negative because the owner of the venues “just doesn’t care” and allows “dangerous [people]” who perpetuate bigotry or predatory behavior into the space. “That person has to do something terrible in [the owner’s] eyes in order for them to get kicked out, you know what I mean? People who own businesses don’t really care that much about the safety of others, because they want to make money.”

I asked Yole what venues they *do* play at as Amygdala, and they said Black Dot Studios “is a good venue” (although they qualified that they’re more of a general studio than a venue), and that Amygdala mainly books shows at somewhere like Black Dot Studios or The Movement Gallery, which Yole described as “radical spaces.”

At this point, Yole’s partner Sage (who was sitting next to me at the table in Halcyon) asked their own question, whether Yole had more fun playing at Black Dot versus Paper Tiger. Yole said that they preferred Black Dot because at Paper Tiger, the sounds were “weird” and the atmosphere was just “not that great of an environment.” Yole said they would rather be performing “on the floor, where people are.”

Yole said they’ve only played shows if they’re with friends who are on tour. I asked them about bands they enjoy and they listed names like Rats and Hated Bodies (they provided a more detailed list later via text), Yo Existo. They said that Amygdala doesn’t play shows too often, and mostly play outside of SA -- except when friends are coming through. Amygdala doesn’t have a solid drummer, so they’re just “hanging out.”

Yole asked for more clarification of what my project was about, and after I described it again, they said that “venues don’t ever pay out bands, which is like a terrible thing.” Sage mentioned a show where they made \$700 at Bang Bang Bar, but only because “so many people showed up.” Yole explained that Bang Bang Bar is a “queer space ... I don’t think we would ever have made as much at Paper Tiger. Maybe not even half of that.” Yole talked about money/finances, and

they said that they always prioritise the band that's touring in San Antonio. "If [the supporting bands] don't care about getting paid, all money goes to the touring band, because they need it, they're on the road, they need gas, a hotel room, maybe food, and whatnot."

Yole said that music spaces are created when "a group of people just want to see change in their music community," often because bigger venues charge too much money to book shows. "Paper Tiger maybe might charge 800 bucks to rent out maybe even the small room, which is outrageously too much. ... But then you've got spaces like La Botanica, it's a bar but they're all ages up until 12, so we can use that space, which is also a queer space. We always just like alternative spaces, because that's the only way a music community thrives. A music community really thrives when there's one venue that does it all, one venue to take one every show. That really sustains a music community in San Antonio." **[I know this is a big quote -- will paraphrase later?]**

They recounted the story of the music venue that they used to host for eight months, from February 2017 to August 2017, The Line In-Between. "*We did punk, metal, hardcore, rap, we did wrestling nights ... We were a radical space -- we were like anti-cop, fucking anti-racist, like everything. We had it literally laid out in front of our venue, like 'This [behavior] is not allowed,' you know? It was cool, but that was short-lived due to gentrification. Gentrification pushes a lot of our venues away.*" **[italicizing bc this is a good quote imo]** Yole described their former venue fondly, but said that these spaces would become less and less feasible in the future because of gentrification in San Antonio. Yole said that after their space declined, The

Movement Gallery was the next big space people in the alternative/DIY community frequented, but now “people are relying on bars” in the wake of TMG -- this was from August 2017 to around December 2018, Yole said.

They explained a bit of their frustration with “bar culture” where they said that alcohol could be problematic for audience members who might want to see a concert but for various reasons (being a minor, sober, etc.) can’t be around alcohol or bars. They said that if any of their audience members express discomfort around alcohol to them, that they’re willing to make it a sober show for the night.

Although The Movement Gallery was a good space for shows, Yole said, they got overbooked and the organization hosting TMG (Southwest Workers’ Union) couldn’t use the space anymore for their own activities, so the music aspect was shut down lately.

Yole spoke some more about what they appreciate about DIY spaces: “The thing about DIY is that a group will get together, we’ll go to a gallery or a Mexican restaurant, and [ask] ‘Hey, can we use your space for these shows?’ and a lot of the time they’ll say yes, because it creates a business for those people. It creates an economy in some ways, and DIY is just thinking outside of the box. If people give you a closed window, there’s usually bound to be another window that you can open, and you just have to be creative.” They named a number of spaces that they go to for concerts, such as Brick (which they often avoid because of parking costs, etc.), Paper Tiger (mentioned in the preceding paragraphs), Twin Sisters Cantina, etc.

According to Yole, bands make a lot of money via their merchandise that they sell at shows. They went back to talking about how touring bands are prioritised regarding who gets the money accrued at shows, but also said that it's the local bands that get the audience to show up. They also said that there are many currently thriving venues in San Antonio, including Twin Sisters Cantina and Black Dot Studios, but said that "people get old, people move, people leave," -- nothing is set in stone regarding which venues are popular/present in the city, basically.

