How Blue Can You Get?
Urban Mythmaking and the Blues in Edmonton, Alberta

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Abstract

The blues is a genre of music that is rich in storytelling. Growing out of an oral tradition that has spanned generations, its influence on popular music today is undeniable. Many will have some vague recollection of some of these stories—whether related to blues figures, cities, regions, or to moments in time these are stories shared by the entire blues community, and through them, people have become familiar with the mythical importance of places such as Chicago or the Mississippi Delta to blues music. But how does a system of myth-making work in regions that do not have the luxury of being at a blues crossroads? Using the Edmonton blues scene as a case study, this thesis examines some of the stories told by people who have long called Edmonton their home and who have contributed to the mythologization of the local blues scene and turned it into an unlikely home for the blues. By employing qualitative research methodologies, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, this study aims to understand the role that mythmaking has played in strengthening the Edmonton blues scene. To demonstrate this, the thesis first introduces the history of the Edmonton blues scene and, more generally, the city itself. It then looks at how myth has been written about by other anthropologists and popular music researchers. Finally, it shares some of the stories of important venues in Edmonton and important legends of the Edmonton scene before attempting to understand how these myths and stories have helped to carve out a space for Edmonton in the larger blues world.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Craig Farkash. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “How Blue Can You Get?: Urban Mythmaking and the Blues in Edmonton, Alberta”, No. Pro00073018, 6/12/2017.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to begin by thanking my supervisor, Dr. Marko Zivkovic, of the University of Alberta's Department of Anthropology. His patience with my pace of writing and research and the freedom he gave me to explore my own, wild and weird ideas. From soundscape and film endeavours to this particular project on myth and music, he has been one of my most important allies. Without his belief in me and continued support, from my undergraduate degree onwards, I would never have imagined myself capable of being accepted into a graduate program in the first place, let alone completing a thesis. I look forward to many more conversations over Turkish coffee and baklava.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members: Dr. Joseph Hill of the Anthropology Department at the University of Alberta and Dr. Brian Fauteux of the Music Department, again, at the University of Alberta. The courses I took with them in both my bachelor and masters programs introduced to a range of worldviews on a breadth of topics and those lessons helped shape the course of this research. For their feedback and time, I owe them a great deal.

One of the first groups I reached out to when I began this project was the Edmonton Blues Hall of Fame Foundation. Since that first conversation, almost three years ago now, I have been readily welcomed into the fold, first as an inquiring mind and later as a member of the board. They put me in touch with so many people in the blues community here and beyond, and I am forever grateful to them for all that they have done and the friendships we have since formed. Tommie Gallie, Marilyn Hooper, Jean Greenough, Garry Goodenough, Frannie Blondheim—here's to you!

It goes without saying but I need to thank all of the members of the Edmonton blues community that took the time to talk to me both formally (Tommie Gallie, Denton Morrell, Grant Stovel, Julie King, Rodger Stanley, Cam Hayden, and Holger Petersen) and informally, at all the blues events around the city. Wherever I went—blues bars, blues festivals, coffee shops, shows (anywhere in the city, really)—I was met by people equally proud of and quick to share stories about the Edmonton blues scene.

I need to express the deepest gratitude to my parents, Keith and Carol Farkash. They have been unwavering in their love and support for me, as I've travelled between programs and degrees and countries over the years. They may not have always understood what it was that I was doing but they stood by me and believed in me every step of the way, financially and emotionally. Without them I would not be half the person I am today, and I will always be in their debt.

Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful partner, Matana Skoye. We met late in the course of my work on this project but, in that time, she has taught me so much about myself. Every day that we spend together is a gift and without her belief I'm not sure I would have been able to complete this project. I found myself at a crossroads and she helped me pick the right route.

To everyone involved in the creation of this thesis, in all ways—thank you from the very bottom of my heart.

Craig Farkash

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Prologue

I suppose you could say that this project has been a lifetime in the making. Ever since my earliest days, music has been a substantial and central part of my life. As a child, some of my fondest memories were of hours spent in my great-grandmothers living room, listening to her play the piano, or in my grandpa's basement playing around on the keyboards or saxophones or accordions or any of the other instruments you might imagine an old, Hungarian grandfather to have. First, I learned the piano. My lessons were steeped in theory and, as any good child would, I rebelled. My parents relented and found me a cheap guitar to learn on. Aerosmith, Stevie Ray, Eric Clapton, Deep Purple (Smoke on the Water, obviously) – the songs of those artists were some of the very first I learned on the six-string.

In those years I was also equally invested in mythical tales from around the world. I soaked those tales up like a sponge. It didn't matter where these stories were from, I would seek them all out. Many of the shelves at my parents' place were filled with books of myth. Later I became more interested in musical myths, stories about Bob Dylan, Woodstock, Jimi Hendrix, and the Beatles, among many, many others. Over those years I had learned a few blues songs and blues-influenced songs on the guitar, but it was not until the summer of 2015 that I discovered a real interest in the not only blues songs but blues histories and spaces as well.

That summer I found myself a student of the University of Alberta's Fieldschool for Ethnographic Sensibility in Belgrade, Serbia. To cut a long story short, one night a group of other students and myself, all interested in studying music in the city in some form, decided to go out on the town to follow our ears around the city's musical spaces. Away we went, into the

night. As we walked, we could hear the distant rumblings of a kick drum – a promising sound. We followed it. We ventured in the direction of the rumblings, basslines began to reverberate in our chests. Then the familiar I-IV-V structure of a blues progression being played on the electric guitar. We turned a corner and found an amazing outdoor music venue, nestled between buildings.

We found a table to watch from; the last one in the joint. The band was hot, and we were invested. After the show we sat down to chat with the musicians, perhaps our sweaty attire gave us away as visitors to the city and they were intrigued by us as much as we were by their playing. The band leader told us wondrous stories of decades ago, before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, of playing at shows in the former state with Mick Taylor of the Rolling Stones, Eric Burdon of the Animals. And then they told us of one of Belgrade's true hidden gems. So hidden that most locals do not even know of its existence. They were playing the next night there, and we were invited. VOX – "the best blues bar in Belgrade, and possibly even Europe!" "A musical venue unparalleled!" "One of the city's true hidden gems!" Needless to say, tentacles of anticipation spread throughout our group. And yet the high expectations placed upon Vox could do nothing to prepare us for what truly lay behind its doors. To set the scene, one must first begin with the street on which it lies.

I was initially alone as I ventured towards the club – I had agreed to meet a few classmates and Serbian friends outside, given how close I was living to the venue. I quickly looked up directions on the internet and full of the confidence that comes when one thinks they know which bus stop to de-bus at, made my way.

Despite being so sure after travelling down the road I believed to be the correct option, I soon found myself walking in circles. I had been told what to look for – it was easy to miss, being a rather inconspicuous place. All we had to do was search for a red fence, a blue sign "26", push through the unmarked gate and a blues oasis would open before our very eyes. Finally, I found the right road – they weren't lying when they told us it was hidden. But what lay beyond was truly magical.

What one sees when they push through the gate is simply an older home. A small garden lines the building, filled with chairs and tables. But the open door to the home is what draws the eyes while everything else fades to grey. Notes kidnap the senses, tugging at the ears, drawing one ever closer. And most striking is the use of space. What may have at one time been a kitchen is now a bar, kegs wait under the counter, liquor for all tastes sits patiently on shelves – vodkas, scotches, gins, rakijas – staring outwards. Trails of smoke climb from ashtrays, from the tips of glowing cigarettes, spreading out into a single hazy cloud that hangs in the air. Old instruments hang from the walls – guitars, bass, Accordions, mandolins, trumpets – while blues posters fill the spaces in between. One poster in particular has a special prominence; signed by Ana Popovic, an artist who got her start in this very club, now making a name for herself around the world.

What was once a dining room is now a receptacle for bar stools and round tables. And across from that another converted living space that is home to a stage. The whole setting is intimate, everything is in close quarters. It reflects the genre; blues is all about laying one's soul bare for all to see. Walking through the doors of Vox patrons are instantly transported to any

and all moments of blues history. I imagine Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, BB King, Stevie Ray Vaughan gracing the stage with their presence. And in a way they are there – their pictures hang from the walls around the stage, their presence is felt in every riff. It is a truly magical space that one can imagine would not look out of place on the Delta itself.

It was that experience, of finding a thriving blues scene in one of the last places I would have imagined to ever find one, that made me question what the blues was like in my home, Edmonton. It made me want to understand more about my own home, in a strange way. That was the moment that helped frame my research questions when I returned to Edmonton and applied to a graduate program at the University of Alberta in 2016.

The choice to go there was an easy one. The U of A is home to the Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology and the Sound Studies Institute (which holds the Moses and Frances Asch Collection of Folkways Records), and the scholars and students of our own department of anthropology have research heavily invested in folklore and music. It was and will continue to be an amazing place to study music of all kinds.

And why anthropology? Why not find a space elsewhere to write about the blues in Edmonton? Because this project was about storytelling above all else, that was an easy choice. From my first days as an undergraduate in the anthropology department I was fascinated by the ease with which so many of the anthropologists I was reading combined academia and creatively written prose. They often let the stories of the people they were writing about stand for themselves. And it is through that lens that I view what I have done here. This project is more about storytelling than music, about the folklore and how it is told than about pentatonic scales. What is to come in the pages that follow is more about documenting a time and a place

in the history of Edmonton music before those stories are perhaps lost. Analytical chapters are meant to provide some of the framework with which to interpret the narrative chapters while also leaving enough space for the reader to draw some of their own conclusions.

