

Live music network in Larnaca, Cyprus: from musicians to audience and back (to the venue) again

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Abstract

This article discusses the development of a live music network in Larnaca, Cyprus. It is the result of a 9 month field research project centred on a specific music venue and it is based on interviews with members of four local prominent rock bands and the venue manager. These interviews were further informed by several discussions with numerous audience members, the result of the author's participatory involvement in this network. The emphasis of the discussion lies in the experiences of the performers and their views concerning the growth of this live music network, which in itself is an indicator of the dynamic relationship between underground musical tastes and the presence of mainstream currents in the city. The purpose of this research is to highlight that the development and preservation of such live music networks depend on various factors and to argue that the study of transformations of a locality's musical life can lead to sociological readings regarding its music-related past and present.

Somewhere in a Mediterranean city the venue has opened its doors. The stage is set and the audience is filling the place, in anticipation for the music to begin. The local band, well established in the city by now, is backstage, eager to perform for another evening before an audience that has increasingly embraced and supported it. The manager-owner of the venue is standing in the corner smiling, remembering the first time this local band was given the opportunity to climb onto the specific stage, surrounded by a degree of scepticism and mistrust. The lights are dimmed, the audience applauds and the spotlight is now on the musicians. It is May 2017.

This is not a one-time occurrence in Larnaca – visit Savino Live on a regular weekend night and the chances are that you will catch a local band playing. Indeed, during the past few years the city has developed its own established array of local bands and an audience attuned to live music, and there is no doubt that Savino Live has been the nurturing home for both. This paper aims to assess the processes by which this came to be the case, processes that are seen to be the result of a three-fold network consisting of local bands that deal with underground rock-influenced musical styles, the specific music venue that has become part of a local 'mainstream' and local audiences that attend live performances on a regular basis. The main research and data collection for this article were conducted between 2014 and 2015, during a time when this network was still being formed.

Nonetheless, a continuous and more intensive participation in the processes until today has served to confirm and extend many of the findings of the initial observation.

The discussion focusses on the experiences of members of four Larnaca-based bands¹ who seem to have found a 'home' in this specific live venue. It is important that their views were collected during a period when the outcome of the network was less clear. In this way, it seems that access was given at the time of formation and what has been said by the musicians is not a nostalgic recollection of the processes that led to where they now stand. The local performers are regarded in this paper as the intermediaries between the venue and the audiences and, from this position, their experiences and opinions provide a significant platform from which to assess the state of the music creativity of the city, the input of the venue in allowing for its growth and the extent to which the increase in numbers of audience numbers affected and continues to affect the musical outcome. It can be said that this paper is in part an assessment of the network from within. The notion of network used here takes another dimension, arising from the fact that, owing to the small size of the city, the majority of the participants involved (musicians, audiences and people who are affiliated with the venue) know each other personally, or are acquaintances in one way or another, and it is often the case that each member of the audience personally knows at least one of the performing musicians.

This article aims to contribute to the existing literature not solely by presenting the music developments in a musically 'uncharted' territory such as Larnaca, but also by suggesting that there is still an ever-present relevance in such studies of music, space and participating musicians, since through these one can observe larger processes that take place within a locality during times of musical transformation. It is specifically emphasised that this local network is regarded as cosmopolitan since conscious efforts are made by the participating musicians, as well as the core audience members, to distance themselves from the mainstream side of music creation, performance and consumption that is mostly popular in the city.²

Concepts and contexts

It is hard to say which of the three elements – venue, musicians or audience – has been the spark that ignited this network, but its conceptualisation might help in shedding some light. For one, it could be viewed from the prism of 'music scenes'. Prevalent in relevant studies since the early 1990s, the concept of music scenes has been widely looked at and, naturally, it has raised a certain degree of debate, to

¹ The actual names of the musicians interviewed are not the ones appearing in this article. A substitute name has been created for all. In addition, the bands are presented as acronyms rather than by their full names. This decision came in compliance with the ethical requirements during the process of research, following agreements with all of the participants. The owner of Savino Live was offered anonymity, but subsequently expressed a preference for the venue to be named.

² We refer to a network of an 'underground' nature, where music that is non-Greek-mainstream is featured. Other bands in the city are active, playing more mainstream and commercial music, whereas there are different networks that revolve around the genres of *entechno* and *modern laïká* that have in themselves large followings in Larnaca and Cyprus more generally. The rise of a network that promotes and supports performances of other musical styles is the main transformation of the musical life of the city that has sparked the research interest in this issue.

an extent that its usage seems to be fraught with ambivalence. Whereas Straw in his widely quoted account described music scene as ‘that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilisation’ (Straw 1991, p. 372), other perspectives often seem to downplay the stylistic pluralism that might exist within a scene. Bennett, for example, suggests that a music scene normally carries the repercussions of a single music style that thrives or has originated at a specific locality (Bennett 2004; Bennett and Peterson 2004). O’Connor also supports notions of monophasic music scenes in his almost polemic view that a scene like the one he focuses on (punk) is distinctly style-based. Although accepting that no ‘self-contained’ musical culture can exist, he further argues that this does not mean that the ‘theory of hybrids and postmodern flows is correct either’ (O’Connor 2002, p. 232). Aligned with Straw’s description, I consider the network presented here as a music scene, in the sense of a specific space where multiple music practices can be articulated (Straw 1991, 2001).

Although numerous discussions of scenes are situated in Western contexts, there are important contributions that deal with other areas of the world, such as Císař and Koubek’s study in Brno, Czech Republic, which gives a thorough account of the development of the hardcore punk music scene in the area. Despite again focusing on a single music style, they are careful to highlight the significance of space, whether this is social, geographic or virtual. They write: ‘differences in the local environment and geographical specificities can significantly influence the final form of the relations within the scene and between the scene and its surroundings’ (Císař and Koubek 2012, p. 5). Giorgis, writing about the development of the independent ‘authorial music scene’ in Porto Alegre, points to the significance of the social networks in contributing to the potential of the authorial bands to grow further and therefore to enable the possibility for the establishment of an authorial music scene in Porto Alegre (Giorgis 2016).

