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A Hand Up, Not a Hand-out: The Music Maker Relief Foundation in Atlanta

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Abstract

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This honors thesis explores the work of the Music Maker Relief Foundation, a non-profit and record label headquartered in Hillsborough, North Carolina that partners with traditional musicians in the southeastern United States to ensure that their voices are not silenced by poverty and time. The thesis considers the historically exploitative relationship between collectors and musicians in the American South and the work of other contemporary organizations who seek to preserve southern traditions. The Music Maker Relief Foundation has made a unique place for itself in this conversation by holistically supporting individuals creating music rather than just their music. This project includes an organizational history of the Music Maker Relief Foundation, an analysis of its COVID-19 response, and an exploration of its network of Atlanta-based artists.

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INTRODUCTION

What is Relief?

The Music Maker Relief Foundation. In order to understand its mission to “preserve musical traditions by directly supporting the musicians, ensuring their voices will not be silenced by poverty and time,”¹ it is perhaps useful to reflect upon the non-profit and record label’s name itself. There are over 100 synonyms for the word *aid*. Why not call it the Music Maker *Assistance* Foundation or the Music Maker *Benefit* Foundation? While both of those options have a nice ring to them, neither fully captures the intention or result of the Music Maker Relief Foundation’s mission. *Assistance* seems reminiscent of more governmental forms of aid and financial support. *Benefit* is frequently found in the vocabulary of charity events and large fundraisers, and it also seems to suggest a sort of monetary aid. Neither of these words, nor *aid* itself, fully capture the work of the Music Maker Relief Foundation. While monetary support is a critical piece of Music Maker’s relationships with its partner artists, the accompanying intrapersonal connection, sharing of stories, and performance opportunities are equally as necessary. Artists are not being *aided, assisted, or benefitted*; they are instead engaging in a partnership with an organization and a network of artists that leads to well-rounded and collaborative *relief*.

In thinking about the word *relief*, it also becomes necessary to ponder what artists are being relieved from. For older artists, perhaps relief means connecting with musicians across the globe of similar generations and similar experiences. Many Music Maker artists had successful first acts, some of which led to recordings and concerts, but many never received royalties and financial gain from their work. These artists are being relieved in the sense that they have an

¹ Ibid.

organization dedicated to reminding them of their artistic worth. At the same time, the connections aging musicians make through the broader Music Maker network can provide a sense of social connection that also acts as relief. For younger artists who partner with Music Maker, *relief* might include support in their first acts as musicians, but the relationships they can build with older legends in their genres is another aspect of that support. Atlanta blues network friend and organizer, Kathryn Dudeck, says, “In America, we’re missing our grandmothers and grandfathers.”² The intentional intergenerationality of Music Maker does not only benefit older musicians; it also provides younger musicians with a space to learn from artists musically and personally. The *relief* in the Music Maker Relief Foundation includes help in overcoming financial stress, but it more importantly includes connection, friendship, and opportunity.

Overview of Thesis

Tim and Denise Duffy started the Music Maker Relief Foundation in 1994. Since they began this work, Music Maker has helped musicians by “meeting artists where they want to be met and doing what they want to do.”³ Music Maker artists are talented individuals primarily in the Southeast US who are at least 55 and make less than \$20,000 per year.⁴ In the last 25 years, Music Maker has helped to create over 7,000 performances, released over 2,000 songs, and represented 435 artists, the majority of whom are African Americans over the age of 60. In order

² Daniel Dudeck and Kathryn Dudeck, Interview #2 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck, interview by Claire Beiter, Zoom, September 10, 2020.

³ Leoneda Inge, “Aging Southern Musical Artists Celebrate 25 Years of Music Maker.,” North Carolina Public Radio, August 6, 2019, <https://www.wunc.org/post/aging-southern-musical-artists-celebrate-25-years-music-maker>.

⁴ Collins De La Cour, “Interview: Tim Duffy of the Music Maker Relief Foundation,” Americana Highways, January 23, 2019, <https://americanahighways.org/2019/01/23/interview-tom-duffy-of-the-music-maker-relief-foundation/>.

to best help those 435 individuals, the Duffys and their team model their interactions with artists under the phrase “a hand up, not a hand-out.”⁵ Rather than merely provide a musical voice for these artists, Music Maker uses its resources to empower its musicians to support themselves while living and performing comfortably.

I first follow Music Maker's organizational history from its beginnings as a product of Timothy Duffy's master's thesis to a globally influential group. I use my work as an intern for Music Maker from August 2020-December 2020, interviews with Music Maker administrators and artists, secondary literature, and the Timothy Duffy archival collection at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill to trace the development of Music Maker from a small group of artists in Winston-Salem to a network of 435 partner artists working with multiple world-renowned musicians and administrators. I position this story within two main conversations about the historical appropriation of southern Black artists' work and other contemporary organizations that “preserve” traditions within the US South. There are three prongs to Music Maker's work: education, consisting largely of exhibitions; sustenance, long-term support of support of artists; and performance, in which artists share their craft. This holistic support Music Maker offers partner artists sets it apart from other individuals and organizations that have recorded southern musicians and collected art from primarily Black southern artists in the past.

The second chapter features Atlanta blues musicians' connections to Music Maker through interviews with an artist, a venue representative, a local non-profit co-president, and Tim Duffy. The center of the second chapter is Daniel “Mudcat” Dudeck, one of Music Maker's first artists in Atlanta who was an essential link between Timothy Duffy and older traditional

⁵ “Music Maker Relief Foundation - Preserving the Soul of America's Music,” Music Maker Relief Foundation, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://musicmaker.org/>.

musicians in the city. The depth and scope of Music Maker's work in Atlanta has made an impact on musicians' lives and it is only possible due to the "mini Music Maker" that the Dudecks developed over their years of dedicated friendship and partnership with older artists.⁶ I close the second chapter by exploring the possibility of creating a second Music Maker Relief Foundation office in Atlanta and why continued partnership within the city is an essential piece of keeping blues musicians active and their fanbases engaged.

I end this thesis by considering the Atlanta blues network and Music Maker from the perspective of 2020-2021 and the unprecedented challenges COVID-19 has created for performers and the venues and organizations who support them. Through conversations with Music Maker administrators such as Tim Duffy and important figures in the Atlanta blues scene, I seek to identify the main problems caused by the pandemic and the strategies that have proven most useful in the mission to keep the blues alive. I also discuss the work I completed during my virtual internship with Music Maker during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide my observations of how the organization adapted to fit the specific needs of its artists.

Throughout its three decades of operation, the Music Maker Relief Foundation has effectively partnered with hundreds of artists in the South to share their music with global audiences. While the albums and concerts Music Maker produces are excellent performance platforms for partners, what makes the organization unique is its commitment to artists on a broader and more personal level. Music Maker partner artists remain partner artists even after they retire from performing. Partner musicians are seen as valuable not only for the art they create, but also for the stories they tell and the lives they lead as the pioneers and purveyors of

⁶ Daniel Dudeck and Kathryn Dudeck, Interview #1 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck, interview by Claire Beiter, Zoom, September 8, 2020.

American music. Atlanta has been a critical location for this people-centered approach to preservation and would be an ideal location for Music Maker to expand its work; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has made that expansion less feasible than ever before. While the past year has created unprecedented challenges for the Music Maker Relief Foundation, it continues to play a critical role in preserving American music by prioritizing its creators.

CHAPTER ONE:

AN ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY OF A CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATION

If you take care of the artists first, Tim and Denise realized, the music will be preserved.—The Music Maker Relief Foundation⁷

Beginning with People

A people-centered philosophy of preservation is at the center of everything that the Music Maker Relief Foundation accomplishes with its network of artists. The success that Music Maker has achieved in the past 25 years, however, was not an overnight process. Music Maker began on a small scale with a handful of artists and has only gained the trust of more musicians through the continued commitment of its founders to maintain a level of personal attention and mutual partnership. As a white-founded non-profit working with primarily Black artists, it is also necessary to explore how Music Maker fits into the exploitative history of white collectors, record company executives, and folklorists that has too often appreciated the music but often neglected the personhood of Black artists. In order to understand how the Music Maker Relief Foundation operates today, it is necessary to examine the development of the non-profit and record label from its beginnings as a product of Timothy Duffy's master's thesis.

In 1982, Timothy Duffy was a 19-year-old developing his love of cultural immersion and music at Friend's World College in Kenya. Duffy remarked that he "kind of grew up there" in the five years between 1982 and his undergraduate graduation from the program in 1987. The biographical information provided in his University of North Carolina archival collection includes that while in Kenya the future folklorist "apprenticed under Swahili songster and oud virtuoso Zein Al-Abdein; produced field recordings of children's music, street songsters, and

⁷ "Music Maker Relief Foundation - Preserving the Soul of America's Music."

dance rituals; conducted interviews of Mombasa men living in poverty; and researched the belief of the ‘jin’ in Swahili society.”⁸ Duffy recalled that an important part of the program was ethnographic fieldwork. The curriculum required that he “figure out what you’re seeing and take notes and come back and write journals and reflect on what you learned through cultural immersion.”⁹ Deep cultural immersion was a critical piece of the program, which was entirely based on independent study. The curriculum’s motto was “peace through education and, a world without classrooms.”¹⁰ Using knowledge to build bridges and educate outside of the walls of a school are themes that seem to have made a deep impact on Duffy; both can be seen in his work today. Another important piece of Tim Duffy’s experience in Kenya was his interaction with non-profits. Throughout his years of undergraduate education, Duffy had begun to explore the world through music and develop skills in ethnographic fieldwork that would propel him into his next step—graduate school.

After returning to the United States, Timothy Duffy began attending the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill in 1988 and working towards a master’s degree in folklore. The connections he would make in the Winston-Salem area would become a foundational piece of his path towards creating the Music Maker Relief Foundation. Duffy’s work at UNC between 1988 and 1990 made him aware of two principles that established the groundwork for the creation of the Music Maker Relief Foundation five years later. Through his exposure to “a vibrant

⁸ University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, “Timothy Duffy Collection, 1969-2018,” Archive., Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/20044/#d1e216>.

⁹ Timothy Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy, interview by Claire Beiter, Phone, February 26, 2021.

¹⁰ Ibid.

community of traditional blues musicians" and "preservationist traditions focused on documenting and archiving rather than taking care of the artists themselves, the actual bearers of tradition," Tim Duffy began the work that would define the beginning of Music Maker.¹¹ The first artist Duffy worked with at UNC was James "Guitar Slim" Stephens, "an old blues rounder for the Southern Folklife Collection."¹² Stephens was born on March 10, 1915 in Spartanburg, South Carolina.¹³ He learned to play the pump organ and piano before joining the John Henry Davis Medicine Show in his teens and learning to play the guitar. His Music Maker biography notes that "It was his welcoming spirit that opened the doors of the Carolina blues."¹⁴ Duffy met Guitar Slim in 1989. Slim introduced Duffy to "dozens" of the "whole host of great musicians in that Winston Salem area."¹⁵ His experience getting to know these artists was the beginning of the "people-centered approach to preservation" that defines his career today.¹⁶ Stephens developed cancer and died soon after in 1989, but he directed Tim Duffy to his friend, Guitar Gabriel, before his passing.

Duffy recalls, "I was told that Gabriel was the one who would really show me what was up. But I probably wouldn't find him. And if I did, he would probably be living in a box and drinking a lot of wine."¹⁷ After a long search for Stephens's "elusive" friend, Tim Duffy met

¹¹ "Our Story," The Music Maker Relief Foundation, 2020, <https://musicmaker.org/our-story/>.

¹² University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, "Timothy Duffy Collection, 1969-2018."

¹³ "James 'Guitar Slim' Stephens," *Music Maker Relief Foundation* (blog), accessed February 6, 2021, <https://musicmaker.org/artists/james-guitar-slim-stephens/>.

¹⁴ "James 'Guitar Slim' Stephens."

¹⁵ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

¹⁶ "Our Story."

¹⁷ Brian Turk, "Tim Duffy - Music Maker Relief Foundation," *NC Music Magazine*, 1/28,

Guitar Gabriel at a housing project in Winston-Salem called Piedmont Circle in 1991.¹⁸ Despite being one of the Piedmont blues' best players, Guitar Gabriel was living in poverty. Gabriel was born in Atlanta in 1925, but he moved to Winston-Salem as a child where he learned to play guitar from his father, a sharecropper. He served in the army during World War II before returning and playing in carnivals and minstrel shows.

Guitar Gabriel's music ranged across topics of love, loss, heartbreak, and the struggle of being a Black man in the US South. For example, in "Southland Blues," he seems to explore his relationship with his father, the legacy of slavery, and the hardships of manual labor.

Southland Blues

I said people talk about slavery time
Well I believe it's happening right now

People talk about slavery time
Oh, I believe it's happening right now

See it comes way down from the South
How in the world can the world get along somehow?

My daddy used to work all the summer
When winter time come he tell us all our crop was gone

My daddy used to farm all the summer
In winter time he'd tell us all the crop was gone

In these bulging out walls and shoes and flies well mine
How in the world can I be wrong?

You're sitting on a piece of paper
Deep in your heart you know my father couldn't read

Woah starving sitting on a piece of paper *showed* to my father

<https://www.ncmusicmagazine.com/home-1/2020/1/2/tim-duffy-music-maker-relief-foundation>.

¹⁸ "Our Story."

Deep in his heart he know my father couldn't read
 You say you're just a poor Black man if you stay with me
 I'll give you more of anything that you need.

