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Where the Bands (and Fans) Are



Richard Florida, the dude who brought us the term “the creative class,” recently published some research on America’s music scenes. Using data from the ever-reliable MySpace, he’s made lists of the 20 cities with the most artists and fans of those artists and puts forth the idea that it’s important to make music in places where there is a fertile scene. There aren’t many surprises here: Los Angeles only tops both lists because Florida separates Brooklyn (#2 in bands; #6 in fans) and Manhattan (#3 in bands; #2 in fans). Chicago comes soon after on both lists. So the top five is pretty much a function of population.

But then Florida uses his metrics to determine that the reason bands in Nashville are fewer but have more fans than groups in bigger cities is “it possesses the world’s best writing and studio talent and the best recording infrastructure” and, thus, attracts top-tier talent.

That’s all interesting, but it doesn’t account for the success of a few recently buzzy music scenes: Baltimore and Omaha make neither list, but we know that first the former, then the latter, was hailed as a haven for musicians and fans alike. These are places where real innovations were (and are) taking place, where musical trends and paradigms shifted. The bands may have fewer fans but still be more influential. And what attracts artists to these places is slightly different from what brings in bigger rock star (Florida cites The White Stripes as evidence of Nashville’s ascendancy): relatively low cost of living, a small but supportive community and plenty of small performance spaces.