

#MusicEverywhereCLT

Charlotte's music history / music scene today

Tom Hanchett, July 6, 2016

Charlotte Center City Partners, a non-profit organization which works for a lively business district in Charlotte, launched a long-term initiative in 2016 to promote and strengthen Charlotte's music scene: MusicEverywhereCLT. As part of that work, they asked Dr. Tom Hanchett, a community historian and musician, to prepare background research on Charlotte's impressive music history – more recording took place here than in Nashville during the late 1930s -- and also offer an overview of current players and venues.

INTRODUCTION:

Charlotte, a music city? It may not have a music scene as well-known as Chapel Hill or Asheville elsewhere in North Carolina, but there's a lot going on in the Queen City.

- Grammy winning neo-soul crooner **Anthony Hamilton** and roots-rock heartthrobs **The Avett Brothers** forged their careers here.
- Grassroots organizations nurture rising talent, from the Jazz Arts Initiative to Charlotte Folk Society to amazing musical variety events called **Tosco Music Parties** that regularly sell out 1200 seat Knight Theater.
- **NC Music Factory** (officially AvidXchange Music Factory) in a renovated mill complex brings together an array of performance spaces and music-industry-support firms.
- Passionate players, from part-time to professional, find **community connections** at venues ranging from the Double Door (the South's longest-running blues club) to The Comet (where Doc Watson sideman Jack Lawrence leads a weekly bluegrass/Americana evening) to Smokey Joe's (Tuesday rock jam sessions) to Wine-Up and Red@28 (soul, hip-hop and spoken word) in the NoDa entertainment district.

All that builds on a deep history.

- Back in the 1930s, Charlotte surpassed Nashville as a center for country and gospel recording. "**Father of Bluegrass**" **Bill Monroe** cut his first discs here. RCA and Decca also recorded the legendary Carter Family, Grand Ol' Opry banjoman Uncle Dave Macon, gospel stars The Golden Gate Quartet and hundreds more.
- Among the homegrown talent to emerge from that era was guitarist Arthur Smith. His rockin' "Guitar Boogie" reached the ears of teenage Paul McCartney,

who used it as his audition for The Beatles. Smith's long-running 1960s – 1970s syndicated TV show seen across the South also launched "**Dueling Banjos,**" one of bluegrass's best-known instrumentals.

- Arthur Smith Studios (Studio East today) made international music history in February 1965 when James Brown dropped by. **Brown's "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" -- #72 on Rolling Stone's list** of 100 most important records of all time -- **pioneered the new genre called funk.**
- Smith's crosstown rival, Reflection Studios, attracted a fledgling band from Athens, Georgia, in 1982 led by a gangly guitarist named Michael Stipe. **REM's first LP, *Murmur*, helped spark the "indie rock" movement.**

Even more than individual hit-makers, the Charlotte region is rich in musical culture. North Carolina is a hotbed of bluegrass and old-time fiddling; the banjo-driven sound of The Avett Brothers takes that tradition to town. An off-shoot of 1950s R&B called Beach Music is alive and beloved along the Charlotte-Myrtle Beach corridor. The United House of Prayer, which has its largest national following in Charlotte, passes down a distinctive trombone "shout band" sound. Time-honored acapella metered hymn singing and close-harmony quartets are still a bedrock in African American churches here – even as Anthony Hamilton and national champion poets SlamCharlotte take vocal expression in fresh directions.

Today Charlotte is making history anew as its booming growth (second-fastest in the US in 2015) attracts newcomers from around the globe. You can hear exuberant West African singing from the International Community Mass Choir, sample a wide array of modern Latino music at festivals organized by guitarist Tony Arreaza for the Latin American Coalition, and find CDs ranging from reggaeton to salsa produced at Loco Sound Studios.

All that sound intriguing? Keep reading to explore Charlotte music past and present, genre by genre, and also look at the support resources that make a music city sing.

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But first a word about genres. "Fluid" – that's the word. Quentin Talley, for instance, does stuff that could be classified as jazz, as soul, as rap, as spoken word. John Shaughnessy, the bass player, loves rock with a heavy metal edge – but leads a risk-

taking jazz jam at Petra's. So if you note some overlap and repetition below, please be forgiving. And if someone seems missing from one category, please look in another.

* * *

Thanks to several of the best network-builders on the Charlotte scene for reviewing this draft report, catching errors and suggesting additional material:

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Quentin Talley – On-Q Productions, Soul Providers band

John Tosco – Tosco Music Parties

Jazz

HISTORY: Jazz has long been a small but sparkling thread in Charlotte’s musical tapestry.

- Historically black **Johnson C. Smith University** trained musicians including internationally renowned jazz violinist **Stuff Smith** in the 1920s.
- Charlotte’s 1930s RCA sessions captured **Jimmy Gunn & His Dixie Seranaders**, a black “territory band” that travelled throughout the eastern US and into Canada. Gunn gave young South Carolina trumpeter **Dizzy Gillespie** his first job on his journey to be-bop stardom. Off the road, Gunn was a school principal for whom J.H. Gunn Elementary is named today.
- White bandleader **Hal Kemp** grew up in Charlotte, a national star of the big-band era who rivaled Glenn Miller before a car accident cut his life short. His Charlotte-born sideman **John Scott Trotter** went on to become longtime music director for Bing Crosby, leading the band on Bing’s “White Christmas,” the **world’s best-selling record** according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*. Trotter’s trombone also provided the sounds of parents’ voices in the Charlie Brown cartoon specials on television.
- During the 1960s – 1980s, gentle jazz pianist and songwriter **Loonis McGlohon** emerged as a national figure. As live-music director for powerhouse radio station WBT and its TV sister WBTB, he became beloved throughout the Carolinas. Songwriting included the standard “Blackberry Winter” with lyricist Alec Wilder, and Frank Sinatra recorded other Wilder-McGlohon collaborations. McGlohon and Wilder co-hosted *American Popular Song*, one of the first music-talk series on the fledgling National Public radio network. McGlohon Theater at Spirit Square honors his legacy.
- In 1981 **WFAE 90.7** signed on as Charlotte’s NPR radio with jazz as half of programming during its initial decade. The station subsequently went all-talk, but not before nurturing a generation of jazz activists who continue to lead the city’s jazz network in the 2010s.

SCENE TODAY IN 2016: Not sure why, but Interest in jazz is at an all-time high in Charlotte in the 2010s.

Among the most active local artists are:

- **A Sign of the Times (ASOTT) band**, lead by trombonist and composer/arranger Tyrone Jefferson, former music director for James Brown, with Jefferson’s wife Toni Tupponce on vocals. Chartered as a 501c3 non-profit, the group is known for its active educational work in African American history and culture. www.asignofthetimes.org

- **Ziad, saxophone** <http://bechtler.org/Press-room/article/ziad-rabie-biography> is at the center of an active network of accomplished “straight-ahead jazz” players, most full-time musicians, including **Ron Brendle, bass**.
- **Quentin “Q” Talley**, spoken word artist and theater producer (On-Q Productions), is at the center of an active network of accomplished players who blend jazz, funk, soul and hip-hop, including **Tim Singh, bass**. On-Q’s 2016-17 theatrical season includes a package that Q calls “**Mo Betta**” – featuring a rotating roster of jazz players and spoken word artists who carry you back to the classic African American nightclub experience of the 1950s (planned for a variety of venues throughout the city).
- **Fat Face Band**, three-piece with Molly Brown on tuba and Matt Postle on trumpet. **Guitarist Troy Conn** is the city’s busiest and most versatile jazz guitarist at the moment.
- **Jim Brock**, percussionist, tours nationally with Janis Ian, Kathy Mattea and others. **Adrian Crutchfield**, saxophonist with Prince and Bette Midler et al. **Ethan Uslan** is three-time world champ ragtime pianist. Pianist **Noel Freidline** teaches jazz at UNC Charlotte and gigs around town. **Michael Porter**, long-time jazz flute. **Ghost Trees**, free-jazz duo. “**Sai the Violinist**” **Harley**, smooth-jazz violin. **Tom Billotto**, mellow guitar. Vocalists **Nicci Canada** (reminiscent of Ella Fitzgerald), **Tenya Coleman**, **Nita Belk** (swing, jump blues). **Little Big String Band** with fiddler Glen Alexander, stringband swing. **Brad Bailey**, jazz on his own handbuilt hybrid string instruments. **John Shaughnessy**, bass, leads a monthly Sunday night jazz jam at Petra’s in Plaza Midwood.