I used to walk five miles to the country store
 I used to walk there to pick *up all the mail*
 Sometime in the rain

Woah, I used to walk five miles to the country store
 I'd walk in the rain just to pick *up all the mail*

Sometimes wouldn't get no letter for weeks
 Cause I know the freight wouldn't even *frail*

My mother used to wash your clothes
 My sister used to take care of the house

My mother used to wash your clothes, poor thing
 My sister used to take care of the house

You still know god's love here, don't make too much fuss
 I just want you to be quiet as a mouse

1941, my daddy laid down and died
 Boss man laid on his knees and cried

1941, my daddy laid down and died
 Boss man fell on his knees and cried

You said I got the feeling he was a [undistinguishable]
 I wish I was born *his* baby child
 I picked up my clothes and moved
 I promised not to come south no more
 I left that farm

I picked up my clothes and left
 I promised not to come south no more

But there's something *lonesome*
*I still [undistinguishable]*¹⁹

¹⁹ This is an excerpt from a field recording by Tim Duffy. The italicized portions of the lyrics were unclear and the bracketed portions were undistinguishable.

The main theme of the song repeats, “I said people talk about slavery time/Well I believe it’s happening right now.”²⁰ As Guitar Gabriel returns to this idea, he tells a story about his father losing crops and continuing to depend on a white man: “You say you’re just a poor Black man if you stay with me/I’ll give you more of anything that you need.”²¹ Gabriel traces the path of his father’s life ending with his death in 1941. “Southland Blues” highlights Guitar Gabriel’s ability to connect complex themes in his music. Duffy especially appreciated the artist's talent for storytelling, noting that Gabriel had an “eloquent ability to express the relationship between his life and his music.”²² In their early partnership, Duffy helped Gabriel arrange gigs and share his talent with audiences across North and South Carolina.

The Living Blues

Tim Duffy’s work with “founding artist” Guitar Gabriel also provides insight into the concept of the living blues that continues to drive Music Maker.²³ In a 1992 interview with *Living Blues Magazine*, Guitar Gabriel recalled:

Blues will never die because it is a spirit. It is an uplift and the way you feel it, that is the way it is. And it brings a lot of joy to people. Music is made to make happiness, make you smile and forget your troubles. In the Good Book it says to make a joyful noise. It doesn’t say what kind of noise, just as long as you make one. So that is about the size of it. That is what we are trying to do.²⁴

²⁰ Guitar Gabriel, *Southland Blues*, Digital (Spotify: Music Maker, 2020).

²¹ Ibid.

²² “Guitar Gabriel - Music Maker Relief Foundation,” accessed December 1, 2020, <https://musicmaker.org/artists/guitar-gabriel/>.

²³ “The Blues Never Die: Music Maker 25 Celebrates the South’s Legacy of Traditional Music - The Chronicle,” accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.dukechronicle.com/article/2019/12/music-maker-25-celebrates-the-souths-rich-legacy-of-traditional-music>.

²⁴ “Guitar Gabriel - Music Maker Relief Foundation.”

Guitar Gabriel's description of blues as a "spirit" makes the genre feel like a living, breathing entity. The blues as alive has been one of the guiding principles of the Music Maker Relief Foundation. When he began, Tim Duffy noticed that there was a sense that the blues peaked in the mid-twentieth century and died when John Lee Hooker died in 2001. Duffy expanded upon this misconception and how it has shaped his work in an interview with *Americana Highways*: "blues did not die because John Lee Hooker died. Really that notion is just another way to appropriate. Saying that [blues] ended makes collections more valuable, you know. It's just the same old shit."²⁵ As a white folklorist working with many Black musicians, Tim Duffy acknowledges that much of the conversation surrounding the "dead" blues genre has been dominated by those who profit from commodifying and rarifying its existence, many of whom have been "guys like [him], outside the culture."²⁶

The Fine Line Between Partnership and Exploitation

The creation and distribution of Black music in the US South has historically been dominated by white collectors and record executives. Perhaps the best-known white folklorists who participated in the collection, preservation, and distribution of Black vernacular music are the Lomaxes. In his chapter, "Creating the Cult of Authenticity" in *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Authenticity*, Benjamin Filene explores the mythic role of "authenticity" in folk music and how cultural middlemen have tried to construct and control what is considered "authentic." Filene breaks down the 1932 road trip of John Lomax and his sons, John Lomax, Jr. and Alan Lomax, as they traveled through the South looking for musicians in a recording tour

²⁵ De La Cour, "Interview."

²⁶ "Swampland: Tim Duffy: Music Maker Relief Foundation," accessed December 10, 2020, http://swampland.com/articles/view/title:tim_duffy_music_maker_relief_foundation.

that would fuel the American folk revival. “The three Lomaxes,” writes Filene, “then embarked on a cross-country tour that would last the rest of the summer and would lay the groundwork for an American folk music revival.”²⁷ During this trip and the influential recordings it produced, the Lomaxes created criteria for what exactly “folk” music was and used African American artists to define the demographics of who the “folk” were. The Lomaxes deemed that authenticity was found within “self-contained homogeneous communities cut off from the corrupting influences of popular culture.”²⁸ One of the most important figures in the creation of this “cult of authenticity” was Black bluesman Lead Belly who was “roughly forty-four years old at the time, in Louisiana’s Angola prison, where he was serving out a sentence for murder.”²⁹ The Lomaxes are credited with discovering the now legendary artist. There is no doubt that the recordings the Lomaxes collected of Lead Belly established him as a foundational folk and blues artist. At the same time, while they began to promote Lead Belly as a “new American original” after his release from prison in 1934, the Lomaxes simultaneously exoticized him as a rapacious killer and tied that mythic identity to his race.³⁰ The Lomaxes' complicated relationships with their poor and Black “discoveries” demonstrate the complexity within the racial hierarchy of recordings in the early to mid-twentieth century that heavily influenced the emerging field of folklore.

²⁷ Benjamin Filene, “Creating the Cult of Authenticity,” in *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Authenticity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 47-48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 51

³⁰*Ibid.*, 59

Vera Hall is one example of a Black artist in Music Maker's geographic scope whose work with the Lomax family provided lasting musical influence but left her with little capital. John, Sr.'s son, Alan Lomax, became an eminent folklorist who recorded hundreds of sessions for the Library of Congress. Vera Hall was a Black musician who lived from 1902-1964 in the Black Belt of Alabama in the post-Reconstruction South. The Black Belt is a region in the Gulf South's Coastal Plain that stretches from south-central Alabama into northwestern Mississippi. The region received its name for the rich soil that made it a popular place for planters in the mid-nineteenth century, but its meaning changed as "half of Alabama's enslaved population was concentrated within ten Black Belt counties where the exploitation of their labor made this one of the richest regions in the antebellum United States."³¹ In his chapter entitled "Vera Hall" in *The Beautiful Music All Around Us*, Stephen Wade depicts Hall as a "self-effacing, thirty-eight-year-old singer whose grandparents had been slaves"³² He notes that "By the time Vera reached adulthood, the 1930 census counted 2,803,756 Black families nationwide, of whom 2,193,357 resided in the southern states, 962,401 of them in rural areas."³³ In 1940, there were limited occupational choices for Black residents in the area, most of whom were sharecroppers or domestic workers. When Alan Lomax recorded Vera Hall's "Another Man Done Gone" in 1940, she was a domestic worker. The success of the recording that followed would bring Vera Hall to

³¹ Allen Tullos, "The Black Belt," *Southern Spaces*, April 19, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.18737/M70K6P>.

³² Stephen Wade, *The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience*, 1st ed. (University of Illinois Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.5406/illinois/9780252036880.001.0001>., 153

³³ *Ibid.*, 156

New York City to perform in a Columbia University folk music festival and eventually lead to the adoption of her song by some of music's biggest names such as Odetta and Johnny Cash.

Paternalism in the creation and aftermath of Vera Hall's Lomax recording must be considered in thinking about the role of race and recording today. "In what seems painfully symptomatic of the era's racial etiquette," writes Stephan Wade, "the Lomaxes invited Vera to Ruby Pickens Tartt's home that evening, an invitation that included her preparing their meals, washing up, and then performing for her hosts."³⁴ Even as she performed "Another Man Done Gone" in a recording whose legacy would outlive her own, Vera Hall was still responsible for cleaning dishes for the party to which she was invited. After coming home from the folk music festival in New York, where she was praised, Vera Hall returned to her life as a domestic worker and died in poverty while her song rested in the Library of Congress and Johnny Cash's discography.

In considering Music Maker's role as an organization rooted in this racially hierarchical folklore tradition, it is also important to explore the growing conversation about white-run cultural preservation efforts in the South today. Although related to the creation of food rather than the production of music, the recent controversy surrounding the Southern Foodways Alliance (SFA) provides insight into the complexities of preservation efforts that are directed at protecting Black traditions but controlled by white organizers. Over the last two decades, the Southern Foodways Alliance has connected academics, chefs, food lovers, and writers to cook, share, and write about culinary traditions in the American South. A recent *New York Times* opinion piece explores how and why people are demanding SFA's white founding director, John

³⁴ Ibid., 155

T. Edge, resign. Kim Severson explains, “They say he is a kingmaker. They say he is a white man — however charming — who has too much power over who tells the story of food in a region where so much of the cuisine was created by enslaved people.”³⁵ As illuminated in this quote, the question of John T. Edge and Southern Foodways Alliance is not if his fundraising efforts, leadership, and educational efforts over the last 20 years were wrong. Instead, critics question if a white man should continue to run an organization which primarily preserves Black cooking traditions and profit from its success. Some people of color connected with Southern Foodways Alliance have begun to publicly call for Edge’s resignation. Osayi Endolyn, food writer and former deputy editor for an SFA quarterly magazine, writes, “They will tell you it’s all about The Work. It’s not. This is a narcissistic and ongoing power grab on the backs of Black people’s stories and the cachet of SFA being able to say what our past affiliation with the org. means for them. It is transactional. It must end.”³⁶ As demands for John T. Edge’s exit of power and requests for more women and people of color in power at the organization persist, Edge remains seated at the top of the Southern Foodways Alliance.

The same blurred boundary between preservation and appropriation must be considered when thinking about the work of white collectors of Black grassroots art such as William “Bill” Arnett (1939-2020). The artistic and academic world continues to grapple with the legacy of Bill Arnett, a collector of African American vernacular artists who brought creative work— such as the now popularized quilts of Gee’s Bend, Alabama — into a national spotlight. Folklorist Bernard L. Herman continues to champion the work of Arnett and his sons. In his article, “The

³⁵ Kim Severson, “A White Gatekeeper of Southern Food Faces Calls to Resign,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 2020, sec. Food, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/29/dining/john-t-edge-southern-foodways-alliance.html>.

³⁶ Ibid.

Quilts of Gee’s Bend: How Great Art Gets Lost,” Herman argues, “[t]he Arnetts saw something that other visitors and collectors had missed, and they worked hard to promote the quilts and create a national audience. The contemporary art world responded to the quilts of Gee’s Bend with an unexpected warmth and effusiveness.”³⁷ Herman’s article was written in response to criticism surrounding Arnett’s work after two of the Gee’s Bend quiltmakers sued the Arnetts for fraud in lawsuits that were later dismissed. News publications began releasing more critical opinion pieces about Bill Arnett, arguing that his work bordered on exploitation. In a *Washington Post* article in the wake of Arnett’s death in 2020, Matt Schudel reflects upon the Arnett controversy:

One of the most successful artists whose careers were launched by Mr. Arnett was [Thornton] Dial, a onetime Alabama metalworker whose works sold for \$25 when Mr. Arnett met him in 1987. Six years later, Dial’s large-scale paintings and collages were going for more than \$100,000 and he was living in a large house. “60 Minutes” pointed out that Mr. Arnett’s name was on the deed. Mr. Arnett said he had helped arrange the purchase because Dial had little credit history and could not otherwise obtain a bank loan.³⁸

Alan Lomax, John T. Edge, and Bill Arnett exemplify the tension between preservation and agency that exists in the relationships between collectors and those who create what they collect. All three men have helped to preserve art and music that would otherwise perhaps not be as widely available or celebrated as it today. At the same time, they have all been the deciding voices in determining what art is worth preserving and how it should be preserved, which takes a level of agency away from artists themselves. While some continue to view their efforts as

³⁷ Bernard L. Herman, “The Quilts of Gee’s Bend: How Great Art Gets Lost,” *The Journal of Modern Craft* 2, no. 1 (March 2009): 9–15, <https://doi.org/10.2752/174967809X416233>.

³⁸ Matt Schudel, “Bill Arnett, Who Collected and Promoted Black Vernacular Art, Dies at 81,” *Washington Post*, accessed December 1, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/bill-arnett-who-collected-and-promoted-Black-vernacular-art-dies-at-81/2020/08/19/aa77ee44-e169-11ea-8181-606e603bb1c4_story.html.

critical to the protection of culture, others argue that the preservation and promotion of Black art should not be something that continues to be left to white folklorists. As a white-run organization that serves a large population of Black artists, Music Maker sits in the middle of the conversation about power, race, and paternalism in the preservation of musical styles and the support of musicians.

The Music Maker Difference: External Influences and Internal Operations

Music Maker has forged its more effective path in the history of white collectors and mediators working with Black artists by focusing on the personhood of musicians rather than the art they create. The lasting positive results of partnerships and their commitment to maintaining artist agency distinguish Music Maker from the aforementioned controversies surrounding cultural preservation in the US South.