A perspective on music scenes that can be applicable in the assessment of the network that is conducted here is one put forth by Sá (2013) and cited in Mendívil and Espinosa (2016a), which emphasises the fact that the ‘spaces’ of musical practice can create circuits of people. An important statement is that ‘scenes do not only appropriate spaces belonging to the city, but ones that they themselves shape as well’ (Sá 2013 as cited by Mendívil and Espinosa 2016b, p. 14). In Tironi’s (2010, p. 206) words: ‘music scenes would emerge as networks in which spatialities and practices, localities and its scene’s members, would mutually enact each other in specific and situated practices’.

Studies of music in relation to locality exist in abundance, travelling to countless destinations (Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1991; Grazian 2004; Spring 2004; Tironi 2012 to name but a few). A substantial number of these studies examine the contribution of specific venues in the development of local music (Burke and Schmidt 2009; Krenske and McKay 2000; Gallan 2012), while not a few have placed emphasis on the experiences and contribution of the participating performers (Groce 1989; Groce and Cooper 1990; Kubacki 2008; Hracs *et al.* 2011). Such studies are often situated in Anglo-American contexts, most of which are on the ‘exporting’ side of music. Despite the fact that Cyprus is by no means to be seen through the same lens, many ideas presented by the above-mentioned scholars have been useful in the conceptualisation of the processes described here, not least by providing insights on how global music influences find their voice in this local venue.

The dynamic relationship between the global and the local is an issue that has been discussed extensively by scholars of popular music, ethnomusicology and cultural geography (Connell and Gibson 2003; Taylor 1997; Stokes 2004; Regev 1992, 1997, 2007; Negus 1993, 1996; Mitchell 1996). More often than not, the tension between the local and the global has been seen through the prism of globalisation, mainly reflecting the power of the Anglo-American centre to permeate, affect and influence local cultures, often implying a one-way flow of information from the centre to the rest of the world. Whereas this might have been applicable in the past, there is growing agreement that this flow of information (that had never truly been one-way) is now both multi-dimensional and multi-directional. There seems to be a turn away from concepts of globalisation and hegemony and an acknowledgement of the power of local actors to make decisions. Indeed, the prevalence of 'globalisation' is now firmly giving way to the idea of 'cosmopolitanism', which, in Stokes's (2007, p. 6) words, 'restores human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think of music as a process in the making of "worlds", rather than a passive reaction to global systems'. One can speak about access to a pool of information that is not one's own and not of certain specific others, and the bringing together of various sources to form one new being. This, of course, might reflect changes in technology and communication that allow for a constant flow of information from and toward various directions and signify a by definition local-cosmopolitan state for anyone who has internet and a device to access it, as well as open borders, assuming that the government is respectful of the freedom of information exchange. Cyprus, both socially and politically, is fortunately positioned in that realm.

Furthermore, the appearance of more and more studies that bring together locality and popular music reflects the ever-present need to understand these issues disengaged from the Western core. Such a tendency is reflected in the publication of the Routledge Global Music Series, a series of books devoted to various parts of the world. *Made in Latin America* proved especially useful for this paper, a volume that discusses the state of Latin American popular music by exploring the topic of music scenes and bringing this into the historical and musical context of Latin America, covering a spectrum of different times and locations (Mendivil and Espinosa 2016a). The two volumes of *Keep it Simple, Make it Fast* also provide valuable insights concerning the development of underground music scenes in different locations in the world by the use of various perspectives, and have both been extensively used for the purposes of this research, often indirectly in guiding many of the initial ideas and hovering concepts (Guerra and Moreira 2015, 2016).

Larnaca is the third biggest city of Cyprus, with population of approximately 85,000. Located at the southeast coast of the island and home of the biggest international airport, it is a city that thrives in tourism, especially during summer. Although this would naturally make one wonder whether the music developments described here are influenced by the tourists that visit Cyprus, it needs to be clarified that Savino Live is a winter venue that closes during the summer months (from the end of May to the end of August), leaving minimum time for tourists to 'intervene' with the changes and, even more importantly, leaving the venue unburdened from decision-making focussed on the tourists' musical tastes. It would be more appropriate to suggest that the external factor that influences these music developments relates to the omnipresence of cyberspace and the possibility of accessing musics from all over the world within seconds, combined with the perpetual need of the local musicians to stay up-to-date with obscure music styles in order to defend

their 'underground' status. My research shows first that the bands aim for songs that are not widely known, songs from alternative rock, stoner rock, grunge and nu-metal styles (to name but a few) but with English lyrics, and that secondly, they then 'influence' each other and the audience with their music orientation. This behaviour brings us to Brown *et al.*'s (2000) view that certain localities can give birth to clusters, 'localized networks', where 'the first real interface between the flow of global musics, images, ideas, styles become consumed, absorbed, embedded, repackaged, rejected, reformed, reconstituted'. They go on: '[i]t is here that the local music scenes are formed around a sense that they could do better, or as good, or at least do *something*. Local scenes, even the most basic, form a supportive, or inspirational context for this' (Brown *et al.* 2000, p. 447, emphasis in the original).

The importance of venues for the development of such clusters (or networks for that matter) has not been ignored (Burke and Schmidt 2009; Krenske and McKay 2000; Gallan 2012; Jun'ichi 2014). Savino Live, with a capacity of 300, has played the role of the hub in which the network described has taken flesh, in a way resembling Becker's 'art worlds' (Becker 1984). Even more relevant is Connell and Gibson's notion of 'cultural space', a space made distinct from the broader social space of a city by the alliances between the individuals involved in the music-related network: musicians, audiences and the music industry (Connell and Gibson 2003). Significantly, such a cultural space needs to be positioned in a 'locality', if not to be attributed a fixed spatiality. '[C]ultural innovation is always anchored in and propelled by specific spatial hubs [...] that order that network around a centripetal focal point and an institutional, political or social agenda' (Tironi 2010, pp. 195–6).