Series and events:

- Saxophonist **Ziad Rabie** (known simply as Ziad) leads the monthly series **Jazz at the Bechtler** Museum of Modern Art. Begun in 2010, first Fridays, always sold out.
- Jazz Arts Initiative in collaboration with Blumenthal Center for Performing Arts offers monthly jazz evenings in the club-like **Jazz Room @ Stage Door Theater**, each focused on music of an iconic figure in jazz, which always sell out.
- **Charlotte Jazz Festival**, presented annually each spring since 2015 by Blumenthal & Jazz Arts Initiative.
- **Bill Hanna’s Jazz Jam**, weekly session hosted by Charlotte’s longtime educator/trombonist/pianist Tuesdays at Double Door.

www.minthilltimes.com/2012/12/a-player-a-teacher-and-a-flyer-bill-hanna/

- Annual collaborative Black History Month performance between Charlotte Symphony quartet led by violinist Jane Hart Brendle and A Sign of the Times band led by Tyrone Jefferson. At the historic Excelsior Club, organized by UNCC-based music writer Meg Whalen.
- See also the dozen-plus mini-festivals and series produced around the region by **Jazz Diva** Tammy Greene, including smooth-jazz Freedom Summer concerts in Freedom Park presented by Mecklenburg Park & Recreation.
- **Queen Charlotte Jazz Fest** -- uptown weekend presented annually in June by Charlotte Center City Partners since 2015.
- **Sensoria, the annual arts week** celebration at Central Piedmont Community College headed by Prof. Alan Yamamoto, has a jazz flavor in April 2017. Centerpiece will be the August Wilson play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, which deals with heavy issues of cultural appropriation. **Tyrone Jefferson** is live-music director for the play and is also helping coordinate an impressive line-up of music performances and panels with Jazz, Latin and Shout-band performers as well as dancers, scholars....

Support:

- **Jazz Arts Initiative** (JAI) offers music classes to youngsters, fields a youth jazz ensemble at public events, and produces a fast-growing array of jazz concerts with Charlotte's major arts presenter, Blumenthal Performing Arts. JAI is led by two musicians who arrived from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina: flutist **Lonnie Davis**, a passionate educator and energetic organizer; and her husband **Ocie Davis**, touring drummer with Branford Marsalis.
<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/entertainment/article19392759.html>
- **Charlotte Jazz Society**, created by saxophonist John Alexander, seems to have an inactive website at the moment, though he continues to lead the **Charlotte Jazz Orchestra** big-band with a new CD in 2016.
- **Jazz Diva** Tammy Greene produces festivals and events including regular early evening wine-and-jazz at Sydneys on N. Tryon in uptown. Musicians include trombonist **Buff Dillard**. Under the name **The Jazz Lifestyle** she brings national smooth-jazz headliners to the Lake Norman area.
<http://www.jazzdivaevents.com/home.htm>
- **Jazz n Soul** regularly produces events with local and regional musicians at **The Tavern** (W. Morehead in uptown) and other venues including **Petra's**

in Plaza Midwood. A mainstay band is the jazz-soul outfit **Groovemasters**.

- **Acoustic Barn Recording Studio** run by jazz drummer and UNC Charlotte percussion instructor Rick Dior has long been a favorite with regional jazz players including Loonis McGlohon.
- **Curtis Davenport** has hosted a jazz radio station on the web and currently has a show on Charlotte Community Radio (internet).
<http://charlottecommunityradio.org/> <https://curtjazz.com/>

Venues: Charlotte has no jazz-mostly listening room, but several venues feature jazz regularly.

- **Cajun Queen** restaurant on 7th Street has hosted “Jazz 7 Nights a Week” for nearly 30 years with a Dixieland flavor. Musicians often drop in to jam with the house band.
- **BluNotes**, new supper-club in the far northeast suburbs, has a strong blues and jazz focus.
- Restaurants that offer live jazz weekly include **Blue** (Thurs – Sat) and **Sydney’s** (Wed), both uptown. Jazz is also on tap from time to time at The Tavern uptown, Petra’s in Plaza Midwood, and new Island Hub restaurant on Monroe Road.
- **Chantilly Hall**, near Plaza Midwood, hosts weekly swing dances organized by GottaSwingCharlotte, often with live bands.

Blues / R & B / Beach Music / Soul / Funk

HISTORY:

- The Piedmont Blues, with its characteristic ragtime guitar sound, flourished in the Carolinas and Virginia during the 1920s – 30s, centered in Durham and Spartanburg. A bit of that made it onto disc during Charlotte’s 1930s recording sessions, notably Virginian Luke Jordan. **Recently the British label Nehi released *Charlotte Blues***, a CD that reissues all of Charlotte’s blues 78s from those years.
- **Napoleon “Nappy” Brown** of Charlotte had hits on Savoy Records as the blues went electric in the 1950s. His career gained fresh momentum starting in the 1980s, leading to new records and an appearance on the coast-to-coast NPR show *A Prairie Home Companion* shortly before his death in 2008.
- Older African Americans recall a **thriving live-music scene along Beatties Ford Road** during the Rhythm & Blues era of the 1950s -60s, including the Hi-Fi Club and the Club Bali with its house band led by diminutive **“Flat Tire” Mason**. Construction of the NC 16 Brookshire Boulevard expressway through the heart of the small business district about 1968 marked the end of that cultural flourishing.
- The **Excelsior Club** – a survivor today from that Beatties Ford Road scene – nurtured African American talent. Jimmy & Minnie McKee opened it in 1944 just as WWII veterans were returning from fighting Hitler and his absurd notion of an “Aryan master race” ... and but back home they could not go to segregated country clubs. So they created their own city-club, a center for political discussion, community work and good times. Among the entertainers who came through was **Nat King Cole**, today recalled as a smooth vocalist but then a hot jazz pianist and Civil Rights activist. The stylish Art Deco building is now an official Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmark.
- A home-grown hit-maker to come up through the Excelsior Club was **Wilbert Harrison**. Son of a United House of Prayer musician-trainer, he grabbed #1 on the *Billboard* R&B charts in 1959 with the first recording of “Kansas City.”
- The Excelsior also hosted events and concerts organized by black radio personalities “Genial Gene” Potts and “Chattie Hattie” Leeper (possibly the nation’s first black female radio DJ) and “Rockin’ Ray” Gooding. All were DJs at **radio station WGIV**, one of the South’s early stations to feature an all-black format, starting in 1947.
- In the segregated 1950s, teens from Charlotte and elsewhere in the Carolinas discovered the hot new R & B sound in clubs around the all-black SeaBreeze

community adjacent to Myrtle Beach, SC. Perhaps to avoid alarming their parents, they nicknamed it **Beach Music**. They danced “The Shag,” an easy-going version of black swing dancing -- today the official state dance of both North Carolina and South Carolina. And they supported a (predominantly white) scene with Carolina bands such as General Johnson, the Rivas and the Catalinas as well as national groups such as the Drifters. A Charlotte magazine *It Will Stand* helped spark fresh interest starting in 1979 and today in 2016 the Wax Museum record-collector shop on Monroe Road run by Chris Beachly (dig the name!) keeps the flame alive.

- Charlottean **Maurice Williams**, born in nearby Lancaster, SC, made the classic record “**Stay (Just a Little Bit Longer)**” in 1960. “Stay” later took on a second life when arena-rock headliner Jackson Browne used it as his regular concert-ender (heard on his 1977 LP *Running On Empty*).
- In February 1965 R & B star **James Brown** happened to be near Charlotte on a tour from his base in Augusta, Georgia, when he had the idea for a recording. He stopped in at Arthur Smith Studios (today Studio East) on Monroe Road and cut a rhythmic jam called “**Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag**.” The record hit big, #1 on the *Billboard* R & B chart for eight weeks, and the sound – in which every instrument plays percussive rhythm – became **a new genre called Funk**.
- Hip-Hop grew out of Funk and its producers frequently sample James Brown. According to the website WhoSampled.com, **clips from “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag” have appeared at least a dozen recordings** from “How You Like Me Now” by Kool Moe Dee (1987) to “Make It Work” by Tiga (2014).
- **Reflection Studio** – from 1970 til its demolition in 2015, Reflection was run by former Ernest Tubbs drummer Wayne Jernigan. Legendary producer **Marshall Sehorn** (born in nearby Concord, NC, and best known for his SeaSaint studio with Allen Toussaint that defined the soul sound of New Orleans) played a role in Reflection’s early development. The studio served all genres but R & B and gospel kept it busiest. A few of those songs can be heard on the CD *Carolina Soul Survey: The Reflection Sound Story* on the British label Grapevine.