In many ways, the Lomax family's work was a critical step in sharing the traditional music of underrepresented artists with a wider public. Tim Duffy first met Alan Lomax, who he considers "one of the greatest folklorists," at a conference about southern music while he was studying folklore at UNC-Chapel Hill. Duffy shared his deep appreciation for Lomax's commitment to "cultural equity" in his recording projects.³⁹ According to Duffy, Alan Lomax travelled to Haiti with "hundreds and hundreds of pounds of recording gear" and recorded Haitian singers on an acetate disc before "putting up the speakers and playing it for the whole village."⁴⁰ Prior to Alan Lomax's work in Haiti, very few Haitian artists had ever been heard before, but "come back five years later and everyone's singing."⁴¹ The best part of Duffy's job is

³⁹ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

that similarly to Lomax “We work mostly in communities that no one looks at or knows that they exist,” he says, “[we] lift the veil for other people in the world to look at them and give them the highways to go visit and see people.”⁴² Many of these communities’ musical traditions were being preserved on a small scale, and the Lomaxes helped to complete that work on a larger world stage. Tim Duffy explained, “sometimes it just takes somebody to say ‘everybody is somebody and this music is important.’”⁴³ Both Duffy and the Lomaxes have been supportive voices in sharing the music of underrepresented communities in the US South and abroad.

Stephen Wade’s feature of Vera Hall and Benjamin Filene’s critical analysis of Lead Belly’s racialized promotion illustrate that while the Lomaxes’ work inspired Tim Duffy, Music Maker is different in its approach to partnering with musicians as people rather than subjects. Wade describes that there was a disconnect between the cultural capital of Vera Hall’s music and her lack of financial stability or celebrity status. Outcomes like this, in which the creators of influential music do not personally benefit from their art’s success, are what Music Maker very intentionally attempts to avoid. While the Lomaxes launched the field of folklore and pioneered the idea of “cultural equity” in their recordings of rural and underrepresented artists, Music Maker has continued this work in a way that is more beneficial to those artists.

Similarly, there exists a clear distinction between Music Maker and the work of Bill Arnett that some commentators have concluded erased artist agency. Like Music Maker, Arnett was committed to promoting the work of southern artists of color in the mainstream art world. Additionally, Arnett seemed to be devoted to the well-being of the artists he worked alongside; however, critics argue that his work to aid artists overstepped a boundary that stripped them of

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

their ability to exit partnerships. As mentioned previously, Arnett was especially criticized for being listed on the deed to an artist's house when the artist did not have the financial background necessary to take out a bank loan. While in many ways this act was likely helpful to the artist, there is also something paternalistic about a collector and an artist being legally bound in home ownership. There is no evidence to suggest that Music Maker has engaged in similar actions with its partner artists. While the organization emphasizes addressing musicians' personal needs, its team seems to avoid entering external legal contracts with artists and instead favors giving direct financial support that can be used in whatever way musicians choose.

The Southern Foodways Alliance and the Music Maker Relief Foundation share many parallels in their scopes and missions. Both SFA and Music Maker recognize the layers of racism embedded into the history of southern cultural heritage preservation and have attempted to create diverse teams of qualified individuals. SFA's staff and advisory board include participation by people of different races, genders, and experiential and educational backgrounds. In its mission, SFA states, "Our work sets a welcome table where all may consider our history and our future in a spirit of respect and reconciliation."⁴⁴ Music Maker is similarly structured into two parts: the operating team and the advisory board/board of directors. There are only five members of the day-to-day team and each staff member has a specific role related to their background and professional experience. Like SFA, the Music Maker operating team is comprised of people of color, older musicians, and women that are well-equipped to partner with artists. The same is true for Music Maker's board of directors and advisory board. Over the years, the advisory board has intentionally been a mixture of business professionals, art administrators, and artists. For

⁴⁴ "Our Mission," Southern Foodways Alliance, March 6, 2013, <https://www.southernfoodways.org/about-us/>.

example, Daniel “Mudcat” Dudeck has served on the advisory board after being a Music Maker partner artist. The outsiders the organization chooses to include in its leadership all have a purpose that directly serves partner artists. One of the current members of the board of directors is Grammy-winning artist and scholar Dom Flemons, “a music scholar, historian, record collector, and a multi-instrumentalist. He is considered an expert player on the Banjo, Fife, Guitar, Harmonica, Jug, Percussion, Quills, and Rhythm Bones.”⁴⁵ He has written extensively about the erasure of Black cowboys from narratives about the American West and brings this forgotten narrative into the spotlight through his music and writing.

Despite their commitment to having diverse operating teams in its mission to preserve southern cultural heritage, the leadership of SFA became a heavily debated topic in the summer of 2020. One of the biggest criticisms of the Southern Foodways Alliance is that, as Osayi Endolyn states, the organization is “narcissistic” and part of an “ongoing power grab.”⁴⁶ Critics argue that SFA leader, John T. Edge, is more committed to his role in sharing foodways than the work itself. The terms “gatekeeper” and “kingmaker” Kim Severson applies to Edge in her *New York Times* article powerfully suggest that John T. Edge has too much power in the preservation of southern food.⁴⁷ SFA’s 2019 Margie Samuels Fellow, Mayukh Sen echoed this sentiment. During a 2020 James Beard Foundation webinar, John T. Edge called for gradualism in the fight for racial equity in foodways work. Before withdrawing his fellowship, Sen characterized these comments as “a way of justifying his power,” saying it “much seems to be a way of preserving the white, male status quo he represents while further marginalizing female, Black, and/or brown

⁴⁵ “Our Board,” *Music Maker Relief Foundation* (blog), accessed December 10, 2020, <https://musicmaker.org/board-members/>.

⁴⁶ Severson, “A White Gatekeeper of Southern Food Faces Calls to Resign.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

voices.”⁴⁸ As SFA has gained notoriety, Edge has made foodways a popularized and trendy field that he writes about and profits from, and his refusal to resign after these criticisms led some to question who his continued role at the top of SFA was really intended to serve.

In contrast, Music Maker administrators maintain that none of its work is about its own celebrity. Every dollar the organization makes from touring and every interview a member of the administration receives after a publication are opportunities to shine the spotlight back onto partner artists. Tim Duffy, who does not make substantial profit from his work, described his motivation to *Americana Highways*: “All the people that I loved and the musicians that I loved happened to be living in utter poverty—and the music that they had created is the basis, the aquifer, of the music industry. They had been locked out, and continue to be locked out of the industry that they essentially created.”⁴⁹ Although Duffy is himself an excellent guitar player, a talented photographer, and a well-respected academic, his comment demonstrates the level of humility he has in his work with Music Maker. He maintains that, despite his many talents, this work is not about him. Every project that Music Maker develops is created in partnership with and entirely for the artists with whom the organization works. Duffy recognizes that many rural artists have been written about as subjects rather than as partners and that “they felt disenfranchised and bitter about it.”⁵⁰ In order to build a path forward, Duffy and his team focus upon trust. He expanded upon how he develops this sense of reliability, describing, “I think if

⁴⁸ Jaya Saxena, “Founding Director of Southern Foodways Alliance Pressured to Resign,” *Eater*, June 29, 2020, <https://www.eater.com/2020/6/29/21307584/southern-foodways-alliance-director-john-t-edge-pressured-to-resign>.

⁴⁹ De La Cour, “Interview.”

⁵⁰ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

you say something, you do it. The main thing is keeping your word and keeping in touch and keeping a dialogue going, you know, and being as straight up as you can. It has varying degrees of results, you know, that's but that's how it is. You got to try.⁵¹ As highlighted in this quote, Tim Duffy believes that his partnerships are made from full transparency and consistent communication. The Lomaxes, Bill Arnett, and John T. Edge have had similar goals for partnership; however, those arrangements did not holistically address artist needs or increase artist agency. While the Lomaxes, John. T. Edge, and Bill Arnett have been in many ways equally as well-meaning as the Music Maker Relief Foundation, their good intentions did not always result in tangible positive outcomes for artists with whom they partnered.

Music Maker artists echo that they have benefited from their partnerships with the organization. Daniel “Mudcat” Dudeck is a partner artist, friend to many others, and an active organizer of the Atlanta network of Music Maker artists who will be featured in Chapter 2. Dudeck agrees with Tim Duffy’s assessment that Music Maker designs each partnership based on the needs of each partner and delivers on addressing those needs. He appreciates that they “find out the needs of each individual artist” and continued by providing examples of different approaches the Music Maker team has adopted in working with artists. While many musicians have creatively partnered with Music Maker, Mudcat noted that “not everybody needs a record and not everybody wants a recording.” According to Dudeck, while “artist development” is a vital piece of the Music Maker mission, “everybody has different needs” and Music Maker has demonstrated a willingness to prioritize those needs unrelated to performance if that is what is most important to a partner artist. “Some people might need photos...Some people might need a

⁵¹ Ibid.

new house because everything burned down.” Mudcat’s descriptions of the various types of partnerships suggest that the open communication and listening described by Duffy are a reality. Duffy and Dudeck agree that the “ultimate goal” of these adaptable relationships is to “get these people active and living the good life.”⁵²

According to Tim Duffy, one of the most difficult parts of running Music Maker is raising money and deciding which projects the organization should pursue. In a 2005 radio feature on 91.5 WUNC, Duffy discussed both the triumphs and challenges of running Music Maker. As segment host, Alex Chadwick narrates, “In ten years, the Music Maker Relief Foundation has raised more than one million dollars from contributors big and small. They’ve helped more than one hundred musicians.” Despite the support from outside donors at this time, Duffy and his team were still faced with the difficult choice of deciding how many potential artists could become partners. “A lot of people,” he says, “find us, and actually too many people find us, and I really can’t help everybody, but a lot of the people have been wonderful.” Although this radio feature aired over 15 years ago, the same challenging choices about budgeting and artist partnerships must still be made. There are too many potential artists and not enough resources for all of them. Tim Duffy explained that the detail-oriented and personalized approach Music Maker uses is only possible with a smaller number of artists:

An asset and a problem with Music Maker is we go very deep with the people we take on. That takes a lot of time and a lot of resources, so you can't take on thousands of people. If we were not an arts organization and just an aid organization, we could do a lot. Alright, we're gonna give X amount of money, this amount a year to X amount of people. And every year we're going to grow that number. So, we could start with 25 people and 30 years later I'm helping 3,000 people a year, but since we are more of an arts organization...you can only take on so many projects that take years to do.⁵³

⁵² Beiter, Interview with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

⁵³ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

As exemplified in this quote, while the structure and style of Music Maker have been a tremendous asset to partner artists, they also present unique challenges as more people seek its help.

A Triple-Faceted Approach

The performance aspect of Music Maker's mission attracts fans and provides tangible results for musicians. Partner artists work with administrators to arrange gigs, perform at local events, and become part of larger tours. Music Maker partner artists often complete recording projects as well. In its 25 year history, the Music Maker label, sometimes in partnership with other record companies, has arranged 7,053 performances and released 2,428 songs with partner artists.⁵⁴ Tim Duffy's organization would be creating better careers for aging traditional artists if all it emphasized was performance; however, Music Maker's work with partner musicians is firmly rooted in a commitment to the whole person. Music Maker has a three-pronged approach to every interaction team members have with an artist that includes performance, education, and sustenance.

To fulfill the education component, Music Maker partners with universities and artistic institutions to organize exhibitions that show its artists and mission through photography and multimedia. While I was completing an internship Wikipedia update assignment, I explored the various educational opportunities Music Maker has created. For example:

In December of 2019, the Music Maker Relief Foundation partnered with Duke University to create Music Maker 25, a celebration of the non-profit's 25 years of success. The week-long program included musical performances by Music Maker artists, an exhibit of Tim Duffy's tintype photographs at Duke's Rubenstein Arts Center and a tintype workshop hosted by Duffy, and a film screening followed by a Q+A session with Lonnie Holly. Music Maker 25 and its music, exhibitions, and interactive experiences

⁵⁴ "Music Maker Relief Foundation - Preserving the Soul of America's Music."

showcased the scope and depth of Music Maker Relief Foundation’s commitment to people-centered preservation.⁵⁵

Music Maker shares its partner artists’ stories by connecting with universities and museums for exhibitions and multi-day programs. Duffy has donated his archive of correspondences, field recordings, and photographs to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill’s Southern Folklife Collection at the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. The commitment to storytelling and transparency in its educational efforts allows Music Maker to use its platform to ethically reproduce and share artists’ content.

Duffy has used his background in tintype photography to produce pieces for MMRF exhibitions, and he published those images in books that can be disseminated to a broader audience. In *Blue Muse*, Duffy characterizes his tintypes as “attempts to reclaim their subjects’ rightful status as the creators, custodians, purveyors, and performers of American music.”⁵⁶ This book gives insight into not only the lives of the talented musicians it features, but it also reveals Duffy’s motivations. He connects this independent photographic venture to the work of the Music Maker Relief Foundation. Both are about the preservation of a vibrant music culture that would otherwise be lost.

Another important piece of the Music Maker mission is sustenance and financial support. This program prioritizes assistance with everyday expenses. Music Maker avoids operating as a middleman. Duffy told *NPR* reporter Debbie Elliott, “If you want to talk about reparations, that’s what we do...We write the checks. ... We’re not afraid to give people cash.”⁵⁷ After a few

⁵⁵ “The Blues Never Die: Music Maker 25 Celebrates the South’s Legacy of Traditional Music - The Chronicle,” 25.

⁵⁶ Timothy Duffy, *Blue Muse: Timothy Duffy’s Southern Photographs* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, n.d.), ix.

⁵⁷ “Capturing The Undersung Blues People Of The Rural South,” *NPR.org*, accessed December

days working with Music Maker it becomes clear that one of their primary philosophies is trusting partner artists to use funds however best serves them. In his interview with James Calemine, Duffy expanded upon the necessity for sustenance as part of the Music Maker mission:

I learned quickly the record companies had no use for these kinds of people—or dealing with them in a correct manner. So, we started Music Maker Relief Foundation with our programs. For example, Musician’s Sustenance—you know people who live at an average income of \$18,000 a year can’t afford heat, electricity, food, medical, or whatever and the last thing on their mind is music. So, we try to help with that situation—monthly grants to help a lot of musicians who can’t play anymore and you don’t even hear about because they’re crippled or living in nursing homes.⁵⁸

Music Maker’s relationship with its partner artists does not stop when musicians are no longer able to perform.