The role of the venue as a scene also grants the participants a form of expression freed from the conventions of the wider locality. As Jang (2011, p. 9) writes, 'Straw contends that scenes, offering forms of belonging that do not require pre-modern nostalgia, function as sites of urban community, both intimate and cosmopolitan'. A particular emphasis should be given to the 'cosmopolitan', since within the network discussed here the prominent music styles are rooted in Anglo-American rock-based music styles, although borrowed from various locations of the world and all of them with English lyrics. Rather than an effort to accentuate locality, it revolves around the celebration of being able to know, follow, be influenced by and further express idioms that are neither ours nor theirs. This particularity appears in the selection of songs that are not well known, and the perpetual effort to remain far removed from what is considered 'mainstream'³ music in the city. These sounds are circulated

³ We refer to what is mainstream in the terrain of live music consumption. For the past decades, the mainstream in these terms has been focussed in two basic genres. First, is *entechno*, which arose in the 1950s from *rebetiko*'s Westernisation and was initially based on the combination of classical music with Greek folk music elements and lyrics from Greek notable poets. From the following decade onwards this genre started gradually coming closer to the mainstream. In Larnaca, and Cyprus more generally, *entechno* became the genre with which the majority of the performing musicians started their performing careers, mostly in acoustic settings and within *boites* and *café/bars*. This music style does not allow for much originality or significant changes to the original songs and therefore musicians and audiences share a convention of what is expected to be presented. This is a very mainstream live music setting in Cyprus, despite *entechno*'s affiliation with art music (*entechno* is literally translated as art song). *Modern laïká* (or *bouzoukia*) which, along with pop, has been Greece's mainstream music for the past decades, emerged in the 1980s. It is connected with dance floor venues and displays instrumental virtuosity with audience entertainment as its main features. *Modern laïká* programmes are not seen as music concerts but as a means for the audience to be entertained.

between musicians and audiences within a specific host venue, in which they persist: echoing, bringing in new audiences and giving birth to new creations.

Methodology, complexities and limitations

As mentioned above, the topic is explored mainly by discussing local musicians' views and experiences. For such an approach interviews are acknowledged as the most appropriate method for gathering information. After a period of observation and involvement in this network, it was easy to identify the musicians to interview: members of four locally based bands (*OSB*, *LM*, *SA* and *TT*) that had a leading role in this network during the time of observation. At the time of interview the bands had been active for one and a half years, four years, seven months and one year, respectively (most of them started in different formations and with different musical orientations; therefore their 'age' here is indicative). All four bands were keen to participate in the project. Some bands appeared in the interviews in their entirety, while others chose members to act as 'representatives' of the whole. Nonetheless, all members were kept informed about the project and the processes.

The interviews were semi-structured and the open-ended questions gave enough space to the interviewees to elaborate on issues regarding their self-awareness, their relationship with other bands and their relationship with the audience and the venue; to comment on more general sociological issues concerning the audience, music education (not necessarily school-based), and the societal nexus that underpins the development of the live music network discussed here; and to speak about the state of the musical life of the city more generally. In a way, one could say that I tried to understand the 'participants' lived experience from their own position – to step inside their shoes, as it were', as put by King and Horrocks (2010, p. 142). However, since at the setting of an interview some responses can be mediated, all the information received was cross-referenced with my personal observations and an additional interview with the venue manager, as well as the countless informal conversations I had with audience members and other individuals during my personal involvement in the network. It should be clarified at this point that, since the main point of interest here is the *content* of information rather than the *language* used by the interviewees to describe it, neither full transcriptions nor extensive quotations will appear in this text: rather, quotations will appear only to provide emphasis on important aspects of the discussion. It should also be stated that all interviews were conducted in Greek, and therefore the quotations that do appear in this text are my translations of the original conversations. Following Neuman's suggestion about the approach of a field researcher, I attempted 'to get inside the meaning system of members and then return to an outside or research viewpoint. To do this, the researcher switches perspectives and looks at the setting for multiple points of view simultaneously' (Neuman 2007, p. 278).

Here it is worth pointing out the particularity of my personal involvement. Issues of trust and suspicion on the part of the interviewees were largely absent owing to the fact that the majority of the performers are people who I personally know or have common acquaintances with, as Larnaca is my hometown, the place where I grew up and started making music. This fact might seem to present a certain complexity regarding the research findings, since, as suggested by Neuman, 'field research in familiar surroundings is difficult because of a tendency to be blinded

by the familiar' (Neuman 2007, p. 284). However, I consider this more of an opportunity than a threat in this case owing to my absence from Cyprus for over a decade, which allowed me to be able to identify more clearly the transformation of the musical life of the city upon my return. Of course, I had always been aware of the changing situation through social media updates and conversations with friends, but it was only when I could experience these processes first hand that I could see the extent to which this transformation can represent a milestone for the music history of the city.