SCENE TODAY IN 2016:

- **National artists in Charlotte.** Two of the top R & B / Soul vocalists in the world today make their homes in Charlotte, as well as a group that helped repopularize Soul in the 1990s.
 - **Anthony Hamilton** grew up here, singing in the choir at South Meck High School. Since the early 2000s he has emerged as perhaps the leading vocalist in the NeoSoul movement. He’s garnered 16 Grammy nominations, released nine studio albums and guested on numerous CDs and film soundtracks. In 2016 alone he toured nationally with Fantasia Barrino, sang at the **White House** for President and Mrs. Obama, did a

“Tiny Desk Concert” for national NPR radio, and partnered with Cracker Barrel restaurants to market a special edition of his most recent album, which includes Country guitarist Vince Gill. Watch his recent videos with The Hamiltones – a virtuoso trio who sing acapella versions of hip-hop hits ... while cheerfully cooking and cleaning at home in their kitchen.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjNkqtpNU18

- **Fantasia Barrino**, born in High Point, NC, moved to Charlotte soon after winning the third season of television’s *American Idol* in 2004. Her 2010 single “Bittersweet” earned a Grammy and she also made a splash on Broadway as the lead in *The Color Purple*. She continues to make Charlotte her base for national tours and media appearances.
- **Jodeci** hit the national scene in the early ‘90s with a Soul sound that some called New Jack Swing. Hip-hop producer Sean “Puffy” Combs helped open doors for them. The name Jodeci came from the first names of two sets of brothers: Cedric and Joel Hailey of Charlotte plus Donald and Dalvin DeGrate of Hampton, VA. The Haileys, raised in Charlotte’s United House of Prayer, also have a career on their own as **K-ci and Jojo**, earning three Grammy nominations.
- **Rudy Currence** -- Born and raised in nearby Rock Hill and still based in the Charlotte area, this singer/producer attracted early attention when he signed with Def Jam Records. He won a 2013 Grammy and Dove Award for production on the album *Gravity* by LeCrae. His voice and songwriting were heard in the film *Bourne Identity*.
- **Sunshine Anderson** – Charlotte-based throughout a 15 year career as soul vocalist beginning with the hit “Heard It All Before” (2001, #3 on *Billboard* R &B chart).
- **Some of the most active local artists today in 2016 include:**
 - **Tryon Jefferson**, Charlotte-born trombonist who was **musical director for late-career James Brown, tours and records with the “JBs”** – alums of the Brown band – including a 2016 stint in Europe.
 - **Streetsinger Ron Morrow** often sets up a boombox and mic at The Square, Tryon Street at Trade Street in the heart of uptown, and sings Motown era songs to the delight of passersby.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_2fQ6yle-M
 - **Tom “Mookie” Brill** works the rockabilly end of the Blues on bass and vocals, on the road with bands on the club circuit throughout the Southeast or close to home with his trio Belmont Playboys.

- **K. Omari Wilkerson**, big-voiced singer, turns up in many settings, including leading Omari & His Hellhounds at the Comet on Sunday nights.
- **Adrian Crutchfield**, saxophonist with Prince and Bette Midler, among others. **Bubonik Funk**, guitar-driven funk since 2008. **Soul Providers** with Quentin Talley.
- **Support, studios and recordings:**
 - Songwriter/producer **Bill Bradford** has released a series of CDs under the Soul Project name on his own Spirit Records. His own NeoSoul compositions showcase local and regional singers including **Maria Howell**, **Debby Dobbins** and the late Pervis Lee.
 - **Charlotte Blues Society** brings together both white and black aficionados of the Blues (started 1993). There's a monthly Sunday evening open mic jam at the Double Door and an annual Talent Competition with the winner going to compete at a national event in Memphis. Jeri Thompson of the historically African American *Charlotte Post* newspaper is a longtime active member.
- **Venues and events:**
 - **Double Door**, said to be the second-oldest blues club in the U.S., is the subject of a book by Daniel Coston: *Charlotte's Home of the Blues: 40 Years of the Double Door Inn* (2013). Recently Central Piedmont Community College announced plans to buy the land when founding owner Nick Karres retires; demolition seems likely in 2017.
 - **The PlayRoom** -- "the Southeast's premier rehearsal facility" at 916 Tuckaseegee Road, run by musician Eddie Z since 1994. 29 practice spaces plus gear for rent. Anthony Hamilton rehearses there. <http://theplayroomonline.com/>
 - **Soul Stage** open mic takes place every other Tuesday. Hosted by spoken word artist, singer and theater producer Quentin "Q" Talley (see Jazz section of this report) in the same NoDa complex as Amelie's Bakery in a space called **Red @28th**. Says the Soulstage page on Facebook: "You Never Know Who Will Show!! Fantasia, Anthony Hamilton, Angela Bassett, Jodeci, Innertwyne (Anthony Hamilton's Band) And Many More Have Graced The Soulstage."
 - **Soulful Sundays**, another similar regular evening at Red@28, is hosted weekly by Power98 radio personalities including Les Bless.
 - **West End Soul Fest** – first annual by Charlotte Center City partners in Summer 2016.

- When the **CIAA basketball tournament** rolls around each February, events pop up all over town. The tournament is an impromptu college reunion for grads of all ages from across the southeastern U.S., and many have a taste for old-school Soul and/or today's NeoSoul.

Hip-Hop / Spoken word

- **Artists:**
 - **SlamCharlotte** put the Queen City on the map for spoken word excitement when the team **twice** won the National Poetry Slam in 2007 and 2008. **Quentin Talley, Bluz Rogers, Terry Creech**, and other team members have since become mainstays in Charlotte's cultural life.
 - **Deniro Farrar** -- as leader of #CultRap @Deniro he has 21.5k Twitter followers. Profiled on national NPR in 2015
www.npr.org/2015/09/23/442575725/songs-we-love-deniro-farrar-nostalgia
 - Other artists to be aware of include: **Mason "Quill" Parker, DJ DR (Dianna Mayfield), Elevator Jay, Ida Divine, Jaycee McCowan.**
- **Support:**
 - **Dupp & Swat is one of Charlotte's most unpredictable and exciting cultural spots.** The storefront inside the Amelie's Bakery complex in NoDa is a combination beauty salon, art space, clothing design studio and center for hip-hop music and all kinds of performance. Fashion maven Davita "Swat" Galloway and her brother Dion ("Dupp") preside. They even publish a quarterly magazine called *Spread*.
<http://www.charlotteobserver.com/living/fashion/article20355408.html>
 - **WPEG Power 98** ("Charlotte's #1 for Blazin' New Hip-Hop and R & B") is regularly the city's first or second most-listened-to radio station according to the ratings. But it's even more important than that, due to its community-spirited personalities. No-Limit Larry, Les Bless, and others help bring people together for soul music, hip-hop and community events.
- **Venues and events:**
 - **Soul Stage** open mic takes place every other Tuesday. Hosted by spoken word artist, singer and theater producer Quentin "Q" Talley (see Jazz section of this report) in the same NoDa complex as Amelie's Bakery in a space called **Red @28th**.
 - **Wine-Up** bar in NoDa is the venue for a long-running open mic night that attracts poets, spoken word artists, and musicians. Hosted on Thursdays by Jaycee McCowan. <http://www.upstagenoda.com/events/touch-one-thursdays-spoken-word-live-music-2016-02-25-2/>
 - A new spoken word series started June 2016 on Monday nights at **Petra's** in Plaza Midwood hosted by Carlos Robson of the SlamCharlotte crew.
 - **Slam poetry night at Spirit Square** is presented monthly by Blumenthal

Performing Arts in partnership with SlamCharlotte.

- **Breakin' Convention.** The annual two-day international gathering of hip-hop dancers moved from London to Charlotte for a multi-year run starting in October 2015. Tom Gabbard of Blumenthal Performing Arts energetically involves local spoken word artists and musicians led by poet Bluz Rogers.
- **Harvey Gantt Center for African American Art & Culture** occasionally presents music events including the Gantt After Dark series in summer 2016.

Country / Folk / Americana

HISTORY:

- **More music was recorded in the Charlotte area than in Nashville in the late 1930s.** Drawn by the live acts on WBT radio (one of the South's first and strongest stations), "field recording" teams led by RCA Victor producers Ralph Peer and Eli Oberstein visited in 1927 and 1931, then came several times a year to Charlotte 1936 – 38 and nearby Rock Hill 1938 – 39. **Bill Monroe**, soon to become the "Fathering of Bluegrass," made his very first recordings February 17, 1936 at 208 S. Tryon Street, now marked by a sidewalk plaque. The legendary **Carter Family**, A.P., Sara and Maybelle, recorded for Victor in 1931 and Decca in 1938 then returned to WBT 1942 - 43 for their last radio appearances before disbanding. Stars of Nashville's Grand Ol' Opry travelled to the Queen City to record, notably banjoman **Uncle Dave Macon**, **Fiddlin' Arthur Smith** (no relation to Charlotte's own "Guitar's Boogie" Arthur Smith), and songwriters the **Delmore Brothers**. Ultimately Nashville's stronger WSM radio won the day and Nashville emerged after World War II as the America's country music capital. The website www.HistorySouth.org offers a comprehensive look at Charlotte's recording heyday with profiles of key artists and a list of over 1000 tracks available on CD.
- **WBT Briarhoppers** stringband were the house band at WBT radio from 1934 til about 1950, beloved throughout the Carolinas. Alums came together for a second stint in the 1970s – 2000s, winning the prestigious North Carolina Folk Heritage Award. Two books chronicle their history: *The Briarhoppers: The Circle Rolls On* by photographer Daniel Coston and *The WBT Briarhoppers: Eight Decades of a Bluegrass Band Made for Radio* (2007) by Tom Warlick, who now leads a revival edition of the band.
- Country guitarist, singer and songwriter **Arthur Smith**, son of a Gaffney textile worker, moved to Charlotte to appear on WBT and went on to become perhaps the region's most important musical force from the 1940s through the 1970s. His long-running syndicated TV show with his brothers plus banjo star Don Reno and country singer Tommy Faile reached homes across the South five days a week. Among his hundreds songs, two especially stand out. He and Reno improvised what became "**Dueling Banjos**" and when Warner Brothers used it without credit in the 1972 film *Deliverance*, Smith won a gratifying settlement. Smith's first hit, the rollicking 1945 instrumental "**Guitar Boogie**," foreshadowed the emergence of rock 'n' roll. Young Paul McCartney attempted to play it as his audition for the Quarrymen in 1957. He flubbed it, but the mates liked him well enough to bring him on as bass player ... and the band soon renamed themselves The Beatles.
- **Arthur Smith Studios** on Monroe Road ranked among the Charlotte's busiest recording spaces from 1964 onward and remains **active today in 2016 as Studio East**. Elsewhere in this report see the story of James Brown recording "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" there in 1965. Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks

Commission designated the building an official Historic Landmark in 2015.