There are some limitations to this approach, as well. As anyone who understands something about the history of popular music will know, the blues is a genre of music that has oft been appropriated by white musicians. The entire British Invasion grows out of that appropriation of a Black art form. While that history will be referenced briefly in this project, the main focus has been on the stories being told in Edmonton, stories of a place and a time. Portions of this project will reference that history giving some background on the issues of cultural appropriation, race relations, and racial solidarity among others. More information on these topics and more can be found in books by Elijah Wald (2010, 2004; these books cover the life and appropriation of Robert Johnson, and a general history of the blues), Michael Urban (2004; this book discusses the place of the blues in postcommunist Russia and how the genre was adopted there), David Grazian (2004, 2003; these cover the relationships between 'blackness' and 'authenticity' in the Chicago blues scene), Roberta Schwartz (2007; this touches on the early British blues bands and traces how that music made its way overseas), and Patricia Schroeder (1989; whose work touches on the role that the blues and its appropriation had in shaping contemporary American popular music culture).

For now, that's enough about myself. Let's get *blue*!

Setting the Scene[1]

It's cold. The kind of cold that numbs the face and would probably hurt if you could still feel anything. Soon your eyelashes start to stick together. Every snowflake that lands on exposed flesh peeking out from under layers of scarves and toques and mitts would feel like the needle of an unlicensed acupuncturist, if you could still feel anything at all. Summer is a distant memory. I wonder why, out of all the places in North America they could have landed, did my Hungarian great-grandparents decide to call northern Alberta home.

It's not always like this. The days are getting longer and, soon enough, we'll trade in complaints about the bitter cold for curmudgeonly remarks about the 'sweltering' heat. If there's one thing that unites people in this city, it's the art of complaint. Sports,[2,3] the interminable winter, the fleeting summer, the dreadful state of the Edmonton Transit system,[4] when someone opens their car door right into the side of the brand-new F-150 your parents bought you for your sweet 16. Ok, fine. You caught me in a lie with that last one. But I can imagine the smug pleasure of bellyaching about the repair bill from the body shop had I been born a wannabe trust fund kid and not a country bumpkin transplanted into the city. The list of cars I've driven looks more like the lineup one might find at a demolition derby and selling them collectively today might fetch me a one-way bus fare to Winnipeg. Which is something else to complain about! Regardless, if something exists here in Edmonton, trust me, we can find something wrong with it. That's not to say that we always mean it. I think for most Edmontonians it's an exercise in community building. It may seem a little contradictory but it's an expression of love. A love for a city that, despite it all, we really do care about. Watch what

happens when an outsider talks ill of the former 'City of Champions.' But we're getting away from the real reason you came over. We've got a bit of a journey ahead of us and my car's been idling outside for a while now, warming up. Shall we head out?

As we walk down the front steps you'll see the bus stop, and you might wonder why we don't just wait a few minutes and catch the next one that comes by. Or why we don't bother calling a cab or its ridesharing equivalent. There's a reason for that: there's only one bus on this route—the number 2. It tries hard to be on time, and most of the time it could almost be (although it's hard to tell if the bus you're catching is so late it's early or vice versa). In any case, I'll tell you all about it as we drive. According to city stats the current aim is that delays for transit should be, on average, *less* than 14 minutes *85% of the time*.[5] As far as objectives go that doesn't seem so great. I know that we're billed as a 'winter city' but, *really?* That's almost the equivalent of hiring a drummer for a gig knowing that they'll only keep the beat rolling 85% of the time.

Edmonton was never really meant to be a transit city (at least in recent decades). Infrastructural problems (and the potential for future ones) have long existed and as the city has grown they've only snowballed. Take West Edmonton Mall; at the time of its opening in 1981 it was the largest mall in the world. By 1985, it was expected that 6-8 million[6] people would visit annually, a huge number considering that at the time, Edmonton's population hovered near 600,000.[7] It was a jewel of the prairies, a tourist attraction, an architectural masterpiece, equal parts mall, amusement park, hotel, aquarium, and future headache. At the time of its construction there wasn't much of anything around it. Housing was sporadic; any neighbourhoods that had started to creep west, away from downtown, had yet to fully fill in

the gaps. It was exciting, being the centre of attention, stealing a sliver of the international spotlight.

40 years later, as Edmonton has sprawled ever outwards and the cost of living has risen, there *is* one glaring mistake, that should have been obvious. No reliable public transit network exists to transport people easily back and forth from the outskirts of the city. Sure, the LRT has been around as long as the mall has, but it only runs north and south, a route that fails to take into account the shape of the city. It wasn't until 2015 that a new line was introduced, although this 'new line' only included three extra stops that branched off from the existing track,[8] and has been riddled with signalling problems. A project that was supposed to begin to move more people more efficiently led to greater travel delays, for both transit users and those in personal vehicles.[9] Most of the plans to expand LRT lines are in their infancy—only one new extension is planned to open in the near future with the opening of a southeast line scheduled for 2020 and most aren't expected to be completed until 2040.[10]

Why would any of this matter to a music scene? What does having rail transit to West Edmonton Mall and elsewhere on the outskirts of the city have to do with making music? What would that have to do with growing a music scene? On the surface, nothing, really. Artists will create, regardless of their circumstances, that's why we have the *blues.* But Edmonton is a winter city and this lack of reliable transport only exacerbates the difficulties of getting people to shows. Things are great in the summer, when the sun seems as if it will never set. But when the days get shorter and snow blankets the streets it becomes increasingly perilous to get out. Buses are delayed. Traffic slides to an icy halt. The above ground portions of LRT track freeze and trap people while they await repairs. I've even heard rumours that Edmonton is featured in

Urban Planning textbooks as an example of what *not* to do. What all this means for the music scene here is that winter gigs are subject to the weather. Local bands set to catch a break by opening for a touring act are regularly double-crossed by a blizzard rolling in, keeping droves of people from coming to their show.[11] It's happened to my friends. It's happened to me. It means loss of revenue and a loss of an audience, the latter perhaps even more valuable to performers of any kind. It's why we drove today. From where I live, a 12-minute drive can easily turn into a 40-minute bus ride.

I saw a picture hanging in a local restaurant a while back. It showed Whyte Avenue, a prominent fixture in the local cultural imagination. It was the 1920s or '30s, I can't remember. As I stared at the photograph I coughed on a chuckle before a bit of snorting laughter erupted from within. A streetcar, travelling down the centre of the street. It would appear that, nearly a century ago, the people of a city a fraction of its current size were better served by local planning and development than they are today.

We can talk about this in greater detail later, if you'd like. Here we are, our first stop on the tour. We've been driving down 104 Avenue, towards MacEwan University. They've just finished building Allard Hall here—it's the large, glass-fronted building to our left—a new arts space complete with theatres, art galleries, recital halls and recording studios.[12] But that's not where we're headed. I'll turn south down 112th Street and park. We can get out now, if you'd like?

Maybe the air has warmed a touch since we left, or maybe I'm simply willing myself to be warm. In any case, we have to walk a couple of blocks from where we found a parking space.

I refuse to pay for parking and in this town free spaces are few and far between, especially downtown. Here we are!

I know you may be asking right about now, "why are we standing here across the road from a strip of condos, Craig?" Good question. We're looking at a six-story complex called the Venetian, a strange assortment of shapes—hexagonal corners, triangular patios, circular patios—and colours—its outer walls a mix of reds and peaches and greens and yellows and beige. It looks more like the kind of building a child might design out of building blocks than anything you'd find in Venice or, for that matter, anywhere in the rest of Italy. It's 'Venetian' only by name. I've really brought you here to discuss the memory of what was here before. It was here that the Sidetrack Café once stood.

The Sidetrack Café was an institution in the Edmonton music scene for people of a certain generation. Nestled beside old train tracks, the Sidetrack Café, which opened in 1981, hosted many great musicians across all genres, equally comfortable opening its doors to blues and country artists across the spectrum. In his obituary for the joint, published in the Edmonton Journal, Mike Sadava mentions seeing Lonnie Brooks, Sue Foley, Colin James, k.d. lang, Kathleen Edwards, Blackie and the Rodeo Kings, Amos Garrett.[13] A list of the players that have graced its stage looks like a who's who of Canadian music royalty and beyond. And it wasn't just the audience that benefitted from having the Sidetrack there for so many years. Many local musicians were given the chance to cut their teeth as opening acts, some even earning the opportunity to share the stage with their heroes as part of the backing band. The Sidetrack had a good run. I was never old enough to know it in the way that those my parents age did—it closed in 2007 after a brief move downtown. But ask anyone here about the blues and they'll

almost certainly volunteer a story about the Sidetrack. For 26 years it helped to foster a sense of community among fans and musicians. It was an incubator for local talent. And, over ten years on from the day its doors were closed, its legend is as strong as ever, if you know who to ask and where to look.[14] I'm sure it'll come up later but for now, shall we move on?

Back in the car, we drive past the Venetian once more before turning back onto 104 Avenue. MacEwan is on our left and in the distance stands the hulking steel of Rogers Place. We'd been sold the idea that a new home for the Oilers would rekindle the magic of the 80s, when Edmonton was on top of the NHL and the Great One and Co. were bringing home a championship every other year. Again, no one my age really remembers those days, but they've become as much a part of the collective folklore of this place as anything else going on in Edmonton in the 80s. It seems everything we've based our identity on came from that period. Maybe that's why we've struggled with building for the future—we've been looking to our past for examples, resting on our laurels too often rather than leading any kind of charge for change.