The emphasis on the musicians' views and experiences serves to shed light on important issues concerning the lead local musicians' decision-making when it comes to performances, and how this is informed by considerations of the audience and the venue. Put otherwise, to hear their own views of audience, venue, themselves and each other, and cross-reference these with observations of the network interactions and the actual musical result, can open up new areas of understanding of the processes that underlie the musicians' decision-making as these are defined by their social awareness, the subtle demands of the audience and the venue's politics. It is my argument that awareness of their surroundings (social, economic and musical) heavily influences decisions regarding their music-making (whether these are to comply with or to oppose the norm), and therefore plays a significant role in the formation of what is currently the major live music outlet of Larnaca.⁴

We are all in this together: the bands about themselves and each other

The four bands interviewed for the purposes of this research are of different, yet intersecting, music orientations. They were asked to describe their musical styles themselves, since to assess these as listeners would only serve to withhold important information concerning the self-awareness of the bands and how they consider themselves to differ musically from one another. As expected, the responses were not entirely straightforward. *OSB* used labels such as 'hard rock', 'riff rock', 'energy' with a 'punk attitude', while they classified themselves as underground owing to their song choices (they said that, while they play material from well-known bands like *AC/DC*, they are more likely to play songs that have never become as popular). *SA*, on the other hand, spoke of aesthetics and atmosphere and described their music as 'stripped down raw rock 'n'roll' with 'sensual anger'. *TT* said that they are a pop-rock band, with emphasis on both elements and the occasional additions of funk and R'n'B elements. They acknowledged that their sound is 'cleaner' than that of their local counterparts and described themselves as a 'pop band with a rock attitude', and 'rocky pop'. Interestingly, in the process of describing their styles, the band members did not always agree in full when speaking in strictly musical terms, some emphasising a different music genre as the band's main influence.

⁴ A focus on the audience would serve to complement and reflect on the contribution of the musicians, since the audience in these terms does not have such personal investment, or an obviously active participation, in the musical output. On a different note, a focus on the venue would have to include issues such as the interest in the generation of revenue and other relevant politics, and would give the discussion a wider scope since the specific venue does not exclusively host local bands, but stages performances from national and international musicians, staging musical styles that range from jazz to *entechno* and from underground to mainstream.

Nonetheless, members of each band came to an immediate agreement when their main reference points were attitude and aesthetics.

The uncertainty with regards to their music self-definition seems to relate to the status of most as cover bands. Gregory (*SA*) said that 'since we are still a cover band you cannot really define what it is that we play'. This view is further strengthened by the fact that *LM*, the only band in our sample who relied more on their original material at the time of the interview, were more confident in speaking in clearer terms about musical styles. They referred to genres such as alternative rock, 1990s grunge, psychedelic and stoner rock as being the elements that, in combination, influence their work.

Despite their apparent similarities the bands do differ in musical style, approach, aesthetics and attitude, something that was also confirmed by numerous audience members. This is a significant point, since it allows one to see that Savino Live is musically versatile, as well as that the local audience has an apparent flexibility, points that will be discussed further later. At the same time, the fact that local musicians relied mainly on covers shows that the act of performing was more important than the creation of new music at the time of the interviews. Nevertheless, the production of originals was found in the plans of all local bands (apart from *TT* which is the only band in my sample that was formed deliberately in order to be a cover band). It would therefore be safe to suggest that the transition from covering to song-writing is representative of a more general transition in the approach of the local musicians, something that might be connected with the fact that bands influence one another, although this has not been outspokenly stated during the interviews. This hypothesis calls for a further attention on the relationship between the bands themselves.

To begin with, it is a fact that all the musicians interviewed know each other personally and are knowledgeable of each other's work. Depending on their individual music preferences and their time availability (most of them have other occupations as well), some will attend every gig, whereas others will be more selective. However, they remain updated about each other's work, whether they attend gigs or not. This is due to the small size of Larnaca that allows for the greatest effect of word of mouth, as well as the fact that they are all currently affiliated with one specific venue. At the same time, it should not pass unnoticed that the local bands themselves operate as a network within the said network. They are interconnected, and members of one band often collaborate with members of the others. Sometimes the connection is not readily visible, and one should look to past collaborations between musicians to see that, in one way or another, they have recycled between them before reaching their current formations. During the time of my participation in the field, collaborations existed both performance-wise (singers, as well as instrumentalists, appeared as guests in other bands' gigs) and otherwise (e.g. the lead singer of *SA* designs the posters for *LM*). However, the affiliation between bands or even individual musicians does not always extend to collaborations, as they do not all share the same approach and aesthetics. Ken (*TT*) has summed it up as such:

So we have and have had collaborations. We do know each other. Of course you cannot have an everyday communication, be in perfect terms with every single one, and it does not mean that just because you collaborated once with someone something has really happened, but I believe that we all respect each other and I think that ... I am not sure ... but I don't think that there are bad thoughts between the bands.

Naturally, at some point during the interviews the issue of 'competition' was raised. Whereas it was often sensed that matters relevant to competition hovered over the discussions, the musicians were reluctant to speak about it openly, unless maybe in order to reject it. Although most of them said that they do not compete with each other, some admitted that 'up to a point this is competitive' (Tim, SA). It has also been said that 'because the number of bands has increased and the stage remains one it is more a matter of support now rather than of competition, whereas it had been more competitive at an earlier stage' (Sia, TT). The paradox between collaboration and competition is not exclusive in Larnaca. Gerstin, writing about the Martinican *bélé* scene, has suggested that '[p]erformers need to co-operate, as well as compete, especially in small, face-to-face musical networks' (Gerstin 1998, p. 408). Indeed, competition exists even in everyday conversations around the scene but, by and large, bands remain supportive of one another. The hesitancy of the musicians to speak openly about competition seems to stem from their need to avoid being associated with the negative connotations of the word. Indeed, they cannot speak freely of competition, despite the fact that they share the same stage and largely play for the same audiences, since they all know each other personally as actors of the same social network. Therefore, any conscious competition is restricted, something further strengthened by the many collaborations between them.

During my personal participation in the field, I encountered both elements of concealed competition, as well as support. Anthony (SA) has given a reconciled take on the idea of healthy competition between the bands, albeit by speaking in terms of audience demand. He stated that:

The audience is more demanding now. They attend more live performances. It's not like 'this is the one who plays, so this is what we are going to hear'. There are many bands who play now and in order for one to be ahead, to have an audience and to be heard, they need to be good [...] Every time I go to see a band playing ... like, the one before the last one I saw was *LM* and I left literally amazed, and the last one was *BO* (a different band) from where I left again amazed. So you cannot stay behind. You cannot be relaxed like 'oh, well, we are going to play, OK'.