<http://cmhpf.org/Survey%20Commtee%20Agendas/Arthur%20Smith%20Studio%20SR%20final.pdf>

- Arthur Smith co-founded **CMH Records** with Los Angeles-based Christian Martin Haerle. During 1975 – 1988 CMH released over 100 LPs by top first-generation bluegrass stars, most recorded at Smith Studios. CMH is still in business today, with no Charlotte connection.
- **George Hamilton IV** began as a genial teen-pop singer with gold records “A Rose and Baby Ruth” (1956) and “Abilene”(1963). He matured into an enduring country star who maintained a home in Charlotte til his death in 2014, a regular on Nashville’s Grand Ol’ Opry and frequent associate of Arthur Smith and Charlotte-born evangelist Billy Graham.
- **Randy Travis** from nearby Marshville launched his career as a teenager in the late 1970s in a long stint at a roadhouse called Country City on Wilkinson Boulevard, discovered by club manager Lib Hatcher, eventually his wife. He went on sell over 25 million records, win six Grammys, and earn 2016 induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame. Brother Ricky Traywick still plays guitar with bands around Marshville.
- **Charlotte Folk Society**, started in 1981, helped this urban place tap into its authentic folk heritage – fiddling, blues, gospel singing, clogging and contradance, songwriting and more. Today in 2016 its monthly second-Friday concert series, dubbed “**Gatherings**,” at **Great Aunt Stella Center** (a restored 1914 church in uptown) plus jam sessions around the community offer good music and even better opportunities for networking and community-making.
- **Thistle & Shamrock** originated at local WFAE radio in 1981, a weekly hour of Celtic music hosted by Scottish-born Fiona Ritchie. It became one of the NPR network’s most popular and enduring music programs, celebrating its 35th year in 2016 – though no longer with strong ties to WFAE nor Charlotte. Ritchie co-wrote *Wayfaring Strangers* (UNC Press, 2014) exploring Scots & Irish influences on American folk music. Her co-author, former UNC Charlotte professor Doug Orr, is highly regarded for creating the **Swanannoa Gathering**, a roots-music summer camp at Warren Wilson College two hours west of Charlotte.
- **Alabama** – Hot country band of the 1990s opened Alabama Grill (1999 - 2004) at Concord Mills Mall with a studio for live radio appearances. One of their big hits was “Dancin’, Shaggin’ on the Boulevard” (1997) featuring a Beach Music sound that recalled their formative years playing at clubs along Ocean Boulevard in Myrtle Beach.

SCENE TODAY IN 2016:

- **Artists:**

- **Si Kahn** is an internationally acclaimed songwriter in the mold of Pete Seeger. He came south to join Civil Rights protests in 1965, then gravitated to the Carolinas where his Grassroots Leadership group assisted textile workers (a character in the 1979 film *Norma Rae* may be based on him). Best known song from his 17 CDs: “Aragon Mill,” about textile factory closings.
- **Mark O’Connor** -- relocated from Nashville to a home on Lake Wylie in 2016. He’s a fiddler renowned in multiple genres – bluegrass wonder-kid who toured and recorded at age 17 with David Grisman and Stephane Grapelli; top Nashville session player on 500+ albums and host of the *American Music Shop* show on TNN; classical composer whose works have been recorded by the London Philharmonic and Yo Yo Ma. Today he is often on the road offering master classes for music teachers using a technique called the O’Connor Method.
- **Jack Lawrence** traveled the globe as Doc Watson’s guitar partner of choice for over 15 years. His fluid picking is heard every Tuesday at The Comet with the ensemble **Red Rocking Chair**, including Charlotte stalwart Tom Kuhn on bass.
- **Michael Reno Harrell** – singer, songwriter and storyteller who crafts story-songs about the blue-collar South. Over a dozen CDs, constantly on tour.
- **Gator Gumbo** – seems improbable that a Cajun dance band would be located in Charlotte. But over 20 years, Jean Prewitt & friends have not only delighted dancers here but also won respect among players in Louisiana.
- **PJ Brunson** – singer-songwriter, key person nurturing Charlotte’s network of songwriters.
- **CharlyHorse** -- Americana duo with Chuck Johnson and Tom Kuhn.
- **Hashbrown Belly Boys** – stringband in their 20s play vintage ragtime and jugband tunes with a punk rock flair.
- Many other Charlotte-area musicians blend regional roots music into Americana-flavored rock. See the Rock section of this report for **Avett Brothers, David Childers, Brown Liquor Pickers, Josh Daniel, Gigi Dover & Eric Lovell, Moonshine Racers.**

- **Venues/Events**

- **Tosco Music Parties** – See “General resources” section of this report, below.
 - **Evening Muse** – listening room in the NoDa entertainment district showcases Americana acts and songwriters.
 - **Thirsty Beaver** – Central Av cinderblock box looks like a biker bar, but actually a friendly hangout with a “honky-tonk roadhouse” vibe. House band **The Loose Lugnuts** specialize in classic and alt-country.
 - **Coyote Joe’s**, out Wilkinson Boulevard, is Charlotte’s old-line country venue with a large dance floor, hard-working house band, and frequent big-name touring acts.
 - **Eaglespeak Coffeehouse** on South Boulevard provides a welcoming small-scale space especially useful for new, emerging performers.
 - There’s a lively **Contradance** scene, including dances every Monday night on the sprung-wood floor at **Chantilly Hall** near Plaza Midwood. The **Charlotte Dance Gypsies** organization also hosts the annual **Gypsy Meltdown** dance weekend at Camp Thunderbird on Lake Wylie.
 - The annual April **Loch Norman Games** weekend festival at Rural Hill farm in north Mecklenburg County celebrates all things Celtic including performances and jams by local and touring musicians. 2017 will be the 24th year.
- **Support:**
 - **Charlotte Folk Society** since 1981. (See “History” section above). CFS Youth Scholarships have assisted some rising talent including Natalie Royal who is now forging a County Music career in Nashville.
 - Area **songwriters** meet and swap songs via the Charlotte chapter of NSAI (Nashville Songwriter Association International), centered at Eaglespeak Coffeehouse.
 - **Violin Shoppe** on Monroe Road repairs all types of string instruments, offers lessons and host occasional workshops and jam sessions. Co-owner **Glen Alexander is four-time bluegrass fiddle champ** at the prestigious Galax festival.
- **Nearby (90 minute drive):**
 - **Merlefest** in Wilksboro, NC, created at Wilkes Community College with help from Doc Watson in honor of Doc’s late son Merle, it is the world’s

top bluegrass/roots/Americana festival. Some 80,000 people attend each April.

- **Earl Scruggs Center: Music and Stories of the American South**, museum in Shelby NC honors the bluegrass banjo innovator and explores his Carolina context.
- **Fiddler's Grove Festival**, among the longest-running stringband events in the U.S., takes place every Memorial Day weekend in Union Grove off I77 exit 65 north of Statesville.
- **National Folk Festival** makes its home in Greensboro for a three-year run 2015 – 2017. Traditional music and culture are featured on seven stages throughout the heart of the city during the second weekend of September.