I'll turn down 109th street here and head towards Jasper Avenue—there are a few things I want to show you there. I'll slow down as we drive so you can have a look, no sense in trying to find another place to park around here. On the left you can see the Alberta block, the former home of the radio station CKUA. If you look quickly you can still see the old, blue logo painted on its side, "Radio CKUA: First on Your Dial." CKUA started at the University of Alberta in 1927, as Canada's first public broadcaster. Over the years its signal slowly expanded to cover the entire province and, in 1955, the broadcaster moved here, into the Alberta Block, where it remained for over 50 years,[15] giving voice to artists from the province and around the world who would otherwise have struggled to find a radio platform for their songs. It's become a

community. In 1997, when the Klein government decided to pull the plug on the station the airwaves went silent for five weeks.[16] After community supporters from across the province banged their drums loudly enough the station was reopened with a new funding model that used "a combination of commercials, corporate sponsorships and listener donations,"[17] becoming a station *of* the people, the community of supporters as much involved in its sustainability as those on-air.

Later it would move into the newly reconstructed Alberta Hotel. If you look to the left now you can see it, that old brick building with its recognizable white cupola and its yellow CKUA sign. In 1984, to make way for the construction of Canada Place, the Alberta Hotel was deconstructed, brick by brick, and placed in storage. Years later, with CKUA looking for a new home in Edmonton, the stars aligned and they agreed to take over the newly restored historical building.[18] While where a radio station decides to call home may seem trivial, it couldn't be less so. Both had seen their fair share of changes in the province, had been through historical moments and now they shared the same space, the space where "Sir Wilfrid Laurier slept…on the eve of Alberta becoming a province."[19] The space where Leonard Cohen is believed to have written the song "Sisters of Mercy". Perhaps you know it? Maybe if we hum a little bit:

Oh the sisters of mercy, they are not departed or gone

They were waitin' for me when I thought that I just can't go on

And they brought me their comfort and later they brought me this song

Oh I hope you run into them, you who've been travelling so long[20]

I knew you'd recognize it. When Cohen arrived in Edmonton in 1966, as a guest of the University of Alberta, he was just another poet. He hadn't travelled to the Chelsea Hotel. His blue raincoat not yet famous, albeit on the cusp of fame. After Cohen was kicked out of his room at the Hotel MacDonald one night, a couple of U of A undergrads took him in, and then took him a few blocks away to the Alberta Hotel, where the song is said to have been written.[21] In a city that likes to complain about itself, that story, regardless of its veracity, we can agree not to tarnish.

We'd better get moving again, I've pulled over long enough for us to take a look. I can see a parking enforcement officer approaching in my rear-view, and I already have enough unpaid tickets. Let's turn around and head back down Jasper. It'll all be on your side this time, so you can have a better look. We have one more stop on this side before we cross the river.

We're back at the intersection of 109th and Jasper, waiting to turn left. It's another important location, legendary even. The light's red so we have time for a short story. This intersection helped build the Edmonton music scene as we know it today, helped carve a hole for us in the greater world of the Blues. Again, you're probably thinking, "this all looks rather new, Craig. There's no way any of this has been here long enough to have had a hand in shaping the course of music in the city."

You'd be right. On every corner there are new glass-fronted buildings housing a couple of clubs that play the same top 40 songs, night after night until 2 am, a condo complex and strip malls. But, once upon a time, at this intersection one of Edmonton's most notable venues once operated, bringing some of the best talent of the day: *The Hovel*. And, again, no one my age would have any memory of the place. Its time came and went in the 70's. Today it only exists in

the minds of those fortunate enough to have spent time there, providing a spotlight for local bands and touring acts alike, from Bruce Cockburn to Rahsaan Roland Kirk to Blues legends like Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.[22]

I first read about the Hovel in *Vue Weekly*—it continued to come up in conversations with many different blues fans—in a piece about the Edmonton Folk Music Festival, perhaps the most important musical institution in the city. An early artistic director of the festival had long been involved with booking acts for the legendary venue and, by the time the Hovel had closed and the Folk Festival was being discussed, a number of the original volunteers from the venue had the necessary skills to develop the event into what it is today. When Holger Petersen became the artistic director of the festival in 1985, the Hovel's founder, Andy Laskiwsky, was brought in as general manager to take care of logistics.[23] Since then, the festival has continued to serve a variety of musical tastes and inspire future generations of musicians. It's quickly become one of my favourite weekends of the year and, perhaps, without the Hovel none of that may have existed—certainly not on the scale it does today.

Perhaps you're beginning to sense a theme here. So many of the venues that have supported live music in this city over the years have disappeared. Even CKUA, one of the biggest supporters of local talent, nearly faded into history. It's not a problem unique to the 70s or the 80s. It's a problem that still affects the music scene in Edmonton. A lot of the places that my early bands enjoyed playing in have gone the way of the dodo. The Artery, a space that combined an intimate concert setting and art gallery, was shut down by the city, citing safety concerns over the structural integrity of the building.[24] Wunderbar, the first venue that gave us an opening gig when we were just starting out, was pushed out of its space,[25] as was the

Pawnshop[26]—both staples on the Edmonton music scene, at least during my coming of age years. That was all only in 2015. Since then numerous other venues have come and gone. Even the weekly alternative newspaper that focused on the arts and entertainment scenes of Edmonton for the last 20 years, Vue Weekly, was forced to call it quits last November after funding sources dried up.[27] When it comes to artistic spaces in this city, nothing is ever safe, no matter its track record.

We spent a little long there, I almost missed the turn signal. It's a good thing you warned me, before the person behind me started honking. We're heading south again, down 109th street. We'll cross the river on the High Level Bridge—make sure you take a look at the North Saskatchewan. It's one of the greatest urban river valleys in the world, covering an area larger than Manhattan's Central Park! Cutting through the heart of Edmonton, splitting the city into a north and south side, the river once separated two distinct cities—Edmonton and Strathcona. A century each still has a distinct look and feel. For what it's worth, that distinction could simply boil down to being a projection of the historical reality onto the contemporary. Maybe we just imagine the differences because we want them to be so and maybe that, in turn, has made those differences noticeable. I don't know. In any case, the High Level has bridged that gap since its completion in 1913, shortly after the amalgamation of the two cities. It connected the provincial university on one side with the provincial government on the other and had "unique significance in western Canada for its original combination of four modes of transportation: train, streetcar, automobile and pedestrian."[28]

Since we're nearby, we'll drive past the University on our way. University campuses have long been places where the arts have, if not flourished, at least been able to stake a claim

for themselves, and the University of Alberta is no exception. This was the campus that the young Leonard Cohen was brought to in the 60s. There are plenty of opportunities there for young singer-songwriters to perform for occasionally engaged audiences. And campus radio stations have long given voice to a diverse and eclectic selection of programs. Much like CKUA before it, the current campus radio station at the U of A, CJSR, hosts programs spanning political discourses, educational topics, spoken word poetry, and, of course, music. One of the city's best-loved Blues shows, Wednesday night's *Calling All Blues*, has been a programming mainstay with the station. The importance of such programs to the city can't be overstated.

In *Music in Range: The Culture of Canadian Campus Radio*, Brian Fauteux provides a tangible description of the oft-intangible idea of a 'music scene':

> *Music scenes result from processes of documentation, such as the recording of music and the writing of articles that comment on musical activity. A number of technologies are implicit in these processes, which both sustain the circulation of music and form an idea of what a locality's music scene sounds like. In other words, a scene can refer both to lived, everyday musical practices and to the perceived sound of a city or town, a sound that is part of its popular imaginary…Scenes, then, depend not only on musical and cultural output but also on institutional spaces where individuals can converse, discover new music, and learn how to produce media."*[29]

He later discusses the role of isolation in helping to develop Winnipeg's music scene. It's a place where, during the cold winter months, most people are trapped, creating art for art's sake rather than a large audience. It's fair to make a comparison to Edmonton's situation. These radio stations and their associated programs provide locals with a learning opportunity. Even in

the midst of a cold dark winter, they connect locals to other places. They teach them what it means to be a member of a community. They teach them about themselves—who they are, who they could be, how to get there. My friend Tommie came from Halifax in the 70's for grad school. When he got here, what struck him most was the differences in each town—Edmonton, Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver—they were all sort of 'isolated' city states. The classics major in me loved that description. Not isolated in the sense of being totally cut off from information and outside influences but in simple, geographic terms. And Tommie said, each city pulsed with its own energy through the winter, pulsated with its own artistic outputs. In his terms, if you were going to be a musician in one of these cities you had better be good, because for six, seven, eight months of the year, your band's shows might be the only live music that your friends saw.[30] Campus radio has obviously contributed heavily to any sense of regional identity that these places have.

No tour around Edmonton would be complete without venturing down into Edmonton's river valley. It's still looking a little cold outside, so I don't think we'll get out of the car just yet. But lucky for us, Hawrelak park is nearby, in fact, the road we've driven through campus on, takes us directly there.

Hawrelak is beautiful in the summer. It's not fair of me to say that right now I suppose. You haven't seen it at that time of year. Trust me. Despite the mountains and mountains of excrement that the thousands of Canada Geese that call Hawrelak home in the summer leave behind (did you know that an adult goose can create 2 pounds of poop a day?[31]) it's still often the place to be. The Edmonton Heritage Festival, featuring foods from all over the world, takes the park over for a weekend every year, donating portions of profits to the Edmonton Food

Bank and other local charities. It's played host to a number of sporting events over the years. The Heritage Amphitheatre in the park hosts the Interstellar Rodeo, the Edmonton Rock Music Festival, and the Edmonton International Blues Festival, bringing the top local, Canadian, and international talent together for unforgettable weekends year after year. Recently, the Blues Fest has given the Edmonton representatives at the International Blues Challenge in Memphis an opening slot on the festival weekend, placing them on- and off-stage beside the very legends whose longevity and success they may hope to emulate.