Here we are given a clearer view of the kind of competition that exists in this network, one that amounts to a will for self-improvement with respect both for the audience (more educated and demanding) and for the venue (we share the same stage so we all ought to be at least equally good). However, it is important that such a statement was made by a performer while speaking about a different topic and not in terms of competition as such. This shows that the musicians are more likely not to be consciously experiencing a sense of competition, or, if so, they do not seem comfortable to admit it.

If musicians became uncomfortable when asked to speak about competition, they became similarly distressed when asked to position themselves in the spectrum of the musical life of the city. Here, the bands tried to position themselves by using various, largely differing, criteria. *OSB* spoke in terms of their stage performances and how they see themselves as non-professionals who put on professional shows, despite the fact that they do not appear regularly. *LM* spoke in musical terms, stating that they consider themselves important owing to their high musical standards and their commitment to original music creation. *SA*, on the other hand, struggled to define their position. As Tim (*SA*) put it: 'this is a hard one. We are definitely not in the centre. We do not try to be in the centre. But we do not make conscious efforts

to be underground. We do not play for a small audience that head bangs'. Tim's scepticism is significant here, since he tries to position the band in relation to the audiences they play for, despite the fact that themselves and *TT* are the only bands in our sample that made regular monthly appearances at the venue during the time of my participant observation. Therefore, the regularity of appearances is not considered definitive for a band's self-evaluation (something that is also confirmed by *TT* as seen below). *TT* use an entirely different perspective when answering that question, focusing on their own mentality, whereas they were the only ones to refer to other bands as well. They described Larnaca live music as a 'pie' from which they claimed one piece, but they specified that they were only concerned for the section of that pie that was held for 'cover bands' (as stated above, *TT* showed no interest in producing their own material). Although one can say that to ask the bands to position themselves in the musical spectrum of the city had been unimportant and disorienting, from my point of view, not only does such a request help in establishing how each band relates to other bands, the venue and the audience, but it can also allude to the ways in which each considers itself to have influenced the development of the local music life as well. A similar point is made by Kruse, who wrote that: 'Situating oneself within that kind of context is and was a way of asserting the importance of one's position in scene history' (Kruse 2010, p. 628).

In this section I reviewed the bands' status, their inter-relationship and the position each band considers itself to hold in the spectrum of live music in Larnaca. What has not been emphasised enough is that all musicians have agreed that in Larnaca, up to the point of the interviews, there existed only one proper venue that could properly accommodate their performances. This venue, according not only to the musicians, but to all participants, holds a central role in the development and sustenance of the live music network discussed here.

Where it all takes place: speaking of the venue

The significance of the venue for the development of the live music network is not surprising; such affairs do need a 'stage', a 'home' or even a 'hub' in order to grow. Frith has described this connection as such:

Read the history of any local scene in the UK and you will come across a paean of nostalgic praise to a now defunct venue, a place which for all its seediness (the reason it is now defunct) is nonetheless seen as *essential* to a city's musical soul. (Frith 2007, p. 9 emphasis in the original)

Despite the fact that Savino Live is not located in any city in the UK, does not belong in the past and therefore any sentiments of nostalgia are precluded, it is fully functional and lacks seediness, Frith's words still bear a relevance for the assessment of the network discussed here. It has been touched upon before, and it is now going to be discussed in detail: that should this network be deprived of its venue, then nothing would exist. And the musicians were not shy in admitting this.

Savino Live opened in 2010 as the adjunct of a rock bar (Savino Rock Bar) that was considered in the past to be the meeting point of the underground and rock personalities of the city – hence its earlier unpopularity with larger segments of the public. The rock bar was in itself the place where most of the local musicians hung out, grew up, exchanged music knowledge, and occasionally played acoustic live gigs.

The live music venue opened out of the owners' love for music. The first act to play there was a popular rock cover band from a different city, which, according to the manager of the venue, has been an influence for various local bands. Then the venue faced difficulties in filling up the dates owing to a lack of music on offer. As the manager told me, 'we ended up paying the bands to play with hardly any people'. In time, a mainstream local band became the venue's house band for two years, playing weekly events that attracted large audiences. This helped the venue accumulate money that could support the staging of newer and lesser known acts that started appearing in the city. The venue and the house band stopped their collaboration and gradually the network described here started growing. The venue now thrives with events. During the time of my research and up to the time of writing the number of performances per week range from two to five according to the season, the musicians appearing vary between local, national and international, new and established, and the musical styles presented are broadly diverse.

Nonetheless, the local bands remain a prominent presence in the venue which has itself been their nurturing place. Indeed, one of the most notable contributions that Savino Live made for the development of the network is that it trusted local bands, hardly heard of before, allowing them to appear on its stage. It would be utopian to suggest that this action had not been profit-orientated to a point: in such a small city where 'who you know' matters and word of mouth spreads fast, local musicians attract their networks of people (relatives and friends) as supportive audiences, some of whom would not have attended similar underground music events otherwise. Nevertheless, this opportunity allowed local musicians to develop their work, increase their own musical standards and further explore their performing abilities. The performers had indeed been exposed to wider audiences, owing to the fact that the venue, despite turning to more underground music, had at the same time gradually become more popular with local patrons, now being considered even a mainstream place for socialisation, or in some local people's words, a 'hotspot'.

It needs to be noted at this point that Larnaca never lacked musicality. The musicians were in agreement in this, but at the same time they all supported the idea that music creativity, when it concerned styles of music other than the 'usual suspects' for Cyprus (*modern laïká*, *entechno* and the mainstream rock covers), was not able to grow owing to the fact that it rarely found an outlet. In this sense, they all acknowledged the venue's contribution to the musical life of the city, while, at the same time, they were aware that at the moment the venue is a monopoly in these terms. Chris (*OSB*) stated: 'I believe that we have a lot of music going on. But we do not have the venues [to support this] in Larnaca. It is just Savino'. Ken (*TT*) was more passionate in claiming that 'our city offers nothing! The musicians of our city, however, offer a lot [...] It is the infrastructure [that we lack]! It cannot be *just* Savino Live'.