Rock & Pop

HISTORY:

- Daniel Coston energetically documents **Queen City garage rock** in his book *There Was a Time: Rock & Roll in the 1960s in Charlotte and the Carolinas* (2014). He is currently reuniting bands and producing concerts.
- **The Spongetones** have been a Charlotte mainstay since 1979, playing and writing power-pop modeled on the Beatles. Sony re-issued four of their 10 albums in Japan 1996-2005 and the Japanese label AirMail released four more and sponsored a tour there in 2008. Individual members have been crucial to Charlotte's local scene: Jamie Hoover (bass) as a record producer and solo artist; Steve Stoeckel (guitar) as an essayist, instrument tech and solo performer; Pat Walters (guitar) as a sparkplug in 1960s garage rock bands here; and Rob Thorne (drums) as a staff drummer at Arthur Smith Studios and a member of Charlotte's long-running Catalinas beach music band.
- Athens, Georgia's **soon-to-be-legendary band REM** arrived at Reflection Studios in 1982 to finish their first LP, *Murmur*, with North Carolina producers Mitch Easter and Don Dixon. A national hit on college radio, it helped usher in the Indie Rock era, and the band returned to Reflection to make their second album as well.
- Charlotte's based **Fetchin' Bones** toured nationally 1983 - 89, their quirky punk sound winning a three-LP contract with Capitol Records. Vocalist/leader Hope Nichols subsequently opened long-running clothing boutique Boris & Natasha and continues to play alongside Fetchin' Bones alum Aaron Pitkin in a succession of bands from SugarSmack to the Plaza Family Band.
- **AntiSeen**, intense punk band influenced by the Stooges and Ramones, came together in Charlotte in the 1980s, did annual tours in Europe during the 1990s, reunited from time to time until the death of guitarist Joe Young in 2014.

SCENE TODAY IN 2016:

In earlier generations, cotton millhands and country folk in the Carolinas played stringband music as a major form of sociability, picking and singing informally. That ethos translates into a bluegrassy/bluesy/traditional-country sound in many Charlotte-area rock bands. The **Avett Brothers** are most famous in that category. Songwriter **David Childers**, both solo and with bands such as Overmountain Men (with the Avett's dad Jim), is winning national notice including a 2016 feature on the NPR show World Café. <http://www.npr.org/sections/world-cafe/2016/04/19/474364001/sense-of-place-north-carolina-david-childers>. Others to watch for: **Moonshine Racers**, **Brown Liquor Pickers**, **Josh Daniel**.

Some of the most active local artists currently:

- **Spongetones** – 10 CDs, newest in 2015 with new drummer Chris Garges. Beatles-influenced power-pop.
- **Benji Hughes** shows off his soul-Americana blend in a 2016 CD on Chapel Hill's highly-regarded label Merge records. He's also worked on projects by actor/country singer Jeff Bridges and quirky funkster Meshell Ndegeocello.
- **Temperance League** – 4 LPs (and CDs) in the past six years offer Springsteen-flavored rock with thoughtful songwriting. Tours in the Southeast.
- **Bo White** – Trained in jazz guitar at Winthrop U, he brings an avant gard sensibility to a variety of rock combos including the 2000s band Calabi Yau. He's working Mexican influences into his sound, a project called Bo White Su Orquesta. And he's a record producer who also runs indy label Kinnikinnik Records.
<http://www.shufflemag.com/bo-whites-music-to-die-for/>
- **Shana Blake** – blue-eyed soul from the granddaughter of a WBT Briarhopper ... and a mainstay of the Tosco Music Parties.
- **Lenny Federal** – the family ran Federal Bakery in Park Road Shopping Center, but Lenny and his brothers went for Southern blues-rock in the 1970s, starting as a house band at the Double Door under the great name Federal Bureau of Rock & Roll.
- **Mike Strauss** – puppy dog of a song-writer, both solo and in a band setting with bassist John Shigoda and others.
- **Loudermilks** – Rocking alt-country band influenced by country sounds including the Louvin Brothers (whose real name was Loudermilk).
- **Time Sawyer** – young band with Americana influences are heard on college radio and tour in the Southeast.
- **Dust and Ashes** – woman-led band with Americana influences and an edgy urgency.
- **Gigi Dover & Eric Lovell** – Rockin' Americana singer/songwriter duo with seven CDs. Run Blu Bubble recording studio.
- **Gina Stewart, Brenda Lee Gambill** – Stewart did a stint as bassist with Fetchin' Bones, teamed with violinist/songwriter Gambill in a band called

Doubting Thomas. Both are known for creative collaboration with theater partners; Stewart often plays bass in Actors Theater's rock musicals.

- **Tom Constanten** -- early keyboard player for the Grateful Dead 1967 – 1970 lives and teaches in Charlotte.
- **Clay Aiken** – UNC Charlotte student (though born and still based in Raleigh) zoomed to pop stardom on TV's *American Idol* in 2003.
- **Funky Geezer** – looks like a cartoon of an ancient guy in overalls. But dang can he rock. He's usually around the NoDa entertainment district.

- **Venues / events:**

Loss of venues is a major problem in the 2010s as in-city neighborhoods experience rapidly rising property values (a nationwide phenomenon). The important blues-rock **Double Door Inn will close in 2017** as will **Common Market** in South End which gave up-and-coming players a place to play. A campaign now underway seeks to stave off demolition of the **Milestone** (punk and alternative rock). **Chop Shop** (mainstream rock) and **Tremont** (indie rock) and **Philosopher's Stone** (Americana) and **Tommy's Pub** (Americana) all closed recently, as did Noda's "**Docklands**" practice space.

Charlotte's main venues with a mostly-rock focus in 2016 are:

- **Evening Muse** -- listening room in NoDa, often with a mellow Americana early evening show, followed late-night by a more rocking band.
- **Snug Harbor** -- indie-rock nightspot in Plaza Midwood doing innovative things including month-long residencies by bands such as horn trio Fat Face.
- **Visualite** -- renovated 1937 movie theater near uptown.
- **Comet** -- tiny bar in Dilworth with a passion for Americana bands.
- **Rabbit Hole** -- new space opened 2015 in Plaza Midwood with a hard-rock focus: "Live Music Six Nights a Week."
- **Amos South End** – large bar known for presenting touring bands that were famous back-in-the-day.
- Charlotte's **National Whitewater Center** offers rock and Americana outdoor evenings throughout the summer with national as well as local bands. Attendance often surpasses 5,000 partiers.

- **Festival in the Park** (since 1960) and other festivals regularly present musical acts.
- Recently opened **Romare Bearden Park** and **First Ward Park** present local and regional musicians frequently during spring, summer and fall, programmed and publicized by Charlotte Mecklenburg Park & Recreation.
- **“Charlotte Has Become Center for Craft Breweries,”** declared *Fortune* magazine July 25, 2015. More than two dozen breweries host live rock and Americana bands in the evenings and on weekend afternoons.
- Each August since 2011 the tattoo artists at Ink Floyd have brought together **God Save the Queen City** with local and national alternative bands. The 2016 edition happens at a range of venues from Snug Harbor to The Fillmore (NC Music Factory) on August 3, 10, 17, 25 and 31. <http://gstqc.com/>

Support:

- **Creative Loafing**, Charlotte’s weekly entertainment newspaper, is the main way to discover new bands and learn who is playing where.
- Recently revived **Tangents** music ‘zine, co-edited and co-published by Daniel Coston, focuses on hometown rock.
- **Smokey Joe’s Tuesday night jam session** regularly attracts the city’s best rock players, sometimes delving into jazz and soul as well.
- Steve Stoeckel of the Spongetones is a sought-after expert in **amp repair** with his shop in the NC Music Factory complex.
- Carl McIntyre, **guitar luthier and repairman**, created one of Doc Watson’s favorite instruments and also developed the McIntyre Pick-up to amplify acoustic instruments.
- **NC Guitar Works**, guitar luthiers and repair in the NC Music Factory, led by musician Nick Plesz with Craig Landau of Charlotte’s late lamented Reliable Music.
- **Mark Williams**, nationally regarded as a mixing genius during his long career at Reflection, continues that work independently. A favorite client: the campy hillbilly rock act Southern Culture on the Skids.
- **Old House Studio** run by current Spongetones drummer Chris Garges.

- **Concentrix Studio**, helmed by keyboard player Fred Story, is best known for scoring TV projects, but is also a center for band and solo recording.

Gospel

HISTORY and CURRENT SCENE:

African American and white gospel music have always intertwined and traded influences in the South. From old acapella hymns, to shape-note books, to hot swing-influenced quartets, to the recent wave of mass-choir ensembles, nearly every historical influence in Southern sacred singing appeared in Charlotte. Most can still be heard today.