Looking out over the frozen pond in the dead of winter, snow swept across the ice surface by the breeze, you can still see signs of life—families gathering around picnic huts for winter fires and hot dog roasts, couples skating hand in hand, groups of people waiting in line to see the ice castle that's become a consistent presence in the park in recent years. And perhaps that's what makes Edmonton so special—our ability to persist, warts and all, not because of the adversity thrown in front of us but in spite of it. We aren't perfect, and I don't think any of us would claim to be. Let's go take a look at another example.

We've circled Hawrelak on the ring road that doubles as a parking lot for park users. From here I'll take us back uphill past the university. I know it's maybe a bit foolish, but when it starts to really freeze here—when it's not just cold but *cold*—I sometimes imagine that today will be the day, when I'm driving past Emily Murphy Park, that my car decides the grade of the slope is just too much for it, winter tires and all, and it will cease to be a car becoming an oversized toboggan and sliding backwards. Today, it seems, is not that day. We're back on 109th street, again waiting to turn left. The turning signal starts to flash and, finally, we're here in perhaps my favourite area of the city. Old Strathcona. Whyte Avenue. It could just be that I

have emotional ties to this place. Maybe it's not that special. But I think that after we're done here there's a chance you may just agree with me. For some, it's the cultural centre of the city. There's always something going on—the Artwalk, Ice on Whyte, the Fringe Festival, the Old Strathcona Farmers Market. Any day of the week you can find something here to catch your fancy. Restaurants, pubs, locally owned shops, cafes, hotels, music venues, dives, you name it. In recent years it's seen a number of changes. There's the Forge on our left now, or perhaps what used to be the Forge. It moved into the space the old Pawnshop used to occupy. It was a hot little venue again until arsonists decided to throw Molotov cocktails at the building it was housed in, exploding, at least for the foreseeable future, any plans for the space.

There's the new Raymond Block there, it just went up. Its six stories of condo living feel out of place on Whyte. But I'm sure as those of us old enough to remember a time before its existence are replaced by a new wave of youth it'll be just as much a part of the area in their memories as anything else. Enough time passes and everything changes. Even the Strathcona Hotel, a consistent presence on the corner of Whyte Ave and Gateway Boulevard since 1891, has been unable to avoid gentrification. (Dis)Affectionately called "The Strat" or "The Strath" depending where you fall on the generational spectrum, it's long been a place where you could get cheap beer, stale popcorn, play pool, and almost taste the cigarette smoke that clung to its ceiling tiles. It closed this fall, for restorations of an as-of-yet undisclosed nature.

Gentrification hasn't left the area completely untouched, but it also hasn't been able to completely remove the character of the strip. Take the building we're looking at across the street. Its red- and white-patterned brick façade is instantly recognizable to anyone who's been

here for some time now. Blues on Whyte. The Commercial Hotel. The 'Commie'. It's always been here, at least as long as anyone still living can remember.

The Commie was built in 1912. For years it had a cowboy bar attached to it. That is, until 1984, when it became Blues on Whyte. Three years later an addition was made to the bar increasing the dance and seating space. Since then it's offered live music seven nights a week (the only place in Western Canada and one of the few left in North America to do so, as the story goes), entertaining patrons from 18-88, white collar to no collar—according to former manager, Denton Morell, "It's a business but people don't really see it as a business. They see it as [an extension of] their living room, having drinks with friends."[32] It's a place that people have grown up in, then shared with their families. During a Saturday Afternoon Jam you might see three generations sitting at one table. Seventy to eighty bands cycle through there a year. Recently, local bands have been given greater access to the stage, usually on Monday and Tuesday nights.

In 2016 it closed briefly for renovations—only three days! The rest of the time, despite work being done, it remained open, upgrades being scheduled around performances rather than the opposite. I don't really remember a time before the changes, unfortunately. I hadn't really paid much attention to the actual space before I began seriously looking into the blues ecosystem of our city. I wish I had a better excuse, but it really just comes down to having been floating through a hazy combination of youthful exuberance and alcohol-induced amnesia. We'd often end nights at the Commie, when we grew tired of the canned music our friends were dancing to in Hudson's or the Rack or any of the other sports bars/clubs that existed at the time. There are a few things I remember though. The feeling of years of spilled liquor

causing your shoes to stick slightly on the carpet before peeling away. The unmistakeable scent of tobacco that permeated ceiling tiles years after smoking bylaws were introduced. And the laughter and joy on people's faces. As long as I've known it, it's never been a place that people go to pick a fight. It looks nothing like it did before and yet still captures the same feeling. It's a community building. And it's built a strong community around itself.

In 2012, as a way to celebrate 100 years of the Commercial Hotel in the community, and as a way to give something back, Blues on Whyte hosted its very first Blues on Whyte Block party, an event that has had, in the past, up to four stages going at once—in Dr. Wilburn McIntyre Park, in the Blues on Whyte parking lot, inside the venue, and, occasionally, shutting down Whyte avenue between Gateway and Calgary Trail for a concert space. It's not the only reason premier Blues talent keeps on coming to Edmonton. The Folk Festival, The Blues Fest, Stony Plain Records—they've all played a huge role in spreading a love for Edmonton. And, for the past five years, Blues on Whyte has also played host to the yearly induction ceremonies for the Edmonton Blues Hall of Fame, a foundation dedicated to acknowledging those who have made significant contributions to the growth and sustainability of the Edmonton Blues scene.

Perhaps there will come a day when Blues on Whyte no longer exists, when the forces that closed places like the Sidetrack or the Hovel wrap their fingers around the Commie. It doesn't seem likely. Whyte Ave, the city, it would all feel different without its presence. But who can tell, who knows? All we can really do is be thankful that exists *now* in our *present*. Drink in the surroundings and memories as much as, if not more than, the cold beer flowing from its taps. Dance with strangers to the sound that's shaped the entire course of popular music. I know I will.

I think that's maybe where we can leave it for now. Looking at the posters on the wall outside I don't recognize the band set to play tonight. It's still hours away from showtime anyway. I'd rather be warming up at home. Maybe I'll put a record on. Let's get you back to your car. We'll talk soon?

On Myth

Myth and Music. They are two words that seem to be inextricably linked in popular culture and in history. Myth itself has become a sort of catch-all phrase, referring to everything and nothing all at once. Something about it draws the listener in, makes a story seem larger than it may well be. It is a word that acts as an easy placeholder for something yet to be explained or fully understood. I am not wholly innocent of this. Since the beginning of this project I have been told to look elsewhere, to not force a term onto a study. But that whole time there has been something wriggling at the back of my mind. I would turn away from the term only to find it popping up again here and there. As the idea of myth has drawn me in, so has it drawn in many in the academic world. Mythography, the study of myth and rituals, has been the focus of research in anthropology, psychoanalysis, history, religious studies, sociology, cultural studies – the list is endless. So rather than pull away from using an idea of 'myth' in my research I have decided to give in. However, before this can be done, we must examine in a little detail the history of the word, its changes in meaning, and its applications to the world of popular music, before ultimately unpacking and defining the conditions with which this study will use the term.

I do not mean to create a grand, generalized theory of myth itself. I only seek to understand how it can help us comprehend the development and sustainability of a music scene, using the Edmonton blues community as a case study. Here I also refer to the 'community' as those living in Edmonton, who act as participants in the music but are not necessarily musicians themselves. This is not as much a story of the musicians that have played

in the city over the years as much as it is about those community members who have made it possible – for what is a musician without an audience?

This chapter will look chronologically at some of the ways in which anthropologists have studied myth overtime, as well as those in some closely related disciplines. Following this short literature review, I will discuss the terms use in relation to the blues genre and, more broadly, popular music before proposing my own brief views on the applicability of a new understanding of myth in the development of a music scene.

There is so much that the term myth touches on. It can connote 'ancient' religions, falsity, or larger-than-life moments. It may bring to mind tales of old—of gods, monsters and heroes. It may reference mistaken beliefs about public health that need to be debunked—one only has to read the headlines of a few newspaper articles or scientific journals to see this. Perhaps when you hear 'myth' you think of moments in the history of popular music – Woodstock '69, the death of Lennon, the '27 club.' The truth is, whatever your particular area of interest, some understanding of myth is inevitably present. It does not matter whether a given 'myth' is true or, at the very least, based in fact. What matters most is that a given group of people allow it to have some sway over their lives. If it gives meaning to the lives of people, if it affects their self-image, either positively or negatively, it is worth studying. At the very least, it is a very good place to start – from the focus of western civilization on the "psychic reality of Beginnings rather than of Now" to the structuring of 'narrative tales' to academia – "woe betide the graduate student whose dissertation does not begin with a review of previous research" (Doty 2000: 5). Myth says "so many different things to so many different people" (Doty 2000: 12) that it can be hard to sift any meaning from it. There are so many overlapping,

varying definitions that “no pat definition of myth will suffice” (Schrempp 2012: 17). In all the fields of research that ‘myth’ appears, there are both positive and negative connotations to its use. Used positively, myths are “seen as really existing, important social entities that express and mold cultures. Myth is understood as referring to the fundamental religious or philosophical beliefs of a culture, expressed through ritual behavior or through the graphic or literary arts, and forming a constitutive part of a society’s worldview” (Doty 2000: 13). Used negatively, myth refers

> “to the non-scientific, but science [refers] to the rational, the empirically provable. Today myth tends to be lumped together with religion or philosophy or the arts as a superfluous facet of culture considered enjoyable, but not particularly useful. In this sense myth suffers from the same ambiguity that prevails with respect to the arts or aesthetics in general today” (Doty 2000: 13).