Freeman Vines: The Person Behind the Music

One of the most effective ways to understand how Music Maker’s three-pronged mission operates is by examining one of its most prominent artists today. Freeman Vines, 78 lives on the same land in Greene County, North Carolina, where his family has lived since enslavement. Fifty years ago, he started making guitars from what he calls his forgotten landscape, some of which are made from a “hanging tree” where African Americans were lynched.⁵⁹ In 2015, Vines came into contact with Music Maker. Although it is a music organization, it does far more to help artists like Freeman Vines than release their music. Vines does not like to travel outside of North Carolina, and his physical ability to play guitar is declining, but Music Maker pays for his

1, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/07/738019387/capturing-the-undersung-blues-people-of-the-rural-south>.

⁵⁸ “Swampland: Tim Duffy: Music Maker Relief Foundation,” accessed December 2, 2020, http://swampland.com/articles/view/title:tim_duffy_music_maker_relief_foundation.

⁵⁹ Inge, “Aging Southern Musical Artists Celebrate 25 Years of Music Maker.”

diabetes medicine and found a platform for him to share his guitar collection. When COVID-19 made his scheduled exhibitions in London and South Carolina more challenging for a large audience to visit, Music Maker arranged for the photographs of Vines' guitar collection to be available online free of charge. There is also a book of the collection, which included Vines' story and philosophy, available under Freeman Vines' name with Duffy's photography included. The prioritization of recognition for artists rather than the celebrity of Music Maker or its administrators demonstrates how the organization delivers on its commitment to increasing artist agency. Music Maker's approach to helping artists such as Vines is rooted in its continued appreciation of his musical and guitar making talents, intellectual abilities, and commitment to his humanity.

The Music Maker Relief Foundation is dedicated to the music, the person, and the narratives of those it represents. Primarily a music organization, Music Maker has produced thousands of CDs. At the same time, it is committed to the people making the music. The Music Maker Relief Foundation remains dedicated to being a means by which these artists can make their own success. Lastly, the organization continues to provide spaces for its artists to share their experiences with the public. Its work is critical because it maintains the histories of blues and folk music and the lives of its musicians whose stories might otherwise be lost in their time and place. While other individuals and organizations have been valuable pieces of preserving southern art, Music Maker continues to maintain artist and community trust by being equally as dedicated to the long-term wellbeing of southern artists.

CHAPTER TWO: KEEPING THE ATLANTA BLUES ALIVE

Everything you hear today started with the blues.

—George Klein, Atlanta Blues Society Co-President⁶⁰

Connecting Hillsborough and Atlanta

Music Maker's invaluable work depends upon the continued discovery and support of talent and intergenerational collaboration. Some of the most important figures in this mission call Atlanta home. The non-profit's history with Atlanta blues musicians has positively impacted artists and the organization and represents potential for this symbiotic relationship to grow. In the early 1990's, the Music Maker Relief Foundation began a relationship with Atlanta musicians that would span decades, result in international tours, and produce dozens of albums. Over the past 25 years, Music Maker has used its global influence to support older Atlanta artists by providing them with sustenance grants, assisting with their daily needs, and helping them continue to make music and pass down their tradition to the next generation. In this chapter, I highlight the history, institutions, and individuals that have created and maintained a vibrant Atlanta blues network where Music Maker partner artists thrive and explore the possibilities for and challenges to continued partnerships between Atlanta musicians and the Music Maker Relief Foundation.

One of the greatest challenges to the partnerships between Music Maker and Atlanta artists is time. Unfortunately, many of Atlanta's iconic blues performers have passed away. They leave behind legacies for fans and musicians inside the city and across the world. As I researched and spoke to those formerly and currently active in the Atlanta blues network, it became evident

⁶⁰ George Klein, Interview with George Klein, interview by Claire Beiter, Phone, February 26, 2021.

that the artists lost over the past several decades continue to hold a special place in the hearts, minds, and music of venue owners, journalists, non-profit directors, and musicians. From those who interviewed artists decades ago to those who continue to perform, there is a sense of familial community among those who play and love the blues within Atlanta today. While Music Maker has impacted the lives of artists here the thing that seems to be missing is a partnership with an educational or artistic institution that would allow them to more consistently showcase their artists and exhibitions. As its current population of artists continues to grow older, there is an opportunity for the organization to expand its artist network and impact, and Atlanta is a perfect place for that to happen.

The Potential and Feasibility of a Second Office

In an ideal world, Music Maker would have offices scattered across the South and beyond and enough funding and staff to partner with talented musicians in towns across the globe. If this hypothetical expansion ever became possible, Atlanta would be a critically important location to include. When asked about the potential to open up a second Music Maker office in Atlanta Tim Duffy said:

If I had staffing and if it was really a true new deal going on, I would love to hire other folklife field researchers... go record and talk to people that would be amazing. Atlanta, that's one of the centers of the South, one of the centers of the new South. It'd be great to have, you know, real drivers, a whole team of African-American researchers going in their communities. If money was no limit, that would be a lot of fun.

While it is not financially or structurally feasible for Music Maker to have a second office at this time, Duffy sees the value of Atlanta as a musical hub.

Partner artist Danny "Mudcat" Dudeck agrees. "There are definitely a lot of artists right here in Atlanta and also just an hour and a half, two hours away."⁶¹ Dudeck also points out the

⁶¹ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #2 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

value of the city as a “place for other artists to travel through.”⁶² While a second office may not be in Music Maker’s near future, a partnership with an Atlanta artistic institution would allow for continued consistency in its work with the city’s artists. Dudeck thought that “some kind of relationship with like a theater and the High Museum” might be a way to “monthly, or every six weeks, do a show or some kind of series.”⁶³

Atlanta’s Rich Blues History

Atlanta’s vibrant musical history as a hotspot for blues recording is one indicator of its potential value as the location of a second Music Maker location. In his chapter, “The Development of the Blues,” David Evans describes how new sounds in the late nineteenth century became a part of African American music. As older sounds merged with jazz and ragtime music, the blues became its own unique style of performance that created a platform for Black Americans to have musical success. Evans begins by describing the cultural context in which the blues took shape. In rural areas, small towns, and cities in the Deep South, blues thrived among sharecroppers, migrants, temporary workers, “hobos and hustlers,” and imprisoned individuals.⁶⁴ During a time in which Jim Crow laws and racial terror prevented upward mobility for southern Blacks, blues provided a sense of individualism and survival.

Evans defines blues as a genre, pointing out some of its earliest characteristics: the use of blue notes, improvisation, and vocal techniques like growling and screaming. The spontaneity of the blues allowed for feelings to pour through its performance. Evans explains how blues

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Evans, David, “The Development of the Blues,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Blues and Gospel Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20.

asserted itself into popular culture and commanded the attention of its listeners: “The songs demanded to be taken seriously, thus causing their singers and the subculture they represented to be taken seriously as well.”⁶⁵ He outlines how the blues developed historically, explaining that its performers were influenced by the “hollers” of lone workers. Blues songs, however, were more structured than “hollers” and, in many ways, were influenced by Anglo-American ballads, spirituals, and congregational church singing. “John Henry” and “Jesse James” became characters that would propel black balladry into its peak popularity.

In the 1920s, Atlanta was gaining a reputation as an industrialized business hub within the South. Mayor Ivan Allen, Sr.’s “Forward Atlanta” campaign brought thousands of businesses to the city and developed it into an emerging participant in corporate life. Black businesses and organizations along Auburn Avenue enjoyed a small piece of this economic boom. Their success remained segregated from the rest of the city’s prosperity. This business separation was part of the white supremacy that infected Atlanta’s infrastructure. As Felix Harcourt writes in *White Supremacists Within: The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Atlanta*, “We must understand the Klan not simply as a social organization, but also as a cultural movement.”⁶⁶ The Imperial Palace, a robe manufacturing facility, Gate City Manufacturing, and the first Klan headquarters were everyday parts of the city’s landscape. The influence of the Klan stretched far beyond its physical presence. Atlantans could pick up a copy of *Searchlight* on newsstands or watch the Atlanta Klan baseball team play against the Georgia Railroad and Power Company. “Membership in the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 22

⁶⁶ Harcourt, Felix, “White Supremacists Within: The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Atlanta,” *Atlanta Studies*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.atlantastudies.org/2017/12/12/felix-harcourt-white-supremacists-within-the-ku-klux-klan-in-1920s-atlanta/>.

Invisible Empire,” observes Harcourt, “was no bar to participation in community life.”⁶⁷ While the normalization of Klan participation created a clear racial hierarchy, music blurred the lines of that power structure and created space for rural, Black, and female musicians to develop as artists and transform Atlanta into a recording hub.

In his chapter “Atlanta as a Regional Music Center” within *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880–1930*, Steve Goodson explores how the development of a distinct blues scene within Atlanta occurred during the rise of Jim Crow. Fiddling conventions helped draw talent to Atlanta and establish it as “the leading hillbilly and blues recording center of the 1920s.”⁶⁸ Despite the limitations imposed by the white commitment to racial hierarchy, the city’s music scene placed Black experiences into the mainstream in an unprecedented way. Decatur Street and venues like the 81 Theater provided a sense of community, belonging, and musical opportunity for free expression about love, loss, and triumph by Black musicians. One artist who highlights this expansion of Black experiences into popularly consumed music is Blind Willie McTell (1858-1959). In his documentary about McTell, David Fulmer points out that the blues legend first came to Atlanta because “he heard there was a market for the blues.”⁶⁹ McTell was part of a rural to urban migration in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Once in Atlanta, McTell gained a following as he sang about his experiences with injustice as a Black man in the segregated South. In “Death Cell Blues,” he laments that

⁶⁷ Harcourt, Felix.

⁶⁸ Steve. Goodson, Steve, “Atlanta as a Regional Music Center,” in *Highbrows, Hillbillies & Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta: 1880-1930* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2002), 172.

⁶⁹ Fulmer, David, *Blind Willie’s Blues*, Documentary, 1997.

“They got me killed for murder, and I haven't even harmed a man.”⁷⁰ Most white listeners however, would not listen to these songs or digest their meaning.

Atlanta became a hub for the blues and a creative environment where many eventual Music Maker artists would find their first fanbases. The early Atlanta music scene, however, in many ways mirrored the firm racial hierarchy within the city. White executives exploited Black recording artists, white journalists patronized working-class performers, and Black elite and religious populations frowned upon the “sinners” on Decatur Street. Goodson notes, “Ironically, in pursuit of profit, white record companies provided a national platform for the sometimes subversive messages of men and women at the bottom of the social hierarchy.”⁷¹ While racial and class structures of power continued to oppress Black and working-class individuals, music created a space in which these structures and their consequences could be spoken about and reflected upon to a degree.

The Atlanta Blues Society

Today, individuals and organizations like the Atlanta Blues Society are committed to keeping the city’s rich history of blues music alive. Their work has strengthened the collection of artists and venues with whom Music Maker could partner. The Atlanta Blues Society (ABS) website features a “Blues Legends” page. Online visitors can look at the page and observe the photographs and biographies of “timeless blues legends, now departed.”⁷² Of the remembered musicians listed on this page, the first four are Music Maker partner artists.

⁷⁰ Goodson, Steve, “Atlanta as a Regional Music Center,” 178.

⁷¹ Ibid, 178.

⁷² “Legends,” TheAtlanta Blues Society, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://atlantabluesociety.org/legends/>.

The Atlanta Blues Society began their work in 1995, a year after Music Maker. They are committed to keeping the blues alive within Atlanta. Co-president, George Klein, has been a member of the ABS since the early 2000's and has acted as either co-president or president for the past nine years. He characterizes the ABS as a non-profit "member-driven" organization.⁷³ Membership is open to anyone and costs \$30 per person or \$40 for a couple. According to Klein, "Everything we do is for our members."⁷⁴ The Atlanta Blues Society also partners with venues in Atlanta and in the surrounding area as they become ABS sponsors. For \$200 per year, a venue becomes a "gold sponsor," and in exchange they will be invited to the ten gatherings the organization hosts each month of the year except August and December. These meetings take place on Sundays from 3-6 and feature live music from local and visiting bands. "We pay one of our member bands to play for an hour and leave their gear there onstage" says Klein, "And then we have a jam for the next two hours. So, anybody who knows anything about us can come in, sign up, and get up and get their 15 minutes of fame."⁷⁵ The ABS monthly gatherings have free admission and the public is encouraged to come in, listen to music, and learn about the blues.

In August and December, the Atlanta Blues Society does not hold a meeting, but they continue to work with its sponsors and partners to provide opportunities for musicians and their fans. In August, the ABS holds its annual competition whose winners will represent the ABS in the Blues Foundation's International Blues Challenge the following January. The 12 acts chosen to compete for the ABS competition professionally record their 25 minute sets at a board member's recording studio. Klein described this opportunity for local musicians: "They're 25

⁷³ Klein, Interview with George Klein.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

minutes sets in high definition video, and fully mixed down multi-track audio on a DVD. So they can go market themselves. It's about \$2,000 worth of a freebie.”⁷⁶ The winners of each available category—band, solo, and youth—are also awarded more studio time and fully mastered tracks as a prize. In this challenge and the rest of their programming, the Atlanta Blues Society provides live and recorded performance opportunities as well as a sense of community.