One aspect of the venue that was highlighted by all musicians is that it is a proper music venue: it has the equipment, a house sound engineer and a fully active event manager. The musicians emphasised that they are treated well by the venue owners and staff, feeling respected as performers. In terms of financial arrangements, the venue provides the stage, the equipment, the sound-engineer and the musicians' drinks without any cost for the bands. The money from the tickets and the band merchandise sold go to the band, whereas the revenue from drink consumption stays

with the venue. Speaking about their treatment by Savino Live, musicians often compared it with other venues outside of the city. Mathew (*LM*) said:

We played out of Larnaca a few times. Of course, to be honest, and I don't [say this to] advertise, Savino is the most proper music venue, in the sense of how they treat us, and what they offer – the sound engineer, the lights, the equipment. In Nicosia, for example, they approach you [the venue owners] as ... erm ... as if you owe them money or something [...].

Anthony (*SA*) said:

Savino Live is actually the only venue that will not ask you to prepay money for playing. A venue in Nicosia requires 1200 [euros] in advance to allow you perform. Savino is different. Yes, they care about money, but because the whole family [of the owner] appreciate good music they are very supportive of new bands.

In the above quotation, Anthony acknowledges the status of the venue as business, but he also highlights the owners' love for music, which he considers as one of the reasons why the bands are not being openly exploited. At this point we can see the importance of the small city again, in knowing who the owner is, the family and their appreciation for good music – something that goes both ways as the owners do personally know all the local musicians as well. Musicians obviously appreciate the venue, and want it to remain popular. In Mathew's (*LM*) words,

It is true that Savino is good. This is why I am glad that it has somehow become mainstream. Yes, it is true that it attracts more people, people who will support the venue to remain active and give us the bands the opportunity to be heard, and be heard under good circumstances.

This last point leads to another issue that is of importance here, maybe one of the most significant parameters in keeping this network glued and fuelling its further growth: the transition of Savino Live to a popular, mainstream place for people to hang out. This is not always seen in strictly positive terms, though. Anthony (*SA*) observed:

Some people will go out to see specific bands for the music, but the majority will go out to have a drink. It does not matter if they go to see this or that band – they don't care! They will just go because there is a gig ... because they want a drink ... or because they will go to Savino *for* Savino! *For the venue!* Because now it is a hotspot! This is good for the bands of course ...

In general, the majority of the interviewees seem to oscillate between positive and negative positions when commenting on the venue's status as a mainstream spot for socialisation. Indeed, since most consider the music they play as underground, the fact that Savino Live has become so popular with an audience of mixed tastes seems to be Janus-faced. Nonetheless, they all agree on the positive effect that the mainstream status of Savino has had on the increase in their audience, and the fact that more people are now being exposed to types of music that they might not otherwise have been interested in exploring. The reluctance to be straightforwardly positive concerning this fact is more likely to relate to the negative connotations attached to the word 'mainstream' that seems to have destructive repercussions to musicians who want to be parts of a more eclectic music milieu. In this sense, to strip the word mainstream of any ideological connotations could lead to less negative associations: 'the mainstream brings together large numbers of people from diverse social groups

in common affiliation to a musical style' (Toynbee 2002, p. 159) has written. However, it is not the musical style that is being mainstream here and the audiences are brought together in common affiliation not to a musical style but to a music venue that offers a multitude of musical styles. Such an affair can serve to benefit both the musicians in gaining more listeners and the audience in accessing previously unexplored musical styles. Certainly, this does not necessarily apply equally to all events hosted by the venue, but it does happen to a degree that benefits all network participants.

To reiterate, Savino Live offers a stage and an opportunity to musicians to perform at a fully equipped venue, under professionally managed situations. In exchange, each local band attracts its own regular audiences, owing to the small size of the city and the network that each musician has individually (relatives, friends and other acquaintances, apart from followers of the band). At the same time, the fact that, as a venue, Savino has become more popular serves to attract larger segments of audiences, who not only support the venue to remain active and provide a home to local musicians, but at the same time are exposed to musical styles that they would not had explored otherwise, for some of which they have developed an interest, and more often than not they include in their music 'diets' (information provided during informal conversations with audience members at various gigs I attended).

Just want to be heard: speaking of the audience

As it must be clear by now, Savino Live provides a sense of security for the bands in terms of audience numbers. Although they have all expressed their interest in appearing at other venues (and all have done so already), they know that in Larnaca they will have the support of their 'people', the people whom they know personally. They also know that they will have Savino's regulars, and people who have the rock bar as a point for socialisation. All of the musicians spoke about this in positive terms, including Ken (*TT*), who nonetheless also pointed to the negative side when saying:

Imagine that most of our band members, people in Larnaca have seen in ten different projects. So you have people coming to *TT*, people who happened to have heard a performance of mine that was Greek *entechno* style, expecting to hear Greek music from the band. Also, when somebody comes to many of your performances becomes your friend, whereas when you have the opportunity to play to unknown people you are free to be more expressive.

Ken's words can lead to the assumption that the familiarity of the musicians with the local audiences might create 'restrictions' when it comes to their music decisions and their expressivity, or that the local audiences might have restrictive expectations from the musicians. However, the bands were definite in their positions that they do not organise their gigs with the criterion of what the majority of the audience could require. They all claimed that decisions regarding their set lists are made according to what they like and not in terms of what the audience would enjoy. The bands mostly seem to avoid well-known, mainstream songs, and tend to perform songs that are lesser known, songs that are by and large their own personal preferences. They all claimed that, because they genuinely love what they perform and do it with integrity, then the audience will approve. As Tony (*OSB*) put it while commenting on the playlist of the band, 'if I like the song, then there is no chance the audience

will not like it'. Gregory (SA) put it this way: 'we play what we like and whoever wants to come, sit and enjoy our music is basically it [our target audience]'. Ken (TT), more conscious of the pressure of the audience, admitted that 'for the audience we might pick three or four songs that we know they will like, but the majority of our playlist is not compiled according to this'. Mathew (LM), on the other hand, stated that: 'the audience will appreciate it even if they do not know the song'. Bill (SA) said that 'if we wanted to please the audience we would not have played the specific songs, we wouldn't have this repertory'.

