This is the Place:
Cost, Location, and Music Venues in Toronto

In a recent insight we looked at the cost of monthly rehearsal spaces for musicians in the City of Toronto. The purpose was to highlight issues of affordability and space for independent musicians in the city. Our study found a total of 13 rehearsal studios across the Greater Toronto Area that offered monthly leases. Not surprisingly, our findings showed that the price of monthly rehearsal spaces for musicians in the central city were the most costly.

If you’re a musician you may live in Toronto’s core, but you may not necessarily rehearse and prepare for shows in the same space. This is due to a sonic requirement for space. Loud volume will need to be tolerated by landlords, tenants, and the building’s physical structure. In our previous study we found that these particular space requirements were not appropriate for residential and most commercial spaces. We also found that rehearsal studio businesses exist all over Toronto catering to these special requirements. While commercial space is plentiful in the City of Toronto, sound proofing and acoustic treatment can get quite costly and also requires technical know-how often beyond the capabilities of the average person.

Although rehearsal spaces have always been important for musicians, today the need for space has become an even greater necessity. In the past live performances were thought of as promotional tools for album sales. Therefore, the more a musical group performed, the better their album would sell in stores. However, in the last 10 years the sale of recorded music has diminished greatly due online file sharing, and changing consumer tastes have shifted the music industry business model with more emphasis on live performance revenue. For instance, in 2009 the value of live music ($19.8 billion) surpassed the value of recorded music globally ($17 billion) (Ontario Media Development Corporation 2011). In Ontario, the changing nature of the music industry has also been reflected on a local level. A recent study by our Rotman colleague Professor Doug Hyatt found that in 2008, 3 percent of independent musician’s income came from the sale of music, while 48 percent came from the revenue of their live performances.

To explore the relationship between rehearsal space, cost, and work opportunity for musicians, we mapped Toronto’s live music venues and overlaid them with the cost and location of rehearsal studios, and transit opportunities in the City of Toronto. Using 2010 Canadian Business Data collected from Pitney Bowes, this was crossed referenced with Yellow pages and Now Magazine directories, which resulted in a total of 152 live music venues for the City of Toronto. Buffers of 2 kilometres were placed around rehearsal studios to visually demonstrate their proximity to music venues.
Our map indicates that centrally located rehearsal studios are closest to the largest number of music venues in the city, are best served by public transit, and are the most costly to rent. In fact, 69 percent of venues in Toronto are within 2 kilometres of monthly rehearsal spaces. The single most costly studio (darkest purple circle), located at Bathurst and Adelaide Street, is located within 2 Kilometres of the most music venues of all other rehearsal studios surveyed.

Boasting the most live music venues in all of Canada, and as Canada’s largest metropolitan economy, musicians continue to gravitate towards Toronto’s thick labour markets for both music-related work opportunity, and alternative forms of employment. Given that live music now makes up the majority of income for independent musicians, having a centrally located studio comes at a great economic advantage for musicians in Toronto.

Proximity is also valued for transit opportunities. While it seems unconventional for musicians to be travelling to gigs on public transit, this might depend on the type of musician. For instance, classical guitar players could easily travel to their performances on transit while a 5 piece rock group may not get around so easily. On the other hand, taking a taxi to gigs from a nearby rehearsal studio also saves in expenses. Given their limited income, owning or renting cars, paying insurance, and paying for gas are all additional costs independent musicians playing in a musical group would have to incur if travelling long distances to perform. In addition, musicians may not necessarily rehearse at their place of residence due to noise restrictions and thus, strong public transit also aids musicians in getting to their rehearsals faster and cheaper from home.
Part of the ongoing discussion at the City of Toronto is how to make better use of the space the city has available. There is also a drive by the Economic Development and Culture Division to better understand the employment needs and spatial requirements of musicians. Although noise requirements present challenges in finding space in Toronto’s core, clearly proximity matters for work and transit opportunities. While organizations like Artscape offer affordable space, there is a lack of musicians within these buildings. As the City of Toronto manages its budget crisis and also considers the re-use of space across the city, planning effectively for the future will enable Toronto to continue to attract musicians and retain talent.

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