After speaking with George Klein, it became clear that the organization maintains a balance of performance and education-focused projects in order to spread their musical mission to the next generation. In addition to partnering with libraries in and around Atlanta for special programming, the ABS also maintains a relationship with local middle schools for their Blues in Schools initiative. “We do Blues in Schools trying to educate mostly middle school kids on where the music they listened to today came from.”⁷⁷ Most of the music young people consume, from multiple genres, says Klein, can be traced back to the blues.

As a 501(c)(3) non-profit, the ABS has made substantial contributions to the Atlanta blues community, but they also maintain a commitment to the city of Atlanta as a whole. The ABS has raised money for cystic fibrosis research, participated in Toys for Tots, and was an instrumental voice in the fight to make Atlanta a smoke-free city at the beginning of 2020. “I went to city council twice, said my piece, and they approved it,” remembers Klein. “And so we had a big party and shindig at Blind Willie's after.”⁷⁸ Klein speaks about the blues like it is a part of him, fondly recalling performances, interactions with artists, and his strong relationships with

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

venues. Klein and the Atlanta Blues Society continue to be a voice for blues artists and the infrastructure that enables their success.

Venues Connecting Bands, Friends, and Fans

One of the most important pieces of keeping the blues alive in Atlanta is the network of established venues that are committed to showcasing the city's talent. Blind Willie's was founded in 1986 by Eric King and Robert Gregory. Thirty-five years later, what began as a "musician's project" has become a cornerstone of the Atlanta blues.⁷⁹ The 1997 "Blues Club of the Year" recipient has made many Atlantans into blues fans, including co-president of the Atlanta Blues Society, George Klein. Klein, now 76 and living in Marietta with his wife, served 20 years in the United States Navy and "never really heard blues" until 2000 when a trip to Chicago sparked a sense of appreciation for the genre.⁸⁰ When he and his wife returned to Atlanta, their friends suggested they go to "a place named Blind Willie's in Virginia Highlands."⁸¹ Klein joined the Atlanta Blues Society soon after and has continued to return to Blind Willie's regularly as a fan, promoter, and preserver of the Atlanta blues. Klein characterizes the club as an iconic location for the city's blues musicians: "it is literally Atlanta's home of the blues, and everybody who's anybody has played there at some point in time in their career."⁸² The Blind Willie's stage has been home to legends such as Bill Morgan and William Bell and continues to attract blues fans each night.

⁷⁹ "Blind Willie's History," accessed February 3, 2021, <http://www.blindwilliesblues.com/history.htm>.

⁸⁰ Klein, Interview with George Klein.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Holding equally as warm a spot in the hearts of Atlanta’s blues enthusiasts is Northside Tavern. Danny “Mudcat” Dudeck describes Northside Tavern as his “home base.” In 1992, Dudeck met owner Ellyn Web and quickly discovered she was committed to fair pay and respect for her bar’s musicians. Over the past three decades, he has played nearly weekly at “Atlanta’s best dive bar” and fostered community with older Atlanta blues legends in the process. Dudeck described his experience learning from older artists as “like going to school.”⁸³ “You may have like a natural inclination for something, but then you go to school and they can define it.”⁸⁴ Mudcat was able to develop a rapport with other artists and fans after years of busking all over the southeast and discovering “what grabs people,” but he credits performing regularly with older artists at places like Northside Tavern as an important part of his continued learning.⁸⁵

The same sense of intergenerational respect and love of blues music fills the atmosphere at Fat Matt’s Rib Shack. Fat Matt’s catering coordinator, Cindi, has been working at the “mom & pop” spot for ribs, barbecue, and blues for the last seven years.⁸⁶ Cindi’s husband is a good friend of co-owner Matt. When Matt asked him to start catering, Cindi assisted with orders before taking the helm after his retirement. As she speaks about her work at the restaurant, a sense of feeling at home permeates her stories. Fat Matt’s is “one of the most trusted barbecue restaurants in Atlanta.”⁸⁷ Matt and co-owner Wes “take care of their employees,” says Cindi,

⁸³ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #1 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Cindi, Fat Matt’s Interview, interview by Claire Beiter, Phone, February 26, 2021.

⁸⁷ “Fat Matt’s Rib Shack,” accessed March 1, 2021, <http://www.fatmattsribshack.com/>.

which has led many members of the staff to stay at Fat Matt's for over ten years.⁸⁸ That longevity is also true for many of Fat Matt's performers, including the regulars who play there each month.⁸⁹ Many Music Maker artists have played at Fat Matt's including Beverly "Guitar" Watkins, Albert White, Eddie Tigner, and Mudcat.⁹⁰

The Dudecks and the Intergenerational Blues

Perhaps the biggest asset to Music Maker's work in Atlanta and its potential to continue to meet artists in the city is the Dudecks. Danny "Mudcat" Dudeck has been an integral part of the Music Maker Relief Foundation since the 1990's. He has recorded multiple albums, served on its advisory board, and toured both throughout the United States and abroad. As I sat over Zoom interviewing Danny and his wife, Kathryn, I could not help but notice the walls behind them, adorned with dozens of photographs, album covers, and letters. Not wanting to seem too eager, I cautiously asked Mudcat if he would mind telling me a bit about the people on the wall behind him. Over several hours that week, Danny and Kathryn told an entire history of their time in Atlanta and the blues artists who have developed a community of musicians over the last century. As Danny told me about his friendships with many of the people I had heard about in my time interning with the Music Maker Relief Foundation, I began to see the deep connection the organization has had with the city of Atlanta and the creation of second acts for its older musicians over the past 25 years. Many of these artists played alongside stars like B.B King in the mid-twentieth century but never received the recognition they deserved. Nearly half a century later, the Music Maker Relief Foundation is trying to change that. In conducting my research, I

⁸⁸ "Fat Matt's Rib Shack."

⁸⁹ Fat Matt's Interview.

have gained a better understanding of the Atlanta artists whose names and faces adorn Mudcat's home studio, how their lives intersect with Music Maker, and the continued work that might place more musicians' stories upon the Dudeck wall.

Mudcat is a blues musician in his 50s who grew up in St. Paul Minnesota before moving to Tybee Island with his mother at age ten. During high school, Dudeck taught himself to play a few chords and began busking in Savannah and Augusta. He continued to travel throughout the South, playing street corners and small gigs before landing in Atlanta at age 22. He described when he first arrived in Atlanta, noting:

Well, you know, I'd been busking and traveling around a bunch and I decided I needed to plant roots somewhere and then circumstances ended up where my van broke down in Athens, Georgia. And I had a high school friend that went to Georgia Tech... so from circumstance, I decided to come stay with him and I got a job at Greenpeace. The next day, I saw an ad in *Creative Loafing* looking for a harmonica player, looking for an acoustic guitar player.⁹¹

As he went on to remember, within an hour of arriving in Atlanta, Mudcat had quit his job at Greenpeace and made a musical connection that would begin his three-decade-long career in the city

Mudcat's style is a combination of the blues and country music he consumed growing up. He frequently incorporates slide guitar and fingerpicking, and his impressive vocal range stretches from the floor to hollers at the ceiling. He has a way of relating to the audiences for whom he performs and his vibrant performance style and emphasis on storytelling have earned him a supportive local fanbase as well as in the places he has travelled internationally with the Music Maker Relief Foundation. Over the years as Dudeck performed throughout the city he

⁹¹ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #1 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

befriended many of the older musicians who were pioneers of the blues and became Atlanta legends in the mid-twentieth century.

Danny and Kathryn, who has also become incredibly active in the Atlanta music scene as a friend and organizer, gradually built friendships with these now older artists. They have tried to share their friends' talents with younger artists and fans to allow their music to continue to be passed down like it was to Danny Dudeck. When asked about the importance of helping their fellow musicians, Danny and Kathryn explained, "I think personally if it makes an artist feel important. Feel like they have a legacy. Something is carrying on."⁹² The Dudecks heavily emphasized the importance of respect in their relationships with their older musician friends. They described that "Back when they were recording regularly, most of them were not getting royalties from their recordings. They weren't paid well for the performances."⁹³ They use this past appropriation to guide their work and friendships. "If we can help you get what you should have gotten back then," says Danny, "then we want you to know that we respect you, your music, what you do."⁹⁴ The Dudecks have worked diligently over the past three decades to promote and partner with older artists who did not receive the economic or professional agency they deserved early in their careers; the festivals, performances, and albums that have resulted are merely a byproduct of the genuine friendships that began between Mudcat and other artists through music.

New Friends, Northside Tavern, and Festivals for the Next Generation

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

One of the Dudecks' longest friendships was with blues pianist and songwriter Eddie Tigner, who Mudcat began inviting to play with him at Northside Tavern as he became a regular performer. The duo learned from each other. "He's taught me to take my time," says Danny. "There's no rush, really. He reminds us that it feels good to be back here."⁹⁵ In 2016, *Atlanta Magazine* published an article spotlighting Dudeck and Tigner's personal and musical bond. "They seem like an unlikely duo," writes Barry Yeoman, "two musicians four decades apart, whose styles and personal histories have little in common."⁹⁶ Eddie Tigner played along Decatur Street in the prime of Atlanta blues and traveled nationally with the band The Ink Spots. In all of their years of performing together, Dudeck remained committed to giving Tigner respect and maintaining their friendship until his death in 2019. This dedication to learning from and working alongside older artists led Dudeck to start his Giving It Back festivals at Northside Tavern in 1995. Each year the proceeds supported a living artist and commemorated one who had passed away in order to preserve their legacy and pass it down to the next generation.

Giving It Back festivals soon developed into Chicken Raid, a two-day expansion of the same performances dedicated to the support of older artists that began in 2002. Mudcat recalled, "I was like we have all these people but we don't have clubs putting them in the front and charging a bunch, but it seems like we could do something with this."⁹⁷ Younger bands, including Dudeck's own, would play for free so that all proceeds could be given to older artists

⁹⁵ Bernard Yeoman, "Musicians Eddie Tigner and Daniel 'Mudcat' Dudeck Forged a Friendship through Some Real-Life Blues," *Atlanta Magazine*, February 24, 2016, <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/great-reads/musicians-eddie-tigner-and-daniel-mudcat-dudeck-forged-a-friendship-through-some-real-life-blues/>.

⁹⁶ Yeoman.

⁹⁷ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #2 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

such as Frank Edwards, whose song of the same name inspired the festival. Edwards was born in Washington, Georgia, in 1909, where he lived until age 14 when he left for St. Augustine, Florida. He traveled extensively throughout the 1930's before moving to Atlanta, where he would become a blues legend. In his 90 year career, Frank Edwards formed close relationships with other Atlanta bluesmen and blueswomen, including Mudcat, Beverly "Guitar" Watkins, and Cora Mae Bryant. Dudeck notes, "I started making phone calls and nobody said no. Everybody said, 'Yeah, that's a great idea. Let's do it.'"⁹⁸ The Chicken Raid Festivals have two stages that alternate sets, ensuring that the music never stops. Over time, more and more mentors joined the lineup, and the festivals grew into a type of celebration of music and performers both young and old.

Perhaps one of the most influential members of Mudcat's Atlanta musicians' network is Beverly "Guitar" Watkins. Watkins was born in Atlanta on April 6, 1939 and began learning to play guitar at the age of nine. She broke into the music business after graduating from high school and joining Piano Red's band, Dr. Feelgood and the Interns. Named for Curtis Smith's radio persona, the band recorded "Dr. Feelgood" in 1961. The song shot the group to stardom and was picked up by the Beatles on their 1964 album *Beatles for Sale*. In 1985, Beverly "Guitar" Watkins began playing at Underground Atlanta, where she would meet Danny "Mudcat" Dudeck. In a *Guitar Player* feature on Watkins, the author notes that "There, for the first time, she played and sang, honing her act for better times ahead."⁹⁹ Watkins and Dudeck

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ "Beverly "Guitar" Watkins.," *Guitar Player*, 2020, <https://login.proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/magazines/beverly-guitar-watkins/docview/2329717732/se-2?accountid=10747>.

formed a musical partnership and a friendship as both performed throughout the city in places like Fat Matt's and Northside Tavern. Kathryn Dudeck recalls, "And Beverly would be up there playing and honestly her guitar was ever so slightly out of tune, and so, Danny would go up and tune her guitar and ask 'Can I perform with you?'"¹⁰⁰ Mudcat plugged her into the Music Maker Relief Foundation's network, which took her around the United States and abroad and later released her 1999 album *Back in Business*. On the title track, Watkins can be heard listing off her "good time friends" with whom she is "back in business." She sings, "I got Eddie, I got Mudcat," showcasing the importance that Eddie Tigner and Danny "Mudcat" Dudeck held in her musical career.¹⁰¹

Cora Mae Bryant was born in Newton County in 1926. Before her death in 2008, Bryant carried on the legacy of her "guitar-wizard" father, Curley Weaver.¹⁰² Bryant learned to play the guitar and sing the blues from her father and his friend Blind Willie McTell. In an interview with James Calemine, Cora Mae Bryant also noted the importance spirituals played in her musical development, describing "when I come up in the church I heard all these spirituals being sung."¹⁰³ Mudcat was first introduced to Cora Mae Bryant at a blues barbecue where the two formed a friendship that spanned decades. Bryant began to pass down her musical legacy to Dudeck, who continues to play songs that he learned from her today.

¹⁰⁰ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #1 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

¹⁰¹ Beverly Watkins, *Back in Business*, 1999, Spotify, 1999.

¹⁰² "Cora Mae Bryant," *Music Maker Relief Foundation* (blog), accessed December 10, 2020, <https://musicmaker.org/artists/cora-mae-bryant/>.