At the same time, when admitting that they persist playing songs with which the local audiences are not as familiar, the majority of the interviewees outspokenly expressed their will to affect the music taste of the audiences, rather than change their own need as performers in order to please the audience by playing songs that the latter is likely to know. Sia (TT) described the song-picking process as such: 'one of us might suggest a song. If somebody else says "but the Cypriot audience won't know it" the rest of us will be like "it is OK, they will learn it now"'. Other bands also spoke in similar terms, and this is something also confirmed by numerous audience members.

At the same time, the musicians made clear that they approach the audiences with respect. They all identified a difference in the engagement of local audiences with live music, especially of a more underground nature, in comparison with the past when the local audiences were more inclined towards mainstream music styles (especially *entechno* and *bouzouki*). Gregory (SA) claimed that 'people, even if a minority, have now begun to listen more closely. They are a minority. But it has started happening.' Sia (TT) agreed: 'I think that people began opening a bit more musically. This is not a mass phenomenon, of course, and it will never be.' Anthony (SA) said that 'people in Larnaca have an opinion. And demand!'

As seen above, the local musicians struggle to position themselves in relation to local audiences. In a context where the myth has it that local audiences are not as musically 'informed', especially when it comes to underground music, the musicians present a different view, emphasising that they are playing to people whom they believe to genuinely respect their music. It is my personal view that they have good reasons for believing this, since, indeed, at all the gigs I have attended there have always been attendees who were singing along with songs that are not as widely known, or head-banged, or interacted with the performers in various ways. At the same time, nevertheless, it is a fact that there is always a percentage of audience members who do not seem to connect with the musical event as expected. These two audience types are also identified by the musicians, who sum it up as follows: the ones who go to the gigs to listen to actual music, and the ones who go to the venue to socialise. For the majority of performers this is a fact they have come to terms with and they accept that a part of the audience attends the event to socialise owing to the popularity of the venue, rather than to satisfy an inherent need to hear the music performed. This often results in audience behaviours that are distressing to the performing musicians. As Mathew (LM) said, 'when the audience is more audible than the performers then this to me is a matter of cultural education'.

Nonetheless, such audience behaviour conforms with a later notion of Straw as to what a scene is, which he described as 'that cultural phenomenon which arises when any purposeful activity acquires a supplement of sociability and when that supplement of sociability becomes part of the observable *effervescence* of the city' (Straw 2015, emphasis in the original). He goes on:

If there is only cultural work and no sociability, we have little more than a network or a production centre. If there is all sociability and no underlying cultural expression, we have only leisure and consumption. In today's cities, a scene is the supplement of sociability, conviviality and effervescence which gathers around the making of culture. And, as we know, this supplement has come to be highly valued in the economic transformation of cities, within in processes we call gentrification. (Straw 2015, p. 142)

This audience tendency does nonetheless have consequences in relation to how audiences interpret and experience their attendance of live music events. For example, audience members often arrive long after the performance has begun, and this is an issue that features prominently in the interviews among the things that most concern local musicians in relation to local audiences. The issue of late audience arrival has often resulted in uncertainty on the part of the performers as to when to begin playing, and therefore in perpetual inconsistencies between the announced performance time and the actual time a performance begins. At the same time, it means that people will still be arriving after the music event has begun, and therefore that some audience members will have missed a good part of the programme. For some musicians this just creates obstacles for what they want to communicate. For example, Mathew (*LM*) put it this way:

We had some friends the other time saying that what we played was kind of heavy. The first thing I asked when told this was: when did you guys arrive? Because if you came in for the last half hour and you made it for the last three songs that are the most powerful and the heaviest and then ask me 'what is this' I cannot take it seriously. Our playlist is built to lead to an end. It is a programme, a whole.

In the above quotation we can locate all of the complicating factors of the local musicians–local audiences affair: the band's *friends* who attended the gig were not entirely satisfied, communicated that to the band, who in their turn challenged their friends' opinion owing to a recurrent tendency of the local audiences to miss large parts of the performances. The viciousness of this cycle is not something to conceal and, despite the fact that we should not generalise, it is an example among many that shows the ambivalence of the 'state of love and trust' between local musicians and local audiences.

Bringing it all back home: discussion

The closing part of the previous section showed that, despite the growing mutual appreciation, the bands do seem to epitomise a part of the local audiences as people who are attached to music habits related to *modern laïká* and *entechno*. In doing so, they at the same time distance themselves and their own specific crowds (and here we speak about their audiences and not their friends) from relevant tendencies. Nonetheless, it needs to be pointed out that the majority of the musicians interviewed for the purposes of this research had begun their performance career by playing *entechno* music (in itself underground before becoming mainstream). Bearing this in mind, I dare suggest that this earlier affiliation of the local performers with *entechno* has had its own contribution to the development of a 'cover ethic' that seems to be prevalent among the local bands (although this is significantly changing now). Indeed, the specific style of music raised a generation of cover musicians in the city, fed by an apparent need of the audience to hear the same familiar songs over and over again tirelessly. Here we should not ignore the fact that, as also pointed

out by Drew, 'most local bands hone their craft by copying national hits' and 'cover bands were the mainstay of popular music long predating the bebop jazz and classic rock cults of originality' (Drew 2004, p. 173). Nonetheless, the reason I persist with my arguments about this issue is due to the fact that the majority of the local bands active in this network consider themselves to be representatives of an underground scene, and supporters of the idea of originality. Therefore, their reliance on covers seems to be attached to earlier music experiences. In this sense, despite the fact that leading musicians of the network discussed here and the venue's regulars and representatives speak of a more underground-orientated music mentality growing in the city and having the venue as its centre, the mainstream creeps in in various ways, both with positive and negative repercussions.