- **Metered-hymn** and **shape-note singing** traditions are kept alive by older worshippers in African American Baptist and Methodist churches, including St. Paul Baptist in the Belmont neighborhood near uptown where County Commissioner George Dunlap leads a metered-hymn group.
- Johnson C. Smith University – originally named Biddle Institute – trained singers in **four-part acapella quartet harmony**. The **Biddle University Quintet** and a **Biddleville Quintet** traveled to NYC to cut records for Paramount the 1920s – available today on CD via the British label Document.
- Starting with records made in Charlotte in 1937, **Golden Gate Quartet's** introduction of swing rhythms transformed African American gospel quartet singing in the U.S. ... and their spoken passages foreshadowed rap. Named for a verse in the Bible (not for the bridge in San Francisco), they hailed from the Norfolk VA area but first caught on in Charlotte. A stint in NYC on the national NBC radio network led to tours of Europe, where they relocated permanently to Paris after World War II. Elvis Presley loved them – his record “Swing Down Chariot” is a Golden Gate arrangement -- and when the US Army stationed him in Germany, he angled a pass to Paris for an all-night jam session. The ‘Gates gained a huge following across Europe and remain active, led by Charlotte-born Clyde Wright.
- The Heavenly Gospel Singers also made important quartet recordings in Charlotte. Their February 16, 1937 disc “**Take My Hand, Precious Lord**” was the first record of that composition (Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., called it his favorite song and Mahalia Jackson sang it at his funeral).
- The African American quartet scene flourished through the 1950s and 1960s with regular concerts featuring national traveling groups filling the big Park Center (now Grady Cole Center). **George Clinton, born in nearby Kannapolis**, started singing with a quartet before blossoming into the funk star of Parliament/Funkadelic. Today a few singers keep alive the quartet tradition in Charlotte, including **Men Standing for Christ** (a ministry of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, with a senior singer who has ties to the famed Dixie Hummingbirds). In the 2000s there was a Quartet Association and a loose network of groups who would sing at each other's anniversary concerts, with Dorothy's Gospel Shop as a

nexus; the shop has closed but the singing likely continues.

- The **Johnson Family Singers**, a white group, became highly popular on WBT radio during the 1940s and 50s. Their old-time hymns, plus some Golden Gate-style hot quartets, were recently collected in two CDs and chronicled in a book *We Sang For Our Supper*. (Grandsons Wesley and Chris Johnson have a long-running occasional band called UltraLounge in Charlotte).
- **Shout Bands** are praise bands featuring massed trombones, found only in the United House of Prayer for All People. This African American denomination started by evangelist Charles Manuel “Sweet Daddy” Grace has over a dozen churches in the Charlotte area and more than 130 throughout the eastern US and as far west as Los Angeles. The music seems to have originated in the 1940s and today is passed down from band member to band member. Folklorist Nick Spitzer, known for his long-running *American Routes* broadcast on public radio nationwide, released a CD of bands from Charlotte and elsewhere in 1999 for Smithsonian Folkways. Levine Museum of the New South and Charlotte Center City Partners have sponsored an annual GospelSHOUT! concert at the “Mother House” of the UHOP each Fall for over 10 years; its House of Prayer host is Cedric Mangum, whose image has been featured in a recent marketing campaign for Charlotte. For history see <http://www.historysouth.org/shout/>.
- By the way, at least two **trombone bands play for tips on the street** in uptown Charlotte. Neither seems to be part of the United House of Prayer, though their sound is informed by that tradition. The most active is the family band Brass Connection.
- **BeBe & CeCe Winans** launched their career as gospel singers 1982 – 1987 with the PTL television ministry located in Charlotte’s south suburbs. Since leaving the area they’ve gone on to win three Grammys, nine Dove awards and two NAACP Image awards.
- **John P. Kee** ranked among the nation’s best-selling African American artists in contemporary gospel during the 1990s – 2000s, releasing more than 20 mass-choir CDs. His true passion is his New Life Fellowship Church off I77 exit 12 near uptown, but he still gives concerts from time to time locally and nationally. Son **Chris Kee** plays with Anthony Hamilton.
- **Dennis Reed, Jr.**, Northwest School of Arts graduate won the 2006 national John Lennon Songwriting Scholarship and has worked with Queen Latifah and Mavis Staples. His Inspire the Fire organization brings arts to Charlotte teens. <http://m.salisburypost.com/2008/12/04/award-winning-catawba-singer-dennis-reed-to-perform-monday/> also <http://clclt.com/charlotte/dennis-reed-jr-the-do-gooder/Content?oid=3574854>
- **Dr. Thomas Moore**, both a gifted musician and a passionate educator in early

childhood development, has recorded 10 albums and travels nationally to speak, sing and play at conferences.

- **Friendship Baptist Church choir** teamed with visiting Wynton Marsalis to record Marsalis' Abyssinian Mass for a 2015 public TV special supported by Knight Foundation. Brother **Delfeayo Marsalis** has ties to this area including a Spring 2016 residency at Davidson College. Brother Branford lives part-time in Durham. <http://www.knightfoundation.org/blogs/knightblog/2015/11/20/knight-produced-documentary-marsalis-performance-be-shown-nationally-pbs/>
- **Daniel Heath** is one of Charlotte's leading choirmasters, both at old-line Covenant Presbyterian and also his own 2000-member Church 21.
- **N-Time Music**, a shop on Albemarle Road, focuses on African American mass choir singing, selling sheet music and providing info on upcoming regional events at NTimeMusic.com.

Classical

- **Charlotte Symphony Orchestra (CSO)**, founded in 1932, is Charlotte's largest arts organization and presents some 90 concerts per year. British-born conductor **Christopher Warren Green** (he conducted the music at the wedding of Britain's Prince William) took charge in 2009, working successfully to engage audiences with a range of experiences including a popular series of casual evenings called "Knight Sounds" at Knight Theater. A summer "Symphony in the Park" series takes place in a specially built outdoor pavilion adjacent to SouthPark Mall. Affiliated groups include the Charlotte Symphony Chorus, Oratorio Singers and Charlotte Youth Orchestra.
- **Opera Carolina**, established in 1948 and led since 2000 by energetic James Meena, seeks out partnerships with other arts organizations. Meena created a city-wide Ulysses Festival 2012 – 2014 in which music groups and cultural institutions chose a performance theme and marketed events jointly. Current initiatives: "Opera Unlimited" singers perform in venues from bars to art galleries to churches; annual international "Art Poetry Music" collaboration with Pfeiffer University; collaboration with Mosiac Arts voice/theater/movement ensemble led by 28 year old Kelly Hutchinson.
- **Charlotte Civic Orchestra** is a 70-member volunteer ensemble of talented community musicians. There is also a **Queen City Community Orchestra** led by retired Queens College professor Aleo Sica.
- **Carolina Voices choir**, a community favorite for over six decades, is best known for its annual "Singing Christmas Tree" concerts. Over 130 volunteer singers make up its three ensembles. <http://www.carolinavoices.org/>
- **David Tang**, vocal music conductor and promoter, previously served as associate conductor of the Symphony and also led the Carolina Voices choir. His passion is bringing together diverse multi-cultural projects through his Firebird Arts Alliance, his VOX singing ensemble, and more.
- **Cellist Tanya Bechtler** is a valuable networker among classical musicians, putting together ensembles for collaborative performances with groups such as the Moving Poets contemporary dance troupe. With her brother Andreas Bechtler she hosts salons with musicians, artist and writers at the family's Little Italy retreat on Mountain Island Lake.
- **Carolina Pro Musica** is a small ensemble playing early music on baroque instruments such as harpsichord and viola da gamba. Led since 1977 by Karen Hite Jacob.

- **Aris Quiroga** – highly accomplished Colombian-born classical guitarist.
- **Jacqueline Hairston** – Julliard-trained Classical composer and singer specializing in Spirituals and other African American material (think Kathleen Battle, Marian Anderson). Grew up in Charlotte, maintains ties here from her base in Los Angeles.
- **Charlotte Flute Association** (<http://www.charlotteflutes.com/>) performing group.
- **Central Piedmont Community College** has one of the city's most active music training programs, including specialties in early music and in opera theater. **Alan Yamamoto**, director of vocal music, also organizes CPCC's spring arts week, the **Sensoria Festival**.
- **Winthrop University** in nearby Rock Hill is one of the main centers for music education in the South Carolina state university system.
- Other area colleges with classical music programs and/or ensembles include **UNC Charlotte** (its UNC Charlotte Chamber Orchestra traveled to Montreal in 2015), **Johnson C. Smith University** (its choir performed in Charleston's 2016 Spoleto Festival opera *Porgy & Bess*), **Queens University** and **Davidson College**.

VENUES & EVENTS: (In addition to the major concerts presented by the groups above):

- **Noon concert series at St Peters Episcopal** – free classical music in uptown.
- **St. Albans Episcopal Church** in Davidson presents several concerts each year, both Classical and Celtic.
- **Charlotte New Music Festival** – innovative classical works – marked its fifth year in June 2016.
- **Symphony Park** at SouthPark Mall built for the Symphony's outdoor Summer Pops series.
- See also the venues list later in this report under General Resources.

SUPPORT:

- **WDAV radio** based at Davidson College actively works to foster classical music locally and beyond including the local music talk show "**Biscuits & Bach**" and sponsorship of an annual **Young Chamber Musicians Competition**. Station manager Frank Dominguez originates "**Concierto**," heard nationally on over 50 NPR stations, featuring classical music by Spanish and Latino composers and performers with commentary in Spanish and English.