We spoke some more about what Yole foresees for the future of the SA music scene, and Yole talked about a "pattern of exclusion" caused by gentrification that they think will cause more venues, like Twin Sisters and Presa House (also more of an arts studio than a music-only venue), to "get bought out" by investors close down in the future. Black Dot Studio is doing more shows now, according to Yole. Yole said that the owners of St. Mary's Strip own a "monopoly" that "keeps out" more marginalized musicians and venues, and furthermore, "if music's not a priority [within a space/scene] it becomes a scarcity."

"Years ago, from about 2009 to about 2014, there was literally about 8 to 9 house show venues ... there was just lots of houses to book at, but people get older, people move, people leave." Yole connected this to the landscape of San Antonio changing to be "more like New York" where people are always moving in and out.

“I alone could barely keep up 800 bucks rent for a music venue, and some of the people who run the venues on St. Mary’s Strip own a monopoly. It kind of just pushes out people who come from working-class environments or neighborhoods and want to book shows, you know? Places like Brick [at Blue Star] won’t be affected, but smaller spaces ... radical spaces, people’s spaces will get pushed out of the community as well.”

### Second Imagine Visit

When Alyssa and I walked into Imagine Books & Records to see the night’s lineup of bands at 8, the time when the show was starting as per the Instagram advertisement for it, (Planetary, Mary Jane and the Fondas, Honeybunny, Beachside Manor), the shop was fairly empty. I suspect I’ve written about this at least a bit in past field notes for Imagine<sup>9</sup>, but the physical environment of the shop deserves some attention: just under half of the physical space is the stage (slightly raised from the rest of the floor’s height) where the bands play, and the other half is a maze of bookshelves, with sections for “Fiction” and “Young Adult,” but also more esoteric fiction selections such as “Occult/Conspiracy/Paranormal” and “Counterculture” in the middle of the stacks, as well as an area in the middle for CDs, records, and cassette tapes. There are posters for artists like Janis Joplin displayed on the walls near the back, but also an assortment of portraits, largely from thrift stores and places like Goodwill, best described as “quirky, faintly avant-garde portraits of people.” Irma, Don’s wife and co-owner of Imagine Books + Records, was there at the cash register, and we spoke briefly about the origin of the venue’s artwork. Irma said that most of the pieces were just found, but that a few of them -- the

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<sup>9</sup> Although Alyssa’s field notes seem much more spatially-oriented than mine

“Imagine” artwork by the stage, the kaleidoscopic portrait of John Lennon, and a “Stranger Things” TV show-inspired portrait -- were either made for the store by patrons/customers, or donated by people who frequent the venue/bookstore. She also relayed a humorous anecdote about a series of portraits on the walls that were based on real people in San Antonio, and the time that a woman walked into the bookstore and saw a portrait of herself hanging above the bathroom door in the middle of one wall by the bookshelves.

When the first band, Planetary, was doing the sound check, there was this brief moment where Irma told them to not play any cover songs, out of fear that they might get sued. (? I’m going to call/email her and ask about this, because I want to know more.) Don introduced each band that played that night (the show started around 9 and lasted until about 11:30) and encouraged audience participation in the form of getting as close as possible to the stage where the bands were playing. The first band of the night, Planetary, was sort of “emo” in genre/aesthetic; bathed in green light (there were some strobes going on that added a visual element to the bands’ performances) they sang some intense songs about topics like addiction and suicide before a comparatively meager audience, when measured against the audience for Akira, the band that was playing in Imagine the evening that Aidan and I visited last time. Matt (one of the interns at Imagine) stood by the speakers, while the crowd that was assembled were mostly seated in the chairs by the bookshelves. While the crowd wasn’t big, there was a certain intensity with which Planetary played that made you forget that; the lead singer had floppy black hair and wore a My Chemical Romance shirt, which was somewhat fitting of the band’s aesthetic. As Planetary wrapped up their set (about 4 or 5 songs long), the other bands and their audience started to arrive. A girl with a denim jacket covered in glittery pins came in and