Myth, as with those other aspects of culture mentioned previously, becomes something extra. People do not understand the impact of the arts or myth or religion in shaping their daily lives and society more generally. Myth has become, again, a catch-all phrase that may cover:

> modern stories, images, or ideals when these rivet minds, energize cultures, and confer identity, design, and/or destiny on individuals or societies…such usage replaces temporal primordiality with a kind of psychological primordiality, or ultimacy, and may yet carry hints of the numinous and the timeless. All of the above usages to some degree impose to myth a certain kind of social and psychological function: that of providing societies and individuals with an ultimate moral ground, a validation and justification of an accepted or prevailing way of life and scheme of values (Schrempp 2012: 16).

Myth is an ambiguous term. It may be based in truth and come to be false or it may be based in falsehood and find a certain truth. After all this discussion of myths’ ambiguity as a point of reference, you may be questioning my choice to use it. It is precisely the inexactness of

the term that draws me in—it's the possibility to make my own sense of it. Before we can formulate our own use of the phenomena that is myth perhaps we should begin to define the term by reviewing some of the ways it has been studied in the past, anthropologically and elsewhere.

Since its earliest discernible days as a discipline, anthropology has been concerned with myth, in some way or another. Tylor, Frazer, and other early 'armchair anthropologists' often utilized a comparative approach when studying the myths and rituals of other cultures. And much of the discussion of myth revolved around its proximity to science. In the contemporary world, we often see myth and science coexisting. Segal explains this well: "it is fashionable to say that whatever else myth is, it is compatible with science. For if myth is incompatible with science, it is unacceptable to moderns, who, it is taken for granted, accept science. At least two ways of reconciling myth with science are regularly proposed. Sometimes it is argued that myth and science serve different functions and so run askew. Other times it is declared, more boldly, that science itself is mythic" (Segal 1999:7). The latter is heavily emphasized by Schrempp (2012) who discusses the ways in which popular science writing has adopted some of the narrative structures of myth as a way to share complex scientific research in an engaging, public format.

While we see both myth and science coexisting in contemporary life, to a comparativist such as Edward Burnett Tylor, myth and science were incompatible. In *Primitive Culture* Tylor spends much time deconstructing certain categories of myth. In one such case, that of 'explanatory myths' meant to discuss phenomenological origins, he suggests that "when the attention of a man in the myth-making stage of intellect is drawn to any phenomenon or

custom which has to him no obvious reason, he invents and tells a story to account for it, and even if he does not persuade himself that this is a real legend of his forefathers, the story-teller who hears it from him and repeats it is troubled with no such difficulty" (1958, 1:392). The obvious criticisms of Tylor's language aside, one could argue that a process such as the 'myth-making' he describes is still at work today. As we move through our daily lives, as we move through space and time, we constantly attempt to rationalize things we may not understand. We create 'myths' every day. Any question or story that begins with a reference to 'where were you when' or some variation of that line of thinking could be the basis for a making of a modern myth. If we can take one part of myth-making to be the creation of a story to explain something, science therefore, as Segal and Schrempp have noted, could easily be considered 'mythic,' as can many other parts of our daily lives.

Tylor's work takes the "incompatibility [of myth and science] for granted. He does argue that the two are redundant—with both functioning to explain events in the physical world. But redundancy does not mean incompatibility. Why for him are myth and science outright incompatible" (Segal 1999: 7)? Segal suggests that Tylor sees this incompatibility as stemming from the different explanations that science and myth give. "Myth for Tylor attributes events to the wills of personalities—above all to gods but sometimes to humans and even to animals. Science ascribes events to mechanical forces. Myth and science are incompatible because they offer different explanations of the same events. Gods operate not behind or through mechanical forces but in place of them" (Segal 1999: 7). Tylor argues that "in the absence of corroborative evidence, every tradition stands suspect of mythology" (1958, 1:395), suggesting that if 'primitive' cultures were only able to find a 'better' explanation for a phenomena they

would rapidly abandon myth altogether. Under this framing, myth acted as a step toward science, as the 'science' of 'primitive' peoples.

I would argue here that it does not matter what we take as 'truth'—whether science or myth or a combination of the two—but that it provides some understanding of how a people view their place in the world around them. By taking this supposed incompatibility for granted Tylor limits any conclusions he can come to on how myth impacts the lives of us all. His theories do not take into account the complexities of the emotional life of humans, nor does it allow for an understanding of the emotional sophistication of the various cultures being studied. What is music if not structured emotion, a perfect blending of the rationalizing and emotional aspects of a culture. Perhaps the best thing we can draw from the comparative approach to mythology is an understanding of what we do *not* want our own theory of myth, as it relates to Edmonton and popular music, to include. Myth *does* attempt to explain or shed light on things that we deem mysterious or complex or any other number of adjectives and, therefore, has value.

Around the same time as Tylor's work on myth and science, the myth-ritualist theory was being developed. Unlike the anxiety-ritual theories later investigated by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, whereby ritual was a means to attempt to exert some control over and ease the anxiety of uncontrollable situations such as sea conditions on a voyage (Homans 1941), or the work of Tylor on myth's role as a primitive science, the myth-ritual approach is "distinctive in connecting myths to rituals…[maintaining] that myths and rituals operate together" (Segal 1999: 37). For William Robertson Smith, who first developed this approach, "myth depends on ritual, even if ritual comes to depend on myth. Without ritual, there would be no myth,

whether or not without myth there would cease to be ritual" (Segal 1999: 39). This connection is an important one to draw from.

We can make this connection easier to think with by drawing on Richard Bauman's study of verbal art, a category created to refer to all the various narrative performances that the worlds cultures have created. For Bauman, "verbal art may comprehend both myth narration and the speech expected of certain members of society whenever they open their mouths, and it is performance that brings them together in culture-specific and variable ways, ways that are to be discovered ethnographically within each culture and community" (1977: 5). In this way we can think of myth as a narrative or story and ritual as the performance of that myth. Each requires the other. Without the performance, without the repetition of the story, that story would fail to have any significance. As we will see later with the stories told about the blues in Edmonton, the ritual, the repetition of names and places and connections over time, is as important as the content.

As we move forward to examine myth, music, and the Edmonton example, the relationship between myth and ritual will be important to remember. Myth and ritual—the structures in place—both inform and are informed by each other. Edmonton is a place that has its own history and development that is geographically distant from the epicentres of blues history and development. When we listen to people here talk about the blues, we can start to see how myths of place have developed, where they might have come from, and how parts of other myths of place have been co-opted, among other things. How might the oral tradition of the blues be understood as ritual? How do members of the Edmonton blues community self-

mythologize? How might the stories being told in the city and about the city have developed in relation to the city itself? We will return to these questions and more later.

In *The Golden Bough* (1958), Frazer developed the myth-ritual theory far beyond Smith, stating that myth and ritual work together only in the stage between religion and science. In this stage, myths give meaning to rituals and rituals are used to enact the myth itself, whereby "the ritual operates on the basis of the Law of Similarity, according to which the imitation of an action causes it to happen" (Segal 1999:39). The myth and the ritual have become inextricably intertwined. Perhaps, by telling their stories repetitively, over time the stories that were being told about Edmonton really began to sit within the minds of those from elsewhere, increasing the mythic stock of Edmonton both in the local cultural imagination and beyond. From all of these examples we can see that the comparative approach in some ways attempts to impose an order or connectivity to myths around the world. And, when used sparingly and with intent, the approach itself can be useful as a starting point. Comparisons can be useful tools, if they are expanded upon and if they are not used as the sole point of reference.

Myth is meant to explain the unexplainable, to give purpose and reason to things as they exist. But even science doesn't fall outside of the realm of myth. It has meaning because we allow it to have meaning. It would be foolish to adopt the work of the early comparativists we have discussed wholeheartedly. There are many problems with the research. Their theories leave out the lived experiences of the people they're writing about. There's a reason that anthropologists these days are forced to trudge into the field, to spend time with the subjects of their research, to get to know them on a personal level. But, paying close attention to the

myths that a local musical community have developed over the years, and the rituals that enact, transform, and transport them can prove very fruitful.

That brings us back to the topic at hand—*myth*. Here we may turn our attention to the father of North American anthropology, Franz Boas. Much of Boas' fieldwork on Baffin Island and on the Northwest Coast of Canada with indigenous groups involved recording and documenting all kinds of cultural practices in as much detail as possible, for fear that the onslaught of colonial practices would deteriorate and ultimately destroy entire ways of life and ways of thinking. The recording of myth was no exception. In the late 19th century, when discussing the limitations of comparativism, Boas remarked, "the mythologies of the various tribes as we find them now are not organic growths, but have gradually developed and obtained their present form by the accretion of foreign material…adapted and changed in form according to the genius of the people who borrowed it" (Boas quoted by Stocking 1974: 5). When we think forward to the case of blues myths in Edmonton, it may be useful to remember this statement. How have the myths being told and shared within and outside of Edmonton been altered to reflect a local flavour? And, can we see any ways in which the stories of Edmonton have been disseminated back outwards into the larger blues world?

We, as individuals and a collective, are the sum of our histories. This may seem obvious, but as the world has grown smaller (to use a colloquial phrase) the number of directions from which we are influenced, and enculturated or acculturated, have grown immensely (I am taking this sentiment for granted here). In the realm of music alone, technological advances and social changes have changed the way music is consumed entirely. The rise of streaming platforms means that we have access to all genres of music from all sides of our planetary sphere.