¹⁰³ James Calemine, "Cora Mae Bryant: Born In Newton County – Snake~Nation~Press," January 10, 2019, <http://snakenation.press/cora-mae-bryant-born-in-newton-county>.

The musical legacy of the blues within Cora Mae Bryant’s family became widely known as her home in Oxford, Georgia paid tribute to her father and the bluesmen with whom he performed. In what became a sort of museum, Kathryn Dudeck recalls, “Her house was completely decorated with Xerox copies from, well now it's FedEx. Back then it was Kinko's...Xerox copies of articles about her dad, and Buddy Moss, and all of the musicians that her dad used to perform with.”¹⁰⁴ Cora Mae Bryant was an integral part of Mudcat’s network of Atlanta musicians who continues to have a lasting legacy both for the Dudecks and her local community.

Bringing the Piedmont to Piedmont Ave

In order to understand Mudcat’s relationship with his friends and partners in Atlanta, it is important to explore his and his wife’s commitment to public scholarship and making their network of artists’ stories accessible. Kathryn Dudeck is no stranger to sharing her expertise with her community. As the Wildlife Director for the Chattahoochee Nature Center, Kathryn has educated the public through experiential learning. She has brought her expansive knowledge of plant and animal life to Medlock Park, the “nearly 40 acre neighborhood located in unincorporated DeKalb County” where she and Danny live.¹⁰⁵ The Dudecks continue this mission to share their passions and knowledge on their podcast covering sustainable agriculture and music, “The Piedmont Report.” While Mudcat is a man of the Delta blues, he has a deep appreciation for the Piedmont region and the music and culture that comes out of it. There are elements of the Piedmont blues style, like finger-picking and the integration of country and blues

¹⁰⁴ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #2 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

¹⁰⁵ Andrea Greengard, “Kathryn Dudeck: Hawk Hero,” *Mindful Living Network* (blog), June 25, 2019, <https://mindfullivingnetwork.com/kathryn-dudeck-hawk-hero/>.

sounds, that are very present in Mudcat's personal style. The Piedmont is a region steeped in musical tradition including "shape-note hymnals, love ballads, and fiddle tunes," and these traditions grew out of scattered small farms where most landowners cultivated their own crops.¹⁰⁶

The podcast began as a project to share the little known history of the Piedmont's music and agriculture with a broader public. The Dudecks own a garden called Hoopoe Acres at their personal address in Medlock Park. "The Piedmont Report" is often broadcast live from Hoopoe Acres and emphasizes the connection between agriculture and traditional music. Danny Dudeck described his thought process creating the podcast as wanting to provide more information about farming and his friends to his audience. "I've been complaining that nobody knows what it is," he said, "So let's see what we can do about it."¹⁰⁷ The episodes available online cover everything from gardening tips to live recordings at community organizations to unreleased acoustic sessions by local artists such as Eddie Tigner.

Much like the rest of his efforts to connect with older artists, Mudcat's podcast is a labor of love designed showcase the art and stories of his friends and share history and tips for growing food. "Because it's a hundred percent out of love, trying to promote people you know," says Danny, "I do my best. Even to keep the name Mudcat off, even though that originally was supposed to be a selling point."¹⁰⁸ Mudcat's podcast is not about self-promotion or making money; it is a publication devoted to sharing music and information.

¹⁰⁶ Allen Tullos, "The Carolina Piedmont," *Southern Spaces*, July 2004, <https://doi.org/doi:10.18737/M7VW21>.

¹⁰⁷ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #2 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

The Music Maker Relief Foundation and the Expansion of the Atlanta Network

Danny Dudeck recalls when he first met Music Maker's Tim Duffy and began putting him in contact with the older musicians who had become his friends. "We began a relationship and plugged in a bunch of artists right away because the whole thing was trust. You know these people I'd gained their trust somehow and that jumped Tim up ahead in these relationships quite a bit. I could say, 'Look, I trust this guy.'"¹⁰⁹ Music Maker was able to begin working with Atlanta artists through the trust that the Dudecks had built with older artists for years before. As a result, Music Maker's partner artists in Atlanta have been taken around the world and lived out their second acts as musicians.

Duffy remembers meeting Danny Dudeck in 1991 when he was still working with Guitar Gabriel. He recognized the importance of Mudcat's influence in getting to know the Atlanta network of musicians, explaining, "Mudcat was a young guy. I met him in 1991 playing in Atlanta with Gabe, and he introduced me to a lot of artists down there."¹¹⁰ As they have continued to work together over the past 30 years, Duffy and Dudeck have maintained a musical partnership that resulted in the discovery of new talent. "I find people wherever I stick my nose," says Duffy. "I think one leads to the other. Mudcat played a place called the Northside Tavern. So he was kind of like my friend that was our talent scout and on our board of directors and always directed me to a lot of people in Atlanta."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Frank Edwards, Eddie Tigner, Cora Mae Bryant, and Beverly “Guitar” Watkins’s partnerships with Music Maker led to recording opportunities, personal support, and expansive tours. In her second wave of musical activity with Music Maker, Beverly “Guitar” Watkins toured around the world, was featured in numerous books and publications. Frank Edwards first became connected to Timothy Duffy in 1995 and later worked with Music Maker again after ten years of retirement. During their partnership, Edwards recorded a CD and is featured in the book, *Music Makers: Portraits and Songs from the Roots of America*. Eddie Tigner joined the Music Maker network in 1998 and began traveling around the United States with the Music Maker Blues Revue. He has cut two albums with Music Maker, *Route 55* and *Slippin’ In*, and been featured in books and a documentary. Cora Mae Bryant was a Music Maker partner artist until she passed away in 2008. She received sustenance grants for her prescription medicine and utility bills, and recorded three CD’s. She is featured in the book *Music Makers: Portraits and Songs from the Roots of America*. Beverly “Guitar” Watkins toured with Music Maker until her death in 2019 and increasingly gained widespread celebrity status. Near the end of her life, Watkins was featured as a “guitar slinging granny” on the television shows of celebrities like Harry Connick, Jr. and Steve Harvey. Many of these videos on YouTube have been watched by hundreds of thousands. Duffy expresses a sense of frustration that many of these views came after Watkins had passed away: “Every other word out of my mouth was Beverly ‘Guitar’ Watkins for ten years and now she’s passed. And this is what kind of makes me mad. She has over a million views on certain YouTube videos and people know her and write about her. Where were you the first five years I was doing this?”¹¹²

¹¹² Ibid.

Music Maker has played a critical role in having these Atlanta artists experience international performance. Klein, Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck, and Duffy all agree that there are many opportunities for blues artists outside of the United States. “The blues in Europe is huge,” says Klein. “Most of the touring blues artists who are really good tour probably four to five months a year, somewhere in there, because they can make so much more money over there.”¹¹³ Music Maker has made the warm reception of the blues in Europe a reality for Atlanta artists. Duffy fondly recalls his time abroad with several Atlanta artists: “Take these guys that couldn't get a gig and go to Switzerland and try to be in a piazza in front of 3,000 people, and people are going nuts. And it's really incredible.”¹¹⁴ Without their partnerships with Music Maker, many artists would not have the connections or financial means to tour internationally.

Reflecting upon the most active time for the Music Maker-Atlanta partnership, Tim Duffy states:

None of those artists were known at all...that's, that's the problem with this music. And these guys create timeless music, which is great. It can be picked up 40 years from now and still be great, and people get interested. But my whole thing is like, I try to get them interested while everyone's alive. I think they all had fun. We all played Lincoln Center together and traveled the world. We really had some good times. I really enjoyed those Georgia artists and I still do.¹¹⁵

While Music Maker still maintains partnerships with artists in Atlanta, a significant number of its most active partner artists have passed away. The organization now must decide how to chart a new course in the city and continue to find the talent that exists at Fat Matt's on a Friday night, an Atlanta Blues Society monthly meeting, or Mudcat's Chicken Raid festivals.

¹¹³ Klein, Interview with George Klein.

¹¹⁴ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion: Working Together to Preserve the Atlanta Blues

Allowing the blues to thrive and continue to be passed down begins with the musicians. Mudcat, Frank Edwards, Eddie Tigner, Beverly “Guitar” Watkins, and Cora Mae Bryant are pioneers of American music and there is no tradition to preserve without them. Keeping the blues alive continues within the venues and organizations that provide these artists with a platform within the city. Music Maker has used its global influence to connect the Atlanta blues network with fans and opportunities across the United States and around the world. Together, these individuals and groups are keeping an invaluable musical past alive. Should it ever become possible for Music Maker to deepen its relationship within a second city through an office or partnership, Atlanta would be the ideal location.

CHAPTER THREE: PANDEMIC ERA PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

You know, they want to fish. They don't want to be given the fish. [Performing] is really good for their self-esteem and really good for their well-being.

—Danny “Mudcat” Dudeck¹¹⁶

When the research process began in January 2020, this thesis was intended to rely upon attending concerts, visiting Music Maker in-person, and speaking face-to-face with artists and administrators to explore the organization. In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic shifted all aspects of life, the act of participating in and learning about a group centered around intrapersonal connection and performance also needed to change. While not an original topic of inquiry, this project cannot comprehensively address Music Maker’s contemporary impact without acknowledging and grappling with the enormous burden the COVID-19 pandemic has placed upon the organization, its partner artists, and its adaptation to best serve their increased need. What does it mean to run a performing-arts non-profit or to be a performer at a time when performance is nearly impossible?

In the past year, the barriers that hinder the continued expansion of Music Maker in Atlanta have been made infinitely stronger by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, music lovers have watched as artists are forced to cancel shows, postpone tours, and delay album releases. There is a palpable sense of melancholic grief that can be felt when driving past an empty concert hall or lifeless music club. Tragically, many music venues in Atlanta and beyond that were once filled with vibrancy and excitement have been forced to close their doors permanently. What the future holds for the players and purveyors of music is an uncertain and daunting imaginary, but it is one for which the Music Maker Relief Foundation and its partner

¹¹⁶ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #2 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

artists must attempt to prepare. Every aspect of the Music Maker mission—education, performance, and sustenance—has had to adapt to meet this moment. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented challenges upon the entertainment industry, and venues, artists, and non-profits like Music Maker have been forced to develop new strategies in order to survive.

Lost Performances and Vacant Venues

Perhaps the most noticeable challenge for performing artists as a result of COVID-19 is the cancellation of the vast majority of live shows. As of April 22, 2020, *Forbes Magazine's* online tracker estimated that over 83 million attendees around the world had been affected by an in person entertainment event being moved online, postponed, or cancelled.¹¹⁷ While this statistic focuses on the audience experience and has only grown as the pandemic continues, it is necessary to consider that each cancelled event is also a detrimental loss to the artist. According to the Center for Disease Control, two of the groups at the highest risk for COVID-19 are older adults and people with medical conditions.¹¹⁸ Because many Music Maker partner artists fall into these categories, artists and administrators must constantly be calculating risk. On the non-profit's Facebook page, Music Maker's social worker, Brittany Anderson, noted that "What I've found is that 2020 really took a toll on our artists. Just in a regular environment, as it was pre-COVID, they were already kind of struggling to make ends meet because they're older, and their primary source of income was gigs. They were already kind of an underserved population

¹¹⁷ Carter Coudriet, "Coronavirus Cancellation Tracker: More Than 83 Million Affected After Events Cancelled Or Rescheduled," *Forbes*, April 22, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/cartercoudriet/2020/03/10/covid-19-coronavirus-cancellation-tracker/?sh=6bd2e0e767ba>.

¹¹⁸ Goodson, Steve, "Atlanta as a Regional Music Center."

making little to nothing almost.”¹¹⁹ Music Maker estimates that in 2019 and early 2020, 83% of partner artists were performing paid gigs regularly.¹²⁰ As the pandemic continues, increased vaccination opportunities and the scheduling of more performances offers a sense of hope for the future.

However, once artists are able to perform shows for a live audience, there is no guarantee that the venues that have traditionally been home to those performances will still be in business. Without revenue from consistent shows and regularly planned special events, venues across the world have been forced to shut their doors. In the Atlanta area, several venues, including The Music Room and The Vista Room, are now permanently closed. Atlanta Blues Society co-president, George Klein, reflected on the impact of these losses: “The sad news is there's a lot of touring artists that are going to really suffer whenever this thing does finally lift, because venues all over the country aren't there anymore.”¹²¹ For the businesses that have so far survived the COVID-19 pandemic, there continue to be increased financial stresses and uncertainty. Fat Matt’s Rib Shack, for example, has transitioned to being take-out only. Fat Matt’s catering director, Cindi, estimates that she lost around 65% to 70% of her business as many of the large gatherings she typically caters have been cancelled.¹²² Cindi said that the venue has stayed in contact with many of their regular performers and reminisced about the musical atmosphere that is an important part of the Fat Matt’s experience. She recalled, “Matt’s at night just has a nice

¹¹⁹ “Music Maker Relief Foundation - Home | Facebook,” accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/MusicMakerReliefFoundation>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Klein, Interview with George Klein.

¹²² Fat Matt’s Interview.

feel to it with the bands playing, and so we terribly miss that part.”¹²³ While artists and fans await the return of live music, venues must attempt to find innovative ways to stay afloat, which are sometimes still not enough to keep their doors open.