introduced herself to us as the lead singer of Mary Jane and the Fondas. This was also where I got another opportunity to interact with Don Hurd, owner of the store, who gave us an overview of the next three bands that would be playing: Mary Jane and the Fondas was “punk,” Honeybunny was “very punk,” and Beachside Manor would be the band that “cooled things down,” being less intense than the other two bands. Irma also called Alyssa and I over (after a brief period where we surveyed the store and checked out books -- I bought a copy of *Annihilation* by Jeff VanDerMeer, while Alyssa purchased one of many editions the bookstore had of *Dubliners* by James Joyce) to her computer at this point, and asked if we had seen the collection of images on Imagine’s Facebook page, of bands that they’re befriended over the past several years. We had not, and Irma took a while to guide us across the array of pictures on her Facebook page of young musicians smiling and hanging out at Imagine. She referred to one young woman with blue hair as one of Imagine’s “daughters,” reenforcing the concept of bands being part of the “Imagine family” (something she had said before the show.) Calliope (my roommate at Trinity, and the bassist for Beachside Manor) arrived just before the Mary Jane and the Fondas show along with her bandmates, and in the next break between performances she and her bandmates were attempting to lug their seemingly-enormous quantity of music equipment (including a horn section with saxophones and trumpets, and Calliope’s guitar and huge amp, which takes up a good portion of our dorm room) into the store. I took a break to sit and write down some jottings (the social awkwardness of being at a concert with a composition notebook in hand aside, Don’s instructions to move to the front made it hard to get jottings down while the show was going on -- the hazards of fieldwork, I suppose), and Irma handed me some peanut

butter crackers from the back of the store where there was water and coffee (I looked tired, I suppose.)

During all of the performances following Planetary, most people in the crowd came up to the front (as Don instructed us to) to listen to the performances; Brandon (the lead singer of Beachside Manor) was sort of headbanging and otherwise swaying to the music, and most of the audience did so as well, albeit in more subtle forms. While I'm not sure if I got the "punk" genre or aesthetic that Don was mentioning, the bands did help the store fulfill its reputation of being, as Don quoted as he introduced one of the bands, "the loudest bookstore in Texas."

As the bands wrapped up for the night, Don thanked everyone for attending, and the musicians for taking the time to perform. Irma was talking to Calliope, who was packing up her instruments at the side of the stage; I said goodbye to them and Alyssa and I left for the night, walking out into the parking lot around the strip mall-like structure where Imagine is located. The store to the left with us was filled with what looked like children's backpacks lining the floor, and further left was a Chinese restaurant that the Lyft driver who transported Aidan and I back from our previous excursion said was good. To the right of Imagine is what looks like a lingerie store, but for the most part the area around the bookstore/music venue was surprisingly empty. Five doors down is the larger building Irma mentioned where Imagine, now literally in the corner of the shopping area, was once held, but I didn't think of looking for it as we headed back towards Alyssa's car.

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Last fall, I was enrolled in Social Research Designs, an upper-division Anthropology course which requires students to go out into San Antonio and conduct research on a particular ethnographic subculture and/or social environment. My group chose to focus our research on the city's local musician scene -- exploring questions of aesthetic, precarity, and how community forms in the ecosystem of musicians, bands, and venues. Although each member of our group was working with the same topic in mind (and some places, informants, etcetera in common) we conducted our interviews largely separately, and our final papers reflected the different angles from which we each chose to approach our project. My project is specifically interested in the subculture of "indie"/"DIY" musicians in San Antonio, and the way that social connections form and are substantiated by the space of the music venue.

The first step in this project was establishing a web of contacts -- I started out by contacting bands and musicians who I had interacted with personally via social media, and then expanded my search by using the website Bandcamp to find lesser-known independent musicians in San Antonio. After my initial few interviews, this process became much easier, as the people who I spoke to for this project -- a group which included musicians, band members, venue owners and staff, audience members, and artist vendors -- would recommend other people and locations in a "snowball effect." However, I still used social media websites extensively to find concerts in my area that my group members and I could potentially attend. During every interview and/or event that I attended, I took detailed field notes. Later, I went back and "encoded" my notes to signify where concepts such as relationality and narrative showed up within what I had seen and heard.

My experiences interviewing participants in the independent/DIY music scene, as well as attending a number of concerts held at different venues, oriented me towards the research materials that I used for the literature review portion of my paper. As my paper explores how community is formed among disparate bands and venues amidst conditions of precarity (such as gentrification in San Antonio, which my informants identified as a problem that has caused many music venues to close), my advisor recommended reading chapters of Clara Han's "Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile" (2012) early on in the project. While the subjects of our ethnographic research are vastly different, reading Han's book helped me to ground my work within the theme of how social connections are formed within subcultural precarity.

After most of the fieldwork component of my project was complete, I scoured various academic databases like JSTOR, the Coates Library Catalog, and Google Scholar to I relied on sources that spoke of precarity in general (such as Clara Han, Judith Butler) as well as studies by authors like Steven Threadgold, David Chafe, and Lisa Kaida that expanded on what this term might mean in the concept of musicianship. I was also very interested in "deep-dive"

ethnographies that focus on musical subcultures or scenes in a particular city; the books "Performing Punk" (2015) by Erik Hannertz and "Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making" (2001) by Sara Cohen helped orient me in this direction, as well as various articles that anthropologist David Verbuč has written about DIY "house show" concert culture. I hope that my research reflects my interests in local music, community, and how these two concepts come together in San Antonio -- as well as the writings of the scholars who I cite in my bibliography.