Even more demonised than *enttechno* culture, *modern laiká* culture has also taken an obvious toll on the emergent live music network of Larnaca, mainly seen in the behaviour of part of the audience. Bearing in mind that such entertainment revolves around live music performances that are by definition media for socialisation, one can expect that the customers of a *modern laiká* venue will join and leave the show without recognising the performance's beginning and end, or the actual programme that is being presented – at the same time, musicians do not take offence if audiences appear late or leave early. Nor do they mind if an audience member spends their whole evening speaking to a partner rather than listening intently or singing along. Needless to say, such tolerance of audience attitude is not transferable to all music styles, but it seems that it has permeated the notion of live performance attendance in Larnaca. As has been mentioned in the interviews, the late attendance of audiences seems to offend the musicians, and it seems to be a habit that is not easy to eliminate. Late attendance aside, the tendency of part of the audience to use a live music venue to socialise, talk to each other and pay only selective attention to the performance is another indication that *modern laiká* culture is present in the local live music events of the city. Nonetheless, bearing in mind Pitts and Burland's position that '[l]ive listening is therefore both an individual and a social act, with unpredictable risks and pleasures attached to both elements, and varying between listeners, venues and occasions' (Pitts and Burland 2013, pp. 17–18), we could also identify a distance between the performers' expectations and the actual live listening occurrences.

Some musicians interviewed have pointed out that numerous aspects of the problematic audience approach are connected with the fact that Cypriot people in general have not had sufficient music education, in the sense that, because the mainstream channels and entertainment mediums of the country do not give adequate output for the non-mainstream and the non-mainstream channels are almost non-existent, it is normal for audiences to have less drive to search further for non-mainstream styles of music. The frustrated comment of the majority of the musicians seemed to be further enhanced by the acknowledgement that local audiences have access to all kinds of technology, and the vast majority of households have access to the internet. Therefore, they have all the means to search further, to get informed and to be exposed to different styles of music, but they seem to not show any willingness to do so. Again, this is not something that applies to everyone in the country but it does reflect a general tendency.

Despite the venue's contribution seen in the provision of a stage to bands that deal with more underground music genres, and the extensive exposure of audience members (either initiated or non-initiated) to these styles, it is a fact that the city lacks

any other infrastructure to help this develop further. No other live music venue is taking the same approach to music styles, whereas at the same time there are, up to the point of writing, insufficient rehearsal spaces for bands or studios to work in. This seems to create obvious obstacles for the further development of bands.

This, however, does not mean that younger musicians and newly formed bands are not trying their hands in performance. Rather, my discussions with younger audience members pointed to the opposite, and it is the case that the local musicians act as 'inspiration' for younger musicians. In addition, the fact that these local musicians are known to them as the people next door (owing to Larnaca's small size) further adds up to the feeling that it is possible to be a performer of a preferred music style. This direct influence is connected to an enhancement of the exposure to more underground styles of music which the venue seems eager to promote, and an increasing willingness on the part of younger people to become informed about more obscure musical styles.

At the same time, as the local musicians get further performance experience, being persistent in the styles of music they want to play while having the support of the venue and the audience, they turn from the idea of producing their own original material to actively engaging in doing so. Most of them, having already begun with their first musical efforts since the time of the primary research and interviews, are now well on their way towards presenting their original material. In this sense, the live music network described seems to have provided confidence to the musicians involved, along with a sense of security for their efforts in writing their own music.

Here the role of the venue as the mediator between musicians and audiences is pivotal. By offering a stage to local bands, and showing enough trust to them, the venue has acted as a nurturing place. Simultaneously, with its increasing popularity as a 'must-visit' entertainment spot for Larnaca, it has gradually attracted larger numbers of audiences. In this sense, it has allowed audience members to be exposed to styles of music that are not in their daily musical diet. In fact, several audience members I have spoken with said that they often leave a gig with new music in their head, which they then go on to research further, resulting with whole new music orientations and a renewed playlist of songs. At the same time, as the venue's popularity increases, more audience members translate to increased revenue, and hence the venue survives as a profitable business that can sustain itself and support the groups in providing live music performances for the local audiences. It is these last three points that mostly highlight my usage of the notion of *network* for discussing the developments of live music performance in Larnaca.

Coda

While all this is being described, it needs to be remembered that the elements that consist of a locality are in continuous transition, and therefore a locality does not remain the same at all times (Hudson 2006). In the same way that localities transform and evolve, networks and music scenes also transform and evolve. As expected, just like a live organism, the network described here persists, evolving and transforming, and many changes have been observed from the moment of research and interviews to the point of writing this paper. The four bands who guided us through our inquiry have gone through their own developments, with *TT* disbanding, probably owing to

the growing expectation of the audience for more original music rather than covers, while *OSB* disappeared to announce recently their new appearance with a different frontman and updated material. *SA* are recording their first album, while *LM* have already released theirs. New bands have also appeared, most of them presenting original music, and Savino Live faces difficulties in finding the dates to accommodate all local bands' performances on top of numerous appearances from other new and established national and international bands. For sure, the audience has now a huge pool of events from which to choose to attend. Some have even told me that 'maybe it is the time to place Larnaca on the map'.

Acknowledgements

I express my gratitude to the two anonymous readers who, by providing thoughtful and valuable comments on an earlier version of this article, helped me to create a more concise and coherent presentation of this research. I am also thankful to all of the musicians, as well as the venue manager-owner, for their participation in the lengthy interview process and for providing their significant insights on this topic.

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