Facebook Livestreams and Virtual Festivals Provide Hope and Connection

Some Music Maker partner artists have begun to consistently perform online to stay connected to their fan bases and practice their art. Danny “Mudcat” Dudeck, for example, hosts three Facebook livestreams a week. On Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, fans can log on and watch him perform an hour of music, often accompanied by the stories and humor that make Mudcat an exceptional performer whether online or in-person. Dudeck began posting content online in the wake of the “uncertain” times that had “everybody freaking out.”¹²⁴ He first started posting one-minute videos to Instagram and received a positive response from fans who would say, “Well, thank you, thank you for doing this. And I’m a nurse or I’m a healthcare worker and this gets me through the day.”¹²⁵ Dudeck then began posting on Facebook once a week on Wednesdays. The performances allowed for a sort of virtual version of his twenty-five year tradition of playing on Wednesdays at Northside Tavern. He then added Friday and Saturday performances. Audience members of the virtual shows not only see Mudcat’s brilliance as a musician, but the shows also have a welcoming and familial environment. Danny Dudeck often calls out friends and fans he sees to say hello, Kathryn Dudeck responds to comments in the chat, and everyone in attendance seems genuinely happy to be present in the online space.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #1 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

While Mudcat has had success on the virtual stage, he pointed out that many older artists may not be able to begin that process. He acknowledged, “They just don't have the knowledge, necessarily, or the technology, to do live concerts on Facebook or whatever platform they want to use.”¹²⁶ Kathryn and Danny emphasized that the most important thing for older artists is “keeping them active” and able to play regularly, and that COVID-19 has made that more difficult than ever before.¹²⁷ The Dudecks felt that older artists could benefit from check-ins to make sure they have the necessary resources to adapt to an online platform. They described, “I think it's important to reach out and make sure they have the day-to-day supplies that they need...the physical items they need, as well as the mental appreciation and stimulation. I wonder if somebody could teach them how to do a mobile or online concert.”¹²⁸

One of the primary adaptations Music Maker has made during the pandemic is increased support of artists as they participate in online performances. The Dedicated Men of Zion's globalFEST performance was one example of this shift from in-person to online performance. Partner artists the Dedicated Men of Zion are a family gospel band from North Carolina who despite the unprecedented challenges of 2020, have managed to have a different, but impressive, year. “In July, the four-man group from eastern North Carolina released their debut album, *Can't Turn Me Around*, which received rave reviews from *NPR Music* and *Americana Highways*.”¹²⁹ It has been difficult for the band to share their songs off the album with a live audience, but they

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Claire Beiter, “GlobalFEST Adapts to Global Pandemic, The Dedicated Men of Zion Prepare for Virtual Performance” (Internship Project, October 21, 2020).

performed at several notable online festivals including the Telluride Blues & Brews 2020 Virtual Festival Fundraiser in September. An October 2020 article for Music Maker called “globalFEST Adapts to Global Pandemic, The Dedicated Men of Zion Prepare for Virtual Performance” further explored the unique challenges the band faced as they prepared for this opportunity:

The Dedicated Men of Zion are slated to perform at globalFest 2021 in January, but the COVID-19 pandemic will make the festival look quite different this year. The globalFEST flagship festival has been one of North America's most influential music industry events since its creation in 2003. Amid many concert cancellations and reschedulings, globalFest has moved online, giving musicians selected from around the world an opportunity to submit video recordings and perform virtually. For artists like the Dedicated Men of Zion, being invited to globalFEST 2021 both represents a great honor and highlights the challenges that performing artists face in a time when the music industry has been shaken to its core.¹³⁰

This excerpt demonstrates that the shift to an online event has been both an exciting and challenging experience for globalFest and the artists slated to perform there. globalFEST, and the exposure to over 1500 music industry professionals, members of the press, and fans it provides, has given Music Maker artists a life changing platform in the past. As I stated in my internship report in fall 2020, “For the Carolina Chocolate Drops, a 2007 set at globalFEST acted as a sort of launchpad for what would lead to Grammy-winning success.”¹³¹ The Dedicated Men of Zion’s manager and former Music Maker program manager, Aaron Greenhood, provided insight into the triumphs and challenges of planning for an online opportunity like globalFEST. He explained that since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Music Maker has been very cautious in their interactions with partner artists, as any event could expose musicians or recording teams to

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

the virus. The Music Maker team must constantly calculate risk as they complete any project that requires gathering, like recording a performance for globalFEST.¹³²

Ultimately, the January 2021 virtual globalFEST was a successful event that exposed audiences and industry members to many talented artists including the Dedicated Men of Zion. globalFEST partnered with NPR to create a 4-night virtual concert entitled Tiny Desk Meets globalFEST. Performers submitted their virtual sets which were then compiled into mini concerts with 3 other artists. In the introduction for the Dedicated Men of Zion’s opening set on the first night of performances, artist and host Angélique Kidjo welcomes the viewers to the 18th year of globalFEST. She then thanks NPR Music for helping globalFEST in their mission to “break down cultural and social boundaries by moving international music into the center of the performing arts field and into your world.”¹³³ Kidjo continues by acknowledging the toll of the pandemic on the festival and recognizes that while this year of globalFEST looks different, its mission continues online.

The Dedicated Men of Zion open the night from their “backyard barbecue in eastern North Carolina.”¹³⁴ They begin with the electric “Father, Guide Me, Teach Me,” and the virtual platform becomes almost unnoticeable as their powerful harmonies and enthusiasm transcend the screen. After the first song, the viewer is welcomed to “Dex’s backyard” by vocalist Antwan Daniels. He thanks the virtual audience and says, “We are the Dedicated Men of Zion and during this pandemic, this is what we’ve been doing. We can’t see you just yet, but when we come back

¹³² Claire Beiter, “Notes from Meeting With Aaron,” October 7, 2020.

¹³³ NPR Music, *Tiny Desk Meets GlobalFEST: Dedicated Men Of Zion, Labess, Sofia Rei & DakhaBrakha*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUF2yr7CC4w>.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

live I hope to see all your smiling faces there.”¹³⁵ Daniels invites the viewer in by describing the “wonderful” smell in Dex’s “office” before turning it over to Anthony Daniels to introduce the next song. Daniels highlights the special meaning in “Can’t Turn Me Around,” saying, “With all of this stuff going on now, hey look, we can’t let nothing turn us around. We’re gonna keep right on headed in the right direction.”¹³⁶ In the middle of the song, Anthony Daniels adds in a sung reflection on the meaning of this song to him, singing, “I love this song right here. Every time I sing this song right here, I have to let the whole world know about it. Yes, I do. See, have you ever been burdened? Have you ever been lonely?” before returning to the main theme of the song “I won’t let nothing turn me around.”¹³⁷ “Can’t Turn Me Around” and the Dedicated Men of Zion’s passionate performance of it highlight the struggles of being a performing artist during the pandemic, but also illuminate the hope and perseverance that fuels their continued work. They begin their last song in the set, “It’s a Shame” by sharing their gratitude for the day and introducing each member of the band. The song repeats the line “It’s a shame how this world has changed” and beautifully explores the trying aspects of life and relationships. As a viewer, it is hard not to think about the repeating theme of struggle and change in the context of the pandemic and its impact on artists. At the end of the song, the screen cuts to video credits, which include Aaron Greenhood and Cornelius Lewis, two former longtime members of the Music Maker team. The Dedicated Men of Zion’s globalFEST performance powerfully recognizes the difficulties of being a musical group at this time and uses sensory imagery through song and setting to transcend those difficulties and connect with their virtual audience.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

In 2020, Music Maker regularly shared performances and stories, like the Dedicated Men of Zion’s globalFEST debut, with its social media followings. While scrolling through their Instagram and Facebook pages, viewers can see old photographs of partner artists accompanied by their stories. In a similar effort to share online and in-person performances with their network of fans, the Atlanta Blues Society developed an effective weekly calendar. Each Tuesday, the ABS shares a list of all performances of which they were aware. Atlanta Blues Society co-president, George Klein, described this effort:

“We send a digital calendar out every Tuesday, and normally it’s full of live music. Unfortunately, when this stuff started there, you know, live music all stopped. So, what we did well and we still do it okay is everything we can do for our members and for people who are involved with us. But we didn’t feel that was fair, given all of this going on. So, we literally advertise every week, saying everything we know that is going on anywhere in the blues.”¹³⁸

Klein and the ABS’s efforts have successfully attracted virtual and live audiences to performances both large and small. Outside of the calendar each week, there are even more frequent updates about performances given on Facebook. While Music Maker has been posting regularly about its partner artists and larger performances like globalFEST, it might be helpful to its network if smaller livestream efforts by partner artists could also be shared. For example, Mudcat’s hours of music on Facebook could be reposted by Music Maker as part of a weekly calendar to showcase the individual efforts of its artists as well.

Educating a Mostly Online Public

The shift to online learning and information consumption in 2020 has also impacted storytelling within the Music Maker network. In the past 25 years, there have been four Music Maker exhibitions: *We Are the Music Makers*, Tim Duffy’s *Blue Muse*, *Our Living Past*, and

¹³⁸ Klein, Interview with George Klein.

Freeman Vines' *Hanging Tree Guitars*. Music Maker exhibitions are intended to be put in frequently visited public spaces to engage with a wide audience. Tim Duffy noted, "Some of them are huge for A-class museums, but most of them aren't. That's on purpose because we want to get this art seen by regular people in their communities."¹³⁹ In the past year, the concept of accessible physical exhibitions that Duffy values has been rendered nearly impossible. Five years ago, from November 2015 to January 2016, *Our Living Past* was displayed at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta airport. The exhibition showcased Music Maker partner artists through photography and multimedia while encouraging viewers to reflect upon the causes for these musicians' limited exposure. 2020's Hartsfield-Jackson looks very different from the bustling airport that was home to *Our Living Past*. At a time when many are encouraged to stay away from heavily trafficked locations, the world's busiest airport is no longer the perfect spot for an exhibition that it was in 2015.

Despite the impossibility of hosting many in-person exhibitions, Music Maker has found new ways to fulfill its commitment to education through a select number of in-person and online experiences. Luckily, Freeman Vines' collection, *Hanging Tree Guitars*, has been able to continue its tour across the United States. The exhibition premiered at the Greenville Museum of Art in July 2020 and will next go to Winston-Salem, NC, and Portsmouth, VA. The exhibition was created in partnership with Music Maker and is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.¹⁴⁰ Beginning in April 2021, *Our Living Past* is scheduled to

¹³⁹ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

¹⁴⁰ "Freeman Vines Collection" *Freeman Vines Hanging Tree Guitars*, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://exhibit.hangingtreeguitars.com/hanging-tree-guitars-collection/>.

be on display at the Birthplace of Country Music in Bristol, Virginia, through September 2021.¹⁴¹ With in-person performances completely on pause, the existence of physical exhibitions acts as a tangible way in which fans and newcomers to Music Maker and its artists can physically engage with its mission and artists.

For those who are unable to travel to a physical exhibition, Freeman Vines' *Hanging Tree Guitars* is also available for online viewing. On the exhibition's website, there are photographs of over 50 of Vines' guitars, guitar bodies, and other works. The introduction to the exhibition includes:

“Vines’ ability to birth such transformational potential from the wood of a hanging tree places him in a rich tradition of Southern African American artists who collect materials from their surroundings and transform them into artworks that often reveal a deep sense of the interconnectedness of all things, human and non-human. Vines’ sculptures speak to the systems of injustice and inequity that continue to operate in our world. His work, however, implores that we not be confined to this world. It shows us that we can instead renew our minds, open our eyes, hear the past, and work towards a better future.”¹⁴²

After reading this introduction, viewers can scroll through Vines' many works of art, which are all incredibly moving. Each piece has a name and a photograph, and some have descriptions of their materials. For example, “Vines Ultrasound U.S.A #1, 1980” includes a “Birch body, vintage Fender telecaster neck, television plastic, tuners, pickups, vintage Fender brass bridge, sheet metal, vintage electronics.”¹⁴³ The description of materials alongside the photograph and title allow the viewer to connect deeply to the piece, despite the physical separation between them. Several guitars have names that seem to reference Timothy Duffy and Music Maker. Most

¹⁴¹ “Exhibits,” *Music Maker Relief Foundation* (blog), accessed March 13, 2021, <https://musicmaker.org/exhibits/>.

¹⁴² “Freeman Vines Collection,” *Freeman Vines Hanging Tree Guitars*.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

obvious is “TD Music Maker, 2019,” but there are also more abstract references to Vines’ relationship with Duffy, like “YD 20 (Young Duffy) 2016” and “Duffcaster, 2016.”

In the section of other works, Vines seems to focus upon grappling with the lynching of Oliver Moore. According to the exhibition’s introduction, “In 2016 Vines acquired a stack of lumber from the tree used in the lynching of Oliver Moore in 1930. Vines reflects on working with the wood: ‘I could see the turmoil in the wood as I worked with it. Its features spoke to me. Could you imagine how that man suffered?’”¹⁴⁴ The lynching of Oliver Moore becomes a major theme of the exhibition commentary written by Dr. Will Boone of North Carolina State University. Boone writes that on the night of August 19, 1930, Oliver Moore was abducted from the Edgecombe County Jail by a mob of white men. The mob drove him 20 miles away where he was hanged and shot outside of his own house. Investigations into the murder proved unsuccessful as no witnesses came forward. Boone describes the event as “an act of terrorism” that occurred at a time of white bitterness due to the fact that “the economic status of white farmers in rural Eastern North Carolina was only marginally better than the Black laborers who worked their fields.”¹⁴⁵ Freeman Vines felt that the wood in this tree was “trying to talk to me. Trying to tell me something.”¹⁴⁶ Wood pieces like, “Spirit in the Hanging Tree Wood” and “Oliver Moore’s Hand” show Vines sharing that “something” he felt in the tree. Movingly, “Memorial for Oliver Moore” appears like a gravesite memorial from the very tree where he was killed. When the silence and lack of justice in his death are considered, “Oliver Moore’s Casket”

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Will Boone, “The Lynching of Oliver Moore,” *Freeman Vines Hanging Tree Guitars*, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://exhibit.hangingtreeguitars.com/freeman-vines-history/freeman-vines-lynching/>.