YouTube tutorials make it easier to acquire new skills without having to leave the comforts of one's own home or city—any instrument, any hobby can be rapidly learned. Travel is easier (although not for all) and this is of importance for live music—on a day in Edmonton, say, at the Folk Music Festival, you might be able to hear a Tuareg band from northern Mali, a blues singer from the Delta or Chicago, an Irish folk singer, or Mongolian throat singers, among others. In the past, most cultural exchanges were restricted "by the facts of geography and ecology…[or] by active resistance to interactions with the Other" (Appadurai 2012 [1990]: 568). Value and meaning come from the *exchange* of goods (Appadurai 1986), whether we think of these goods as musical styles or ideas or hard copies of music recordings or performances or anything else. Globalization has allowed for musical commodities to infiltrate the furthest places from their point of origin. The idea of 'mediascapes,' taken from Appadurai's research into 'global cultural flows,' refers to both the "distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information…and to the images of the world created by these media" (2012 [1990]: 574). In his studies on the Northwest Coast, long before Appadurai, Boas "discovered that particular themes and motifs might diffuse, with some degree of independence, to combine and recombine with other elements in a variety of shifting ways" (Briggs and Bauman 1992). This diffusion can happen on a small scale between neighbouring collections of stories or people or on, as is the case now, global scales.

These global flows, in our case of music, mean that people anywhere have access to anything, and local imaginations are shaped by this. It can be hard, therefore, to differentiate what a distinctly local flavour is from what has been shaped by outside influences. When we dissect some of the myths both of and told by the Edmonton blues community it will be

necessary to first understand some of the history of the blues as a genre and the social development of the Edmonton region before sifting through all our information. It is quite possible that after all of this work we will not come to a definitive conclusion but have rather more questions than we began with. But let us return to Boas for a moment.

When discussing his fieldwork with Indigenous peoples of North America, Boas outlines the "mythification of historical events" (qtd. in Stocking 1974: 135). This—somewhat self-explanatorily—involves the production of new myths out of historical events. Through this process anecdotes become allegory. However, this sequence only becomes clear when we have access to historical documents, or memories of the times and places mentioned in neo-mythical tales. In cases where the institutional and cultural memory has faded or been altered by time these new tales can replace historical memories. We can illustrate this with an Edmonton example. In my discussions with members of the blues community, there's a certain question you can ask of those old enough to remember such a time—who was the first person to play at the newly minted *Blues on Whyte* when it first opened in 1987. Some will say Rusty Reed. Others will have a different answer. It's a question that could be (relatively) easily verified. Perhaps it was published in an events calendar of the time. Perhaps there's documentation somewhere in the venue records. It doesn't really matter. Regardless of what the 'correct' answer is, the answer you receive when asking such a question can tell a lot about the people you ask it of. Like in Boas' example, what matters, what *becomes* the truth is as equally important and has equal importance to the community sharing it.

I would like to recall the Boasian principle of historical particularism (Boas 2012)—Edmonton as a collective, as a community, as a place in time and space, and as a cultural

ecosystem is a product of its own unique history. The blues community of Edmonton is simply a subculture of this. Now here I do not refer to subculture in the sense of Hebdige (1979), where the term signifies modes of resistance, but rather to the idea of subculture as discussed by Thornton (1996) where the term is used to signal distinction from the parent culture. Building on the Bourdieuian concept of 'cultural capital,' Thornton develops the idea of a 'subcultural capital' where levels of membership within a group are dictated by the investment the individual has in it. In this vein the myths and stories of the Edmonton blues community can be used as markers of membership or identifiers within the community. Subcultural capital is gained through the stories that one can tell, through musical proficiency, through connections to important figures and places, and, finally, through a nuanced knowledge of the blues. While not an exhaustive list of the ways one might gain subcultural capital within the Edmonton blues scene, these act as markers that we will need to be aware of in the next chapter. As a 'subculture' the blues community can be seen to have varying levels of membership, as the type and intensity of individual engagement with the scene demonstrates this.

Malinowski was less interested in the origins of myth and more the function of myth and ritual as it existed in the present. Not only do myths serve to "give rituals a hoary origin and thereby [sanction] them" but they also enforce other cultural phenomena and ensure that all members of a society adhere to them (Segal 1999: 44). In other words, "myth…in its living…form, is not merely a story told, but a reality lived" (Malinowski quoted in Doty 2000: 131). The repetition of these stories over time comes to reflect the social realities of the present. How the people repeating these stories over and over again view their community both shapes and is shaped by these 'mythical' tales. Myth itself, then, becomes a charter for

society (or at least for those members of a specific culture or subculture). Malinowski's insights on myth can be seen as falling into one of four categories: "function and practice, context and meaning, anthropology and psychoanalysis, and conceptual marking" (Strenski 2014: xi). Myths are "part of the functional, pragmatic, or *performed* dimension of culture—that is, as part of activities which *do* certain tasks for particular human communities" and in order to interpret them we need to have an understanding of the context in which they are actively lived – "myths do not have intrinsic meaning; their meaning is given by their home context of situation" (Strenski 2014: xi). To use an example from Malinowski, while the Kula exchange is extremely meaningful to the people of the Trobriand Islands, not only moving material culture between islands but also cultural artefacts in the form of customs, art, and others, if such a practice were to be displaced or transported to another location, the meanings would differ substantially (Malinowski 2012 [1922]).

So what function might the stories being told in Edmonton serve? As we will see later, part of the mythmaking process in the musical realm, as it applies to specific scenes and cities, is to separate one place from another. They work on the individual level, transmitted from member to member as a means of building community, but also reference various pasts, presents, and futures. Music and myth almost seem intrinsically linked at times. Perhaps nowhere is this made more explicit than in the work of Levi-Strauss and other structuralists.

For Levi Strauss, all mythology is dialectic, trapping "the human imagination in a web of dualisms" (Doniger 1995: viii) which, when these dualisms are viewed in myth, can be broken down into their constitutive pieces. His technique to analyze myth "assumes that the analysis of myth should proceed like the analysis of language. In both language and myth, the separate

units have no meaning by themselves, they acquire it only because of the way in which they are combined. The best comparison is with musical notation: there is no musical meaning in a single isolated note" (Douglas 1967: 50). In this way we can think of the blues myths of Edmonton. When told in isolation they do not have the same meaning. It is only by connecting the stories told in Edmonton with the larger blues world that they begin to have meaning and establish Edmonton as a blues city. The blues world has well-established mythologies and narratives while Edmonton does not (at least in the very beginning). There are well-known figures (Robert Johnson, BB King, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, etc.), well-known places (the Delta, Chicago, Memphis, etc.), and well-known narratives (selling one's soul to the devil at the crossroads is one that may immediately spring to mind). Edmonton, while still well-known by those in the know within the blues world, does not command the same attention within the North American/Western cultural imagination. Therefore, it may in fact be useful when examining some of the stories and themes that circulate in the Edmonton blues scene to place these narratives alongside some of the more common narratives of the larger blues community and how they are used. A single story of the Edmonton blues scene may not necessarily have any specific meaning when told by itself. It is only when combined with other myths, with other ideas of place, and with prior knowledge of the blues or of Edmonton, that the stories combine to create a tale of Edmonton the *blues city*. And, by extension, it is only when these stories are place alongside the stories from other blues communities that we really start to gain a greater understanding of the whole.

Often, we take for granted a disconnect between mythology and history. In the popular imagination, one is taken to be an allegory, an embellishment, or a marketing tool, while the

other is taken to be a social fact (I refer to history here as a social fact in that the modern historical establishment, centred in academia and shared outwardly, is often subject to biases and can be influenced immensely by the varying agendas of the authors yet still exert an influence within society). If something is historical it is true and if something is viewed as mythical it is false. However, the two are rather intertwined and, contemporarily, it would be useful to think of them as such. Indeed, when discussing the Edmonton blues scene and the stories surrounding it, we will be well served to recognize this interplay and use it to our advantage. To quote Levi-Strauss, "we would think that it is impossible that two accounts which are not the same can be true at the same time, but nevertheless, they seem to be accepted as true…if you take two accounts by historians, with different intellectual traditions and different political leanings…we are not really so shocked that they don't tell us exactly the same thing" (Levi-Strauss 1978: 41-42). And that may be what is the most important aspect of mythmaking—it is not necessary that something has actually happened for it to become 'true,' only that a group comes to take it as truth over time, just as Edmonton has come to be recognized as a home for the blues

In *Myth and Meaning,* Levi-Strauss claims, there are two relationships between myth and music, one of similarity and another of contiguity. The latter relationship developed when mythic thought faded to the background and new musical styles emerged to take over the intellectual and emotive function that mythology had once had—music like that of Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven. The music created by those in the previous example maintains certain themes—like mythology—that only become clear when placed side by side. When we listen to a musical piece or a mythical story, we constantly reconstruct what we are hearing and

reevaluate based on previously established themes (Levi-Strauss 1978). In the case of Edmonton's mythmaking there is a recurrence of themes that, perhaps, without reference to one another and the whole would be interpreted differently. Without understanding a bit about the general history of the blues it would be impossible to formulate a nuanced understanding of the blues in Edmonton. I do not wholeheartedly agree with Levi-Strauss on his study of myth but I find it useful to use his call to look at the pieces as a sum of a whole, needing to reference parts that come before and after and to look at these myths from a variety of angles we may find ourselves with a more complete understanding of the topic at hand. In the same way, we could frame the story of the Edmonton blues scene not as a linear progression but one that, at any moment in time, is actively referencing the past, looking to the future, and harkening itself to different times and places.

Perhaps now is a good time to depart from anthropological studies of myth and briefly introduce a few other ways of conceptualizing myth. As we have been discussing prior, myth is viewed as something foundational. It can act as a social charter. A mythical narrative can tell a lot about the people who value it. In a collection of essays Barthes deconstructs modern mythologies and, while formulated from his experience of the rise anti-intellectual groups in French society (Roth 2012), has offered a useful framework for understanding myth. He frames myth as a type of speech, "not defined by the object of its message but by the way in which it utters this message" (Barthes 1972: 131). With this in mind, what can become myth is arbitrary. Anything—whether writing or objects—can become speech and thereby myth if it *means something* to those who accept it.