- Former Bank of America CEO Hugh McColl asked the city's major philanthropists to establish the **Thrive Fund** in 2013 to provide ongoing support for the Symphony and make grants to other cultural institutions for endowment building and audience development.
- **Steinway**, the celebrated piano manufacturer, maintains a showroom in northern Mecklenburg County and occasionally hosts concerts.
- Violin maker **Kurt Widenhouse** is gaining a wide reputation for his fine work.

Global

Like many cities in the upcountry South, Charlotte had few immigrants throughout most of its history. That has changed dramatically since about 1990. From barely 1% foreign-born then, Charlotte now surpasses 12% foreign-born. According to Nielsen, Charlotte ranked as the nation's fastest growing metro in Latino population 2000 – 2013. Half of immigrants are non-Latino, arriving from every part of the globe. The Latino music scene in Charlotte is most well developed because that is the largest population stream, but other traditions can be found if you look.

- **Artists:**

- **International Community Mass Choir of Charlotte** – voices from Liberia and neighboring nations in West Africa blend and soar. Will be featured at the National Folk Festival in Greensboro September 2016.
- **Banda Tecno Caliente** perform the tuba-driven dance music of the Sinaloa region in western Mexico – but on synthesizers. They tour both across the U.S. and in Mexico and have appeared on Univision TV programs.
- **Rhythm Plus Latin Jazz** – big band co-led by longtime Charlotte saxophonist John Alexander.
- **Boriquen Sublime** -- Puerto Rican trio with Danny Rodriguez Sr on cuatro (10-string guitar) and bass, his son Danny Jr on timbales and Lucas Torres on percussion. Plays every Friday evening at **Piece of Havana**, the Cuban restaurant out S. Tryon Street near Carowinds Blvd.
- **UltimaNota** – Latin pop and rock led by promoter, guitarist and networker **Tony Arreaza**. A small version plays lounge music at Piece of Havana on Saturdays; a big version appears at festivals where it will rock the joint. Arreaza formerly led **La Rua**, a modern “rock en Espanol” band that made it onto MTV.
- **Orquesta Mayor** – brass-driven salsa big band tours throughout the Carolinas.
- **Leydy Bonilla** – Dominican-born vocalist with a following in Spain and Central America who relocated to Charlotte in 2004.
- **Bakalao Stars** -- Jam band mixes reggae, salsa and other Latino styles.
- **Bachata Flow** – High-energy dance band playing meringue and bachata rhythms from the Dominican Republic.

- **Reinaldo Brahn** – young Brazilian guitarist often teams with world-class Charlotte percussionist Jim Brock playing/singing a range of music from traditional sambas to MBP (Modern Brazilian Pop). Three CDs including one on San Francisco’s prestigious Reference Recordings label.
 - **Jahalistic** – reggae featuring two brothers from Argentina and a singer from Chile.
 - **Los Trajadores band** – Cuban and other older immigrants come together *ala* Buena Vista Social Club.
 - **Los Morales** – Guitar trio in the bolero tradition with smooth father-son vocal harmonies.
 - **Tommy Lopez** – of Puerto Rican ancestry -- Christian and jazz flute
 - **Mariachi** bands, including Los Gavilanes, turn up regularly at area restaurants and parties.
 - Brazilian Arts Center on Central Av is dedicated to **capoeira**, Brazil’s African-influenced blend of dance and martial arts. Live music on the one-string *berimbau* accompanies most events and can be heard on a CD produced by the Center.
- **Festivals** are important for discovering local and international bands, and also for forging community networks.
 - The **Latin American Coalition (LAC)**, a highly active and effective non-profit that helps immigrants adjust to Charlotte, produces festivals as a key fund-raising and community-building strategy. Tony Arreaza, a guitarist from Venezuela, leads that work:
 - **Festival LatinoAmericano** (October), launched by the Mint Museum in 1990, is one of the city’s largest and longest-running events of any kind. Arreaza uses it to present internationally important Latino rock and dance bands.
 - **Cinco de Mayo / Fanta Festival** (early May) — Mexican focus
 - **Night in Rio** (February) highlights Brazilian culture
 - **Cuban Festival** (May) is Arreaza’s newest partnering with Piece of Havana restaurant.
 - **Venezuelan Christmas Celebration** (December) at the large mainstream venue Neighborhood Theater.
 - **Carnaval Carolina**, featuring over two dozen performers from Mexico, Central America and the U.S., celebrated its 19th year in June 2016. Created by Mexican-born Charlotte based recording artist and promoter

Alex Ruiz, who calls it “La Fiesta Hispana Mas Grande de los Estadios Unidos” – largest Hispanic festival in the U.S. Now that Metrolina Fairgrounds is closing, it has moved in 2016 to Charlotte Motor Speedway.

- **Colombian Festival** (July) marks its 12th year in Charlotte in 2016.
- **Puerto Rican Festival** (July) has recently become a sizable event.
- **UNC Charlotte International Festival** (September) brings together thousands of students and local community members.

- **Venues and events:**
 - **Mint Museum’s Latin Music Concert Series** enters its second year in Fall 2016 with four evening events. The Mint’s Claudia Beatriz Soria is in charge.
 - Mama’s Caribbean on Central Av presents **reggae** bands three or four times each month. Next door is Reggae Central selling t-shirts and other reggae-related paraphernalia.
 - **Latino bands** regularly entertain diners at the spacious Cuban restaurant **Piece of Havana** near Carowinds; **Verde Mexican and Nuevo Latin Fusion** in Huntersville; **Mama’s Coffeehouse** in Pineville.

- **Support:**
 - **Norsan Media** may be the largest Latino media entity in the Southeastern US. Founder and CEO Norberto Sanchez has roots in Atlanta and radio stations from Florida to Tennessee, but his work has flowered most strongly in Charlotte. He runs radio stations **LaRaza 106.1** (Mexican regional music) and **Latina 102.3** (modern dance hits with a Central American flavor). There are also restaurants and newspapers, plus the company organizes its own festivals including the recent large Salsa Fest and Hola Fest on Tryon Street in the heart of uptown.
 - The book ***The Sounds of Latinidad: Immigrants Making Music and Creating Community in a Southern City*** (2015) by New York-based anthropologist Sam Byrd offers a well-researched analysis of Latino music streams in Charlotte during the early 2010s.
 - **Sharey El Showman** hosts DJ evenings of Central American music at Punta Cana Dominican eatery on South Boulevard and several other area restaurants.

- **Loco Sound Studios** in Matthews, guided by veteran Texas musician and producer Eldee Trevino, is a magnet for Latino bands of every flavor.
- **Tropic Culture** studio, run by Jorge Espinosa, is a smaller Latino recording facility. Espinosa had a reggae-influenced jam band in the 2000s; he's also knowledgeable about Puerto Rican traditional players here.
www.tropicculture.com
- **El Potrero Western Wear** on Central Avenue attracts fans of Mexican and Central American music. Promoters usually post flyers about major shows in town or in regional venues such as the large covered arena at **La Gran Plaza Mexico** up I77 at exit 65.
- Winthrop University has an internationally known program in **Mbira**, the African "thumb piano" found in Zimbabwe and nearby regions. Percussion professor B. Michael Williams recorded a 2005 CD *BataMbira* in collaboration with Cuban musicians exploring connections between African and Latin America traditions.

General Resources

Venues and Presenters:

- **Tosco Music Parties are unique to Charlotte**, a performance showcase that encourages musical discovery and networking. Music teacher John Tosco, a bouncy guitarist fond of Beatles sing-alongs, started the parties in his living room years ago. Today in 2016 they fill 1200 seat Knight Theater four times annually. The musicians volunteer to perform, each does one or two songs, then meets and mingles and sells CDs. The line-up is wildly eclectic. You will see major touring musicians who happen to be in town playing next to youngsters stretching their wings for the first time. No matter how well you think you know local music, you are guaranteed to make welcome discoveries. The Tosco camaraderie is helping foster a generation of active, connected young (and older) musicians in this city.
- **AvidXchange Music Factory** (formerly NC Music Factory) is a complex of spaces in a renovated textile mill at the edge of uptown. Has concert venues (biggest is the Fillmore) programmed by giant national promoter Live Nation, smaller spaces including VGBG beer garden and Label nightclub, and offices and work spaces for music-related entrepreneurs. www.charlotteagenda.com/50473/inside-live-nations-strategy-charlotte/
- **Blumenthal Performing Arts** – manages the state-supported Blumenthal Performing Arts Center in the heart of uptown, with showplace spaces including huge Belk Auditorium, big Knight Theater, smaller Booth Playhouse, fine old McGlohon Theater, and the small Stage Door space. Also has teaching and practice spaces in its Spirit Square facility. And presents major national/international performances such as the Breakin’ Convention hip-hop festival and homegrown ones including Quentin Talley’s On-Q Productions and the Jazz Arts Initiative classes and concerts.
- **Arts & Science Council**, a sort of United Way for the arts, is one of the biggest agencies of its type in the US, each year raising and dispersing roughly \$10 million dollars. It provides major ongoing operating support for key musical organizations including the Symphony as well as smaller grants such as the one that helps Charlotte Folk Society produce free monthly concerts. It is the officially designated “Office of Cultural Resources” for Charlotte and Mecklenburg County and often takes the lead in long-term planning, for instance commissioning the study that led to construction of the **Levine Center** cultural campus (Mint Museum, Knight Theater, Bechtler & Gantt museums) on South Tryon Street in the 2000s.