¹⁴⁶ “Freeman Vines Collection,” *Freeman Vines Hanging Tree Guitars*.

which is both carved from the hanging tree and filled with dirt from the site, powerfully evoke a sense of delayed mourning.¹⁴⁷ The availability of these pieces online allows anyone with internet access to grapple with this history and its legacies.

Vines' exhibition also resulted in a book of the same title that was selected by *NPR* as one of their Best Books of 2020. Music Maker has released two books in the past, and in 2020 it has continued this work. The Music Maker team and friends of Music Maker are currently working on a songbook based on Tim Duffy's field recordings. Each song in the book will include the bio of its artist, lyrics, and guitar tablature produced by a friend of Music Maker, as well as photographs by Duffy.¹⁴⁸ Some songs in the book do not have lyrics or genealogies available online, and this project will make that knowledge and the stories of the artists who created it more accessible to an online public. While Tim Duffy is not sure what the final form of the project will look like, it is expected to launch sometime in September 2021. Tim described the importance of the project: "It's something that we can do in this off-time that further cements how important these artists are. And so people can learn their tunes. I don't know how successful we'll be, but it's going to be there, so it's important work to do."¹⁴⁹ Duffy's commitment to this work without knowing the final outcome demonstrates that his devotion to partner artists and telling their stories has not faltered in the pandemic despite the additional challenges it has created.

Sustaining a Struggling Network

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Beiter, "Notes from Meeting With Aaron."

¹⁴⁹ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

Tim Duffy explained that in a normal year, Music Maker has around 400 artists touring at over 100 gigs which results in about a \$250,000 total income for the artists.¹⁵⁰ That number did not include local gigs not organized by Music Maker. On the local level in Atlanta, the Atlanta Blues Society also had to adapt to their members' and sponsors' decreased income. All levels of in-person performance have been canceled in most cases, resulting in 50-60% income loss for most partner artists. Music Maker also estimates that around 90% of partner artists now have at least one item in a pawn shop.¹⁵¹ In a March 2021 Facebook post, Music Maker social worker Brittany Anderson expanded upon this idea of increased need:

We're in 2021 now, and COVID is still around, and unfortunately things still have to be paid — people's rent, their water, electricity, food. Those things are still needs for people. And unfortunately, what I found is that most artists are really struggling because they don't have that [gig] income coming into the home.¹⁵²

On an organizational level, Music Maker has had to find new ways to raise money to support artists who have lost most of their income. According to Tim Duffy, "They're hurting, so we did a two-prong approach. We promised everybody sustained checks twice a month until June starting last year."¹⁵³ Through fundraising campaigns, Music Maker has exceeded its promise and continued to provide those checks at least through March 2021. The organization "just took those stories and had to lean into the pandemic and fundraiser."¹⁵⁴ In a similar way, the Atlanta Blues Society has also supported its members financially by waiving membership fees through

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ "Music Maker Relief Foundation - Home | Facebook."

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

2020. George Klein said, “We did all we could do...we just wrote off 2020.”¹⁵⁵ He continued, “And so, that was the best we could do to give back. At least you have to say to everybody, we know you're struggling, but we're not going to come hit you up for, you know, forgiveness.”¹⁵⁶ After the pandemic is over, there will be no expectation of returning the waived financial support offered by Music Maker and the Atlanta Blues Society.

While increased fundraising is a crucial part of artist support, Music Maker is adapting its sustenance mission by focusing on the human impact of the pandemic for its artists beyond just the check. Social worker Brittany Anderson is coaching partner artists on how to avoid predatory lenders and helping them schedule their COVID-19 vaccines. Music Maker has maintained its valued level of personal attention in its sustenance-focused interactions with artists. Danny Dudeck described that when he received a surprise check from the organization, he also received a handwritten note from Denise Duffy. He said: “It meant everything in the world to me. They said you're an important artist. We know you can't work right now. No, you can't do your thing, but you're an important artist.” While increased financial support is helpful, the personal sustenance of showing an artist who can't perform they are still a valued member of the Music Maker network is a crucial part of well-rounded support during this time.

On the Brightside: Hope for the Future and Maintaining Online Community

While 2020 was in many ways a year of tremendous loss, anxiety, and uncertainty, the pandemic era struggles and triumphs of performing or aiding performers has perhaps provided new skill sets and innovations that could continue to be useful.

¹⁵⁵ Klein, Interview with George Klein.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Many organizations that were forced to abandon their normal operations found new ways to engage with their communities. Fat Matt's Rib Shack, for example, was no longer able to host live performers or have restaurant guests, but instead focused their energy on supporting healthcare workers. Originally, "People would reach out and say, 'My daughter's working in the emergency room tonight. I want to buy the whole staff dinner.'"¹⁵⁷ Then a friend of Fat Matt's reached out to the restaurant about making boxed lunches for the healthcare workers at Grady. "They contacted the local schools and they had kids write letters, and so we would put the letters in the box lunches for them."¹⁵⁸ Fat Matt's catering director Cindi said that the children would include jokes and other fun messages, and laughed that it was "kind of amazing what these kids would come up with."¹⁵⁹ Fat Matt's needed to drastically adapt their activity during the pandemic, but in doing so they found meaningful ways to support their local healthcare heroes.

For artists participating in online performances, the pandemic has required them to develop new skills. According to Danny Dudeck, "There are benefits that I didn't expect...it keeps me sharp, you know, because honestly, I was just gonna let my skills kind of go and kind of pick them up on the other end."¹⁶⁰ These virtual opportunities maintain artists' skills while also providing connections to their distanced fans and friends. Dudeck noted that his Facebook livestreams have provided a space to reconnect with people like his friend and fellow partner artist Cora Mae Bryant's daughter. He said, "So this Facebook thing is pretty cool that way. Cora Mae's daughter came across us about a month ago. And she's like, 'Hey, how are you doing?"

¹⁵⁷ Fat Matt's Interview.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Dudeck and Dudeck, Interview #1 with Daniel and Kathryn Dudeck.

Glad you're doing mama's songs."¹⁶¹ They had not kept in touch in recent years, and now Bryant's children and the Dudecks have had an opportunity to spend time together online again.

For Music Maker, COVID-19 has meant supporting online performances, adapting its educational goals, and redesigning what sustenance looks like. While it has been a challenging year, it has also been one in which more people than ever have access to the Music Maker Mission. The Dedicated Men of Zion's globalFEST performance would have been for a live audience of around 1,500 in New York City, and today nearly 50,000 people have tuned in to their virtual set on YouTube. Freeman Vines' *Hanging Tree Guitars* can be viewed around the globe by anyone with a computer or phone. Music Maker's mission is more necessary than ever, and while the pandemic era has been challenging, it has also led to new skills and fans that will allow the organization to thrive in the future.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

CONCLUSION: AN ADAPTABLE “RELIEF” FOR THE FUTURE

For the Music Maker Relief Foundation, the word *Relief* cannot have a static meaning. The importance and applicability of relief depends on the time, place, and social context of the artists its team is working alongside. In many ways, the three prongs to Music Maker’s mission—performance, education, and sustenance—are also three facets of the word *relief*. In Music Maker’s history, it has been necessary to lean into different facets of the mission at different times. By having an adaptable understanding of its mission, it has developed well-rounded relief.

Mudcat, Beverly “Guitar” Watkins, and Eddie Tigner experienced relief through performance as they traveled around the world playing for an international audience. The exposure to more fans, the incredible response to their music, and the act of traveling while touring itself all provide a type of connection that can only be accomplished through performance. While Freeman Vines does not regularly perform anymore, Music Maker focused on its educational mission to give him a space to share his stories and art. Through in-person and virtual exhibitions, interviews, and a book, his relief has come in the opportunity to share his works of art and their histories with a large online audience. Sustenance is a constant relief project for Music Maker, but the team finds new ways to carry out this part of the mission by having online fundraisers, sending surprise checks, and helping artists continue to avoid external exploitation.

In its first 25 years of operation, the Music Maker Relief Foundation was committed to the idea of well-rounded relief. By focusing upon building genuine partnerships and making artists active participants in those partnerships, Music Maker has grown from the product of Timothy Duffy’s master’s thesis into a group with global influence. By focusing on the artists

who make music rather than only the music itself, Music Maker has done its best to make sure that its good intentions result in tangible success for partner artists.

In its interactions with Atlanta artists, Music Maker has relied upon intrapersonal connection and trust to forge partnerships. The Dudecks and their sort of “mini-Music Maker” network of artists are a critical piece of Music Maker’s ability to build that trust with older artists. Additionally, Music Maker was able to be successful in Atlanta because its mission to protect traditional music and its creators is very much aligned with the idea of keeping the blues alive that is found in the Atlanta Blues Society, venues like Fat Matt’s Rib Shack, and the wider Atlanta blues network. As its current population of artists in Atlanta continues to grow older, it is critical that Music Maker finds new ways to connect with the many talented musicians in the city.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the possibility of creating more partnerships with artists and organizations in Atlanta more difficult than ever. For artists, the pandemic era means losing the majority of their income which comes from touring. For Music Maker it means increasing fundraising to make up for those losses and to adequately support its artists. For artists, the pandemic means losing a platform to showcase talent and share their stories. For Music Maker, this time requires more virtual education opportunities to share its partner musicians stories with an online public. For artists, COVID-19 means attempting to find ways to perform online through Facebook livestreams and virtual festivals, and for Music Maker it means supporting its artists as they learn these new skillsets and search for opportunities. All three prongs of music maker’s mission—sustenance, education, and performance— have had to shift. There is more demand for its work than ever before but also fewer resources to complete that work. The uncertainty of when older artists can feel comfortable performing live again and

when exhibitions can be open makes planning projects a daunting and unpredictable task even though we need Music Maker's work now more than ever. However, the trying experiences of being in the entertainment industry over the past year have led to the development of new skills and proficiencies that will only make Music Maker and partner artists stronger in the future. It is now up to fans and friends to support these artists and organizations as they attempt to forge a new post-pandemic path.

2020's widespread calls for racial equity also presented a unique opportunity for Music Maker and other cultural heritage preservation groups in the US South to reevaluate their roles in upholding and dismantling systemic racism in the United States. The Southern Foodways Alliance, the organization Souls Grown Deep that is tied to Bill Arnett, and the Music Maker Relief Foundation have all attempted to meet this moment in a way that develops a more equitable path forward for their work. On June 11, 2020, Souls Grown Deep established the Gee's Bend Resource Center, where free public internet access and computers are now available for the Gee's Bend community. This effort and its accompanying information campaign allowed the 62.5% of the Gee's Bend population without internet subscriptions to receive stimulus payments and register to vote. The Gee's Bend Resource Center announcement included a statement by president Maxwell L. Anderson that read:

The art world is struggling, along with the rest of America, to evaluate its past role and current responsibilities in combating the persistent scourge of racism. The 160 artists represented in our collection, together with their families and communities, endured discrimination and lived in poverty, ignored by the art market and by museums. We are doing what we can to redress these injustices by transferring their extraordinary contributions into public art collections, and simultaneously obtaining and dispersing financial support to improve economic opportunity for residents of the Black Belt.¹⁶²

¹⁶² "SGD Provides Direct Financial Support and New Community Resources Benefiting Black Communities in AL | Souls Grown Deep," Souls Grown Deep, June 11, 2020, <https://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/news/sgd-provides-direct-financial-support-and-new-community-resources-benefiting-black-communities>.

Anderson's statement is a powerful example of how cultural heritage preservation groups in the US South can use their resources to be a driving force for change in the best interest of the artists they work alongside.

Similarly, on September 1st, 2020, SFA released a statement recognizing that studying foodways in the US South is a political act “that involves not only the well-being of communities today but tracks straight back to enslaved labor within the region, particularly the labor of black women in kitchens and fields.”¹⁶³ They committed themselves to actively working to dismantle structures of power not only in their internal organization but also in operations and programming. While these statements are impactful first steps toward justice, the most important piece of Souls Grown Deep and the Southern Foodways Alliance's continued work will be tangible structural change.

Although the Music Maker Relief Foundation has not faced criticism in the same way that these groups or the individuals leading them have, it too can play an important role in the road to equity. Freeman Vines' book was released in the summer of 2020 during the height of the Black Lives Matter movement. In its first five weeks, the book sold over 2,500 copies and brought enormous media coverage to Freeman Vines' talent and Music Maker's effort to help his work be seen.¹⁶⁴ Music Maker received positive media attention because the organization has been working to dismantle systems of inequity and to return agency to artists of color for the past three decades. All of the money that the book made during the publicity boom went back to

¹⁶³ “Statements from SFA & CSSC” Southern Foodways Alliance, September 1, 2020, <https://www.southernfoodways.org/latest/statements/>.

¹⁶⁴ Duffy, Interview with Tim Duffy.

Freeman Vines and the sustenance program so more artists could be supported during this difficult year.

As cultural heritage preservation efforts in the US South reevaluate their role in creating racial equity, Music Maker must look to the future and explore how it can continue to be a driving force in knocking down the structures that oppress partner artists. Perhaps the next leader of Music Maker could be a former partner artist. Maybe the organization will develop an office in Atlanta or many offices scattered across the South. The future of Music Maker might even involve continuing to expand its work internationally to partner with traditional musicians whose genres influenced the creation of the blues. Whatever the next step for the Music Maker Relief Foundation is, it will continue to preserve music and affect change by placing artists at the center of its work. The best form of *relief* is people-first preservation that eliminates the causes of artists' limited exposure and continues to pass down the US South's living musical past to the next generation of artists and fans.

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