This could be akin to claiming that Edmonton is the *real* blues capital of Canada, regardless of what others might say. Myths represent an idea of a place. They focus in on one feature while blurring others—there are so many linkages between places and movements of music that to say something is *only* something is to forget that it is a part of a larger narrative that includes the movement of peoples and ideas and images and stories and so on. In its entirety, myth is something that comes to be taken for granted. It presents itself as a 'natural' thing (Barthes 1972). Flaws could be found in a story if attention is given to more minute details, or aspects of it were examined more closely. This is perhaps best seen in hindsight, projecting our own present stories onto historical narratives. Now that we are on the topic of the narrative aspect of mythmaking it may be a good time to discuss how other studies on narrative forms can offer us useful frameworks.

In his study of Russian folktales, Vladimir Propp developed a useful way of looking at the structure and content of these tales; each fairytale or folktale that Propp studied was seen to have the same basic structure. And, while that conclusion was specific to Russian folktales and not a generalized theory it is potentially very useful for our purposes. What is seen on the surface of the tale—such as how places are described, the language used, and so on—may vary from tale to tale, the components underneath that provide the structure will remain relatively unchanged (Propp 1968, Doty 2000). In simple terms, there are certain points that a narrative *must* stop at along the course of its telling. What happens in between these points can change, so long as it serves to bring listeners to the correct destination. This will be important to remember as we look at some of the stories of a handful Edmonton blues luminaries. When you listen to them talk about the blues, as people with a stake in the blues community, there are

certain themes that will become apparent when the various stories are placed in proximity. The names of important figures will certainly appear, those that the narrators of the tales have played onstage with or become friends with. The names of cities and places crucial to the development of the blues will appear often, and connections between these places and Edmonton work to legitimize Edmonton as a blues space. Through listening to these stories of place—as narrated by local Edmontonians—we learn "what is important and how meanings are chosen and how they compete" (Bruner and Gorfain 1983: 74). By studying mythmaking as a narrative practice, we can learn what it is about the blues *in* Edmonton that gives meaning to locals.

In a similar vein to Propp, Joseph Campbell introduces us to the idea of a monomyth. In its most base form this strips the myths of the world into a simplified narrative structure that has the hero of the myth receiving a 'call to adventure' and leaving home, eventually finding a mentor. After this departure the hero goes through an initiation phase, facing trials and temptations before finally returning home changed after find the 'ultimate boon' (Campbell 2008). Now it may seem that the kind of mythmaking we are searching for in Edmonton would be something different. That would be a fair assumption. However, certain parts of the structuring of a 'hero's journey' can be useful to think with. While not explicitly a Jungian, much of Campbell's work aligns with that psychoanalytical structure. The process of 'myth-making' is very public, perhaps coming from the Jungian 'collective unconscious' (Segal 1999, Walker 1995). We take in information from outside sources and process it based on our individual experiences. These interpretations of the local mythology are then introduced to a more public sphere. If it can be said that there are certain narrative structures that are more common than

others, than it would be helpful to examine certain blues myths and legends from the past to see how they exert themselves upon modern mythmaking practices.

Now that we have discussed in some detail how myth has been studied in the past and what those studies can do for us *now,* we can turn our attention to more recent uses of myth, ones that have emerged from pop culture studies. While this has not been an extensive examination of all that has been done to study myth anthropologically and otherwise it does, hopefully, give us a clearer vision of some of the major points of reference. Perhaps, then, it is time to turn our attention to myth's study in the present. More specifically, how the concept continually appears in the realm of popular music studies and blues writing as well as mass media studies, in both the academic and public spheres. In one such study, Liz Locke recorded what an entire year's sampling of *Time* magazine's use of the term myth referenced and came up with six categories:

> "1. Greater or more relevant reality…
>
> 2. Traditional fictions/stories…
>
> 3. Misconceived belief/untruth…
>
> 4. Personal organizing principle…
>
> 5. Collective organizing principle…
>
> 6. Metaphor/Symbol…" (Doty 2004: 12).

In the presence of so many definitions or uses of the term it can be difficult to sift through all the conflicting notions. It can be even more frustrating when we believe ourselves to have a strong grasp of the term ourselves. Turning now to the blues and popular music will further assist us on our journey.

The blues is a genre of music rich in storytelling, growing out of an oral tradition that spanned generations, its influence on popular music today undeniable. Whether or not you are a fan of the blues you undoubtedly have some vague recollection of a story about a soul being sold to the devil at a crossroads. That motif has appeared in popular culture numerous times, whether in the 1986 film *Crossroads*, the Coen Brothers' 2000 film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?,* or *Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny*, among others. In the blues community, this trope is often associated with Robert Johnson, the legendary Delta Blues guitarist and songwriter.

This is not the only myth that exists within the realm of the blues. There are some related to other blues figures, to cities, regions, to moments in time. These are stories that are shared in a wider popular context, shared by the entire blues community. People are familiar with the importance of Chicago or the Mississippi Delta because of their importance to the general history of the blues. These places have been built up within the cultural imagination of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of people. But how does a system of myth-making or mythologizing work in regions that don't have the luxury of being at a blues crossroads? How can places like Edmonton and its people go about mythologizing themselves? What types of stories can be told in regions outside of the hubs of blues production? How do the global narratives of the blues interact with the local? How do the aesthetics of venues contribute to feelings of authenticity? Finally, how might the flow of musicians affect community building? As with the Balinese cockfight, the stories that the blues community in Edmonton tell about themselves are much more than stories (Geertz 1973). They are ways of framing the world. Within a certain story or performance is hidden an entire world.

In preparing for this research I began reading into the role modern mythology—of place, of time, etc.—has played in different blues communities, predominantly around the United States but also in Canada, as well as the larger realm of popular music. In our present, "music has become something artificially intelligent" (McRobbie 1999:38), "snatching phrases, chords, and strains of sound from unlikely sources" (37). In the music industry, myth has become a marketable commodity (DeCurtis 1999: 31). Stephen King (2011), in his book on blues tourism in the Mississippi Delta, discusses how a variety of communities in the region have latched specifically onto the figure of Robert Johnson, using the ambiguities in his life tale to connect their own towns to the blues legend. He even includes a story on the city of Cleveland, Mississippi claiming an intersection in their boundaries as *the* intersection where Robert Johnson made his deal with the devil, despite the fact that the same two roads intersect a number of times to the north. Patricia Schroeder delves specifically into the life of Robert Johnson, whose most consistent characteristic in his story was his inconsistency (1989). In the Canadian context, Narváez (2001) touches on the 'myth of acousticity' that exists among certain blues musicians and within the crowd in general, suggesting that many view the acoustic guitar as an instrument that is inherently more 'authentic' that an electric guitar, along the lines of the Bob Dylan/Newport moment. To remain on the subject of authenticity and the blues, Grazian (2004, 2003) sees a 'sliding scale of authenticity,' that what is perceived as authentic varies depending on the context in which one is searching for it. What is important to take from this is that there is a significant amount of ambiguity at play. I also spent time watching a few films that documented certain aspects or moments of the blues, films such as *The Land Where the Blues Began* and *The Search for Robert Johnson*. Recent research by Elijah Wald and others

(Wald 2004), focuses on the Robert Johnson story in great detail. In much the same way as Schroeder before him, Wald sees the Robert Johnson story as particularly influential in the development of blues mythology and perceptions of the blues itself (as it was transmitted to white audiences during the early days of rock'n'roll). It seems the presence of Robert Johnson is inexhaustible.

In the previously mentioned examples on the mythologization of Robert Johnson, what we see is a certain amount of ambiguity as well as awe in what is being said in some of the stories, an unverifiable variable. And this understanding of myth can be combined with Grazian's discussion of 'authenticity' (2004, 2003). I think the two terms, myth and authenticity can be linked quite well. On the surface this seems quite strange, they seem quite opposite. But in the context of the Delta, and even Chicago, myths of space and time and people are used to ground a perceived authenticity.

There were a few things that continually came up as I was interviewing people about the blues in Edmonton. These included the importance of public/campus radio, the importance of certain places in shaping what the blues is today, the importance of festivals, and the importance of linking our own blues scene to a (perceived) shared past. Fauteux (2015), discusses the importance of Campus Radio to local music scenes of varying urban sizes. At one point an article written about Winnipeg is brought up, which discusses the importance of the cold and isolation to the strength of Winnipeg's musical creativity and output—it is campus and donor-sponsored radio that help share and encapsulate the environmental factors in creating a myth. But why use a term such as 'scene' to describe what is going on with the blues in

Edmonton? Here it may be first useful to differentiate between the terms 'scene' and 'community' and the degree of their entanglement.

Straw (1991) suggests that the two terms, while linked, define different things. A musical *community* "presumes a population group whose composition is relatively stable…and whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage" (1991: 373). On the other hand, a music *scene* "is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization" (373). In a sense, the blues in Edmonton is both a musical community and a scene. The population of blues fans and players is relatively stable, for the time being, and it is through the perception of some sort of Edmonton musical heritage that ties them to the place they find themselves. But in other ways it resembles a scene, given that there are certain cultural spaces within the city that bring musicians of all kinds together, with Blues on Whyte being one of those spaces. In this sense its influence can be seen to be spreading outwards into the community. Even if one is not playing the blues or actively involved in its consumption, the genre and its associated places within Edmonton do shape the sense of self and location of Edmonton musicians.