- **Maxx Music – Greg McGraw** produces hundreds of Rock and Americana shows each year in Charlotte and nearby, working in partnership with all venues.
- **Mike Kitchen’s The Sol Kitchen** produces numerous DJ parties and concerts at local venues, focusing on soul/R&B and hip-hop.
<http://thesolkitchen.com/>
- **Tammy Greene, The Jazz Diva**, is an active concert/event producer focused on smooth jazz and soul.
- **Neighborhood Theater** – in the NoDa entertainment district presents mostly indie rock and Americana.
- Recently opened **Romare Bearden Park** and **First Ward Park** uptown present local and regional musicians frequently during spring, summer and fall, programmed and publicized by Charlotte Mecklenburg Park & Recreation.
- **Cabarrus Arena** – unlike some U.S. metro areas, Charlotte has few major entertainment venues scattered in the suburbs. This is the notable exception.
- The former Afro-American Cultural Center at **historic Little Rock AME Zion Church** on 7th Street offers an intimate attic theater that A Sign of the Times band uses regularly for jazz.
- **CPCC theaters** including big Halton, mid-sized Pease and intimate Tate Recital Hall adjacent to uptown.
- Area colleges and universities all have venues, music programs, and schedules of events.
 - **Winthrop University** in nearby Rock Hill is one of the main centers for music education in the South Carolina state university system. It trains numerous music teachers ... and generates some top-notch bands of students and recent graduates (Bob Crawford of the Avett Brothers is Winthrop alum).
 - **UNC Charlotte** -- its UNC Charlotte Chamber Orchestra traveled to Montreal in 2015.
 - **Johnson C. Smith University** -- its choir performed in Charleston’s 2016 Spoleto Festival opera *Porgy & Bess*.
 - **Davidson College** (Davidson); **Queens University** (Charlotte); **Wingate University** (Wingate, NC); **Central Piedmont Community College** (Charlotte); **Mitchell Community College** (Statesville)

- As noted earlier in this report, **Loss of venues** is a major problem in the 2010s as in-city neighborhoods experience rapidly rising property values (a nationwide phenomenon).
 - The important blues-rock **Double Door Inn will close in 2017**.
 - **Common Market** in South End, which gave up-and-coming players a place to play, will close in summer 2016.
 - So will **Metrolina Fairgrounds**, which hosted sprawling events such as the Latino music weekend Carnival Carolina.
 - A campaign now underway seeks to stave off demolition of the **Milestone** (punk and alternative rock).
 - **Chop Shop** (mainstream rock) and **Tremont** (indie rock) and **Philosopher's Stone** (Americana) and **Tommy's Pub** (Americana) all closed recently, as did Noda's "**Docklands**" practice space.
- Large venues in the city include **Time-Warner Arena** (its first concert was the Rolling Stones in 2005), **Bojangles Coliseum**, the **Grady Cole Center** (named for a popular 1930s – 60s WBT radio host), **PNC Music Pavilion**.

Support:

One notable lack in the Charlotte area is locally-oriented radio where listeners can discover local artists and hear about events. There is no locally programmed jazz station. Mainstream rock and country station have local hosts but little local music. Best for local involvement are WPEG Power 98 (R & B / hip-hop) and nationally regarded Americana station WNCW Spindale, which does not reach all parts of the Charlotte metro.

- **Community School of the Arts** – large program nearing its 50th anniversary (in 2019) providing music and other classes to youth: “CSA welcomes into its program every student, regardless of ability to pay.”
- **Northwest School of the Arts** – Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools magnet is a vibrant, multicultural arts learning curriculum for students in grades 6 – 12. Its production of the musical *The Color Purple* received national attention and the **NSA theater program won Broadway's first Tony Award for Excellence in Theater Education** in 2015.
- **Photographer Daniel Coston is the “great connector”** of the Charlotte music scene. He seems to turn up at every music event as well as freelancing prolifically for the *Observer* and many other publications. He's earned a national reputation for capturing Johnny Cash's last appearance and for shooting commissions for musicians ranging from the Avett Brothers to the Beach Boys. Charlotte Museum of History presented two shows of his photos in 2015 – 2016. He is author of several books on the

local and regional scene including *North Carolina Musicians: Photographs and Conversations* (2013).

- Media outlets for music are led by the ***Creative Loafing*** weekly entertainment newspaper; editor-in-chief Jeff **Hahne** came up through music writing. The ***Charlotte Observer***'s longtime freelance music writer Courtney Devores generally contributes one or two articles per week.
- Books on Charlotte music include: Ann Wicker, editor, ***Making Notes***. (history essays); Samuel Byrd, ***Sounds of Latinidad*** (Latino scene); Daniel Coston, ***There Was a Time*** (60s garage rock). See also on the web: ***Recorded in Charlotte*** (Charlotte's 1930s recording heyday) www.historysouth.org/recordedinclt/.
- A quick Google search turns up more than a **dozen recording studios** within Charlotte's I485 belt, including:
 - **Studio East** (formerly Arthur Smith Studios) where James Brown recorded his pathbreaking "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag."
 - **Old House Studio** run by current Spongetones drummer Chris Garges.
 - **Concentrix Studio** helmed by keyboard player Fred Story is best known for scoring TV projects, but is also a center for band and solo recording.
 - **Acoustic Barn Recording Studio** run by jazz drummer and UNC Charlotte percussion instructor Rick Dior has long been a favorite with regional jazz players including Loonis McGlohon.

Ancillary services for the recording industry include:

- **The PlayRoom** -- "the Southeast's premier rehearsal facility" at 916 Tuckaseegee Road, run by musician Eddie Z since 1994. 29 practice spaces plus gear for rent. Anthony Hamilton rehearses there. <http://theplayroomonline.com/>
 - **Studio B Mastering** since 1990.
 - **Mark Williams**, nationally regarded as a mixing genius during his long career at Reflection, continues that work independently.
 - **Audio engineering program** at Central Piedmont Community College.
- Main offices of the company formerly known as **Muzak** have been in Fort Mill (Charlotte's southern edge) since about 2000. Today part of Canada-based Mood Media, it provides a wide variety of curated music streams

to clients worldwide.

- **Charlotte Community Radio** started up recently as an internet-only all-volunteer effort guided by Bridget Sullivan (*Ignite Charlotte*) and Melvin D. Nix. <http://charlottecommunityradio.org/>
- **Charlotte Music Awards** chooses honorees in several genres and presents a concert each year. Created by promoter Jeffrey Cheen, known for his work with Mercury and Capitol records, the Los Angeles Lakers, and BB King Blues Clubs, among others. <http://www.charlottemusicawards.org>
- **North Carolina Music Hall of Fame** in nearby Kannapolis holds its annual induction ceremony each October. The museum is open year-round.
- **I Am Charlotte** initiative by Evening Muse proprietor Joe Kuhlman and former TV reporter Stuart Watson hosts regular networking events for musicians and other culture-makers, aiming to help build bonds of community in this city of newcomers.
- In the current era of disappearing record shops, it is remarkable that Charlotte has three strong mainstream stores: huge **Manifest Discs** (mostly new CDs) on South Boulevard, just-expanded **Lunchbox Records** (new and used vinyl, CDs) on Central Av, and newly reopened **Repo Records** (used) on Commonwealth Av. For Mexican and Central American music, including Charlotte-based bands, visit **Latin Music Max** at 5721 South Boulevard.
- **Nearby (90 minute drive):**
 - **Merlefest** in Wilksboro, NC, created in 1988 at Wilkes Community College with help from Doc Watson in honor of Doc's late son Merle, it is the world's top bluegrass/roots/Americana festival. Some 80,000 people attend each April.
 - **Earl Scruggs Center: Music and Stories of the American South**, museum in Shelby, NC, honors the bluegrass banjo innovator and explores his Carolina context.
 - **North Carolina School of the Arts**, Winston Salem. Residential college run by the state of North Carolina focuses on education in music and other arts.
 - **Fiddler's Grove Festival**, among the longest-running stringband events in

the U.S., takes place every Memorial Day weekend in Union Grove off I77 exit 56 north of Statesville.

- **National Folk Festival** makes its home in Greensboro for a three-year run 2015 – 2017. Traditional music and culture featured on seven stages throughout the heart of the city during the second weekend of September.
- **Fidelitorium Recordings**, Mitch Easter's studio in Kernersville. Easter played a big role creating the first wave of indie rock, including REM in the 1980s, and his recent client list is a who's-who of the Southeast's top musicians including NC's Ben Folds and Avett Brothers.
<http://fidelitorium.com/client-list>