After all this what can we draw from a discussion of myth, to help us better understand the process of mythmaking and the blues in Edmonton? Why even call this thing we are after 'myth?' It may be as simple as the ease with which one can use the word and immediately bring an image into someone's mind. It's certainly easier and less simplifying to say you're discussing mythmaking and music as opposed to saying its 'kind of a study of myth and of storytelling and

of music and of folklore or any other number of terms.' From the previous discussion we can conclusively say that myth a unifying practice. I don't mean to say unifying with the intention of looking through a universalist lens, but rather within the cultures and spaces a certain mythical framework develops. It's something that is socially relevant and, whether self-mythologized or mythologized from the outside, gains cultural relevance. That is what differentiates the realm of myth from elsewhere. I only hope that all I have written before this has led to a greater understanding of how we can attempt to decipher the process of mythmaking as it exists in Edmonton. And I hope once finished we can see how useful mythmaking can be in fostering the growth and stability of a music scene. But for now, I think I hear our tour guide knocking at the door once more.

People of Power, Places of Power[1]

It's great to see you again, I can't believe it's been this long! Come in, come in! You found the place ok, I trust? The last time we were together seems another world now. The trees have long since put their summer clothes back on, life breathed back into the city. Looking out from the balcony here you can hear the laboured voices of runners chatting as they jog along the river valley, hear the roaring of engines finally breaking free of their winter confines. I guess that's the other thing that's changed since our last visit – I've moved. There was no balcony before, no view, only a backyard and traffic. I guess I wanted to be closer to all the action. For me, 'the action' is live music. Its hubs of arts and culture. Its seedy dive bars jammed into an eclectic assortment of buildings. Whyte Ave has all of that. It's a sort of snapshot of the city itself. There's the university crowd—the young ones rolling tokens into the games at places like Beercade, full of optimism and hope, and the older disenchanted ones hanging out in dingy places like Black Dog or Tavern. There's wealth and poverty juxtaposed in one block. The buildings themselves are a sort of patchwork quilt or brick and steel and concrete and glass, a visual time capsule of the last century of the city.

Remember the last time we were together? The day that you picked me up, at my old place? We ended our tour outside of one of my favourite places in the city—*Blues on Whyte. Blues*. *The Commercial Hotel.* The *Commie* as its referred to by people of a certain era. Since I first heard that nickname for it, I found it strangely reflective of the place. The place where working class music is played to working class people (and others). It seems appropriate that such a place would be nicknamed the 'Commie.' It appeals to the little Marxist in me (not a full-blown communist, just someone that wants out of the dumpster fire that neoliberal capitalism

has created). Anyway, I know we ended our tour last time outside, but we never actually went in and sat down, never stopped to take in all that we had been talking about. I thought today we might be able to walk down there, since its summer now and I can tell you a little more about the people and the places that make this Edmonton the blues capital of Canada. You might think I'm being a little facetious but trust me, I really mean it when I say that Edmonton is the heart of blues and roots music in Canada. Shall we go? I've got a couple of stops in mind along the way.

I often think of Edmonton as two distinct cities. There's the one you get in the winter—moody, frozen, quiet, persistent. And then there's the summer Edmonton—green, lively, loud. Sure, both halves are unified by the Edmontonian passion for complaint. In the winter it's too cold, in the summer it's too hot. We have spent a *long* time in the shadow of other places, if only in our own minds. Even though Edmonton is the provincial capital, housing the legislature and the provincial university, we are often compared to Calgary. Maybe that's why the city adopted a more left-leaning persona as well, always wanting to be different than its sibling to the south. But maybe that's also why, when something really good comes along we want to scream it from the rooftops to the world. We're the home of *Wayne Gretzky.* Of *Connor McDavid*. Where *k.d.lang* and *Michael J. Fox* were born. *Tommy Chong* too, for that matter. And, like I mentioned earlier, this is the place where *Leonard Cohen* wrote the 'Sisters of Mercy.'

It's something that certainly stuck out for me when I first met with Denton Morrell, the former general manager of Blues on Whyte. That was where my deep dive into the blues scene here really began, sitting at a table across from him in the Commie. It was as good a place as

any to start, at least to get a picture of how the people running the place saw themselves. When he first walked out for our meeting, he wasn't really who I expected—he was tall, bald, strong. He's not a blues guy. He handles the business. But I know he can give me a bit of the history, at least from the business perspective.

We touched on this on our previous tour too, but it's probably fair to dive into the history of the Commie a little more here, at least for a refresher. The Commercial Hotel has been a fixture on Whyte Avenue for over 100 years now. Built in 1912, it housed a cowboy bar until 1984 when the renovations began to convert it into Blues on Whyte. After a few years of success, they tore open the east-facing wall adding a larger dance floor and stage space in 1987. I had asked Denton a little bit about what he saw as the reason for the long-term success of Blues on Whyte, as someone who had grown up steeped in sports, not music. I guess the crux of his take was that *"early on it was just something different, you know, in Alberta at the time it was all oil and country in the early 80s, right, so I think it was just kind of right place, right time for a change of scenery. You know, with the tradition now, you know our clientele is 18-88, white collar to no collar, right, so it's all over the place, so you have the parents bringing the children in, you know, 18 coming in and checking out the next generation of the bar. The fact that we play music of artistic people, you know, they're always doing the family jams so then when they come out for the Saturday jams they can all jam together, so it makes it more of a family bar that way, so everybody knows everybody. And doing the renos was huge, we hadn't had a renovation since '84, or '87, sorry, when we built this side of it besides new carpets and some paint. We did a full extensive reno. And just the way the customers dealt with it—we only closed for 3 days, it was nuts, you know, we'd tear down a wall, board it up, tarp it off, and*

then, you know, reopen at night time, so that was extensive and fun and the customers were great during the process of it. Probably got sick of it after a few weeks but you know?"[2]

When you think about it really is amazing that it went so long without change. I remember walking in there before the renos, before I really knew the blues or of the importance of the space, and the scent of cigarette smoke clinging to the ceiling tiles as much as the beer-soaked carpet clung to your shoes with every step. I can't imagine the number of darts that had to have been lit up in that space so that more than a decade after smoking laws changed the stale scent of cigarette smoke clung to the insides.

About five or six years back, just after Denton took over the GM job at the place, he changed the business model. Up until then, the Commie was still booking acts for the whole week, six or seven nights a week. It was great if you loved a band, you could go back as many nights in a row as you wanted, usually for free too. Maybe on the weekends you'd have to pay cover but that was about it. Denton summarized the reasoning behind that choice fairly well, from a business perspective, when we talked:

"I think it's good in the sense, like, when I first started here, when I took over as GM, I switched it to two bands a week instead of one seven-night gig. I did a five-nighter and a two-nighter and that enabled me to have more local bands coming in, checking out more talent, you know, cause we did kind of alienate ourselves a bit in the past… we just got in the same routine of the same bookings, the same bands…We stopped taking any chances because you have to commit to the whole week with them, right? It's also the Canadian dollar…it makes it a little more difficult right now, you know? It's hard for the Americans to come up here so, whether it's me trying to book tours for the guys around our location just to get them up here so they're not

just having 3, 4 dead days on their tour and driving 8 hours from the border to us. They can drive two hours and be at, like, 20 different gigs down in the states so if you can help them out and give them a couple extra dates at other locations that's the easiest way to do it."

I hope this is all making sense for you. Maybe we can sit down here, it's one of my favourite places in the city to sit and watch the world go by. We've been walking down Saskatchewan drive, the road that lines the south side of the river. It has the absolute *best* views of downtown. Here, what about right here, this bench. Perfect. Any questions so far? No?

Looking out towards downtown you can see RE/MAX Field, the ball diamond where the Edmonton Trappers used to play once upon a time. They were replaced by the Cracker-Cats and then the Capitals before they eventually folded too. Now the Prospects play there, in a summer college league. I think a game is about to start. If you listen closely you can hear the last few bars of 'O Canada.' This is a sports town. Or at least it still tries to be. For decades it was known as 'the City of Champions' until by some crisis of faith city councillors voted to remove the slogan from signs coming into the city, as if the term 'champions' itself couldn't be redefined and applied elsewhere. Maybe they just weren't into taking the time to redefine 'champion.' We have had some amazing people come from this town—authors, actors, public servants, community builders, people that *don't* get recognized often enough. Heck, Marshall McLuhan, the guy saying "the medium *is* the message"[3] on the Canadian Heritage Minutes that would play during commercial breaks on the tube—I suppose even that's a thing of the past—you guessed it, he's from Edmonton too!

Anyway, from our perch here you can *hear* everything going on, on both sides of the river. Concerts, traffic, sirens, the sounds of nature, it's all here. Just over there to the left, the

Kinsmen Field House, soon it will play host to a metal festival but back in the day, BB King made a few appearances. And there, across the river, you can see the legislature. Well just behind that you might be able to catch some great Canadian acts at Taste of Edmonton—last year I remember being stuck in a downpour, no umbrella, no rain jacket, with maybe a couple hundred other brave souls to catch Halifax alt-rock legends Sloan. And over there, to the right, you can just make out the tops of the glass pyramids at the Muttart Conservatory, right beside Gallagher park. Close your eyes and listen hard enough you can almost make out the sound of ghosts of Folk Fests past.

Here is also a good place to *see* change. Take downtown, for instance. It's a patchwork quilt from this side, of glass and steel and concrete, of all colours and architectural eras. And, now that the Stantec Tower is completed, its home to the tallest building in Canada (outside of Toronto). It's not all shiny and new though. On one side is the shells of former (blues) venues, if those shells even exist anymore—the Ambassador Hotel, the Sidetrack Café, the Hovel, the City Media Club, Sneaky Pete's. There's actually a really cool film project by a couple of Edmonton filmmakers that touches on a few of them. It's called 'Dead Venues,'[4] you should really check it out. Maybe I'm projecting here but looking out at downtown I'm reminded a little of the cemeteries I checked out in Italy while I was living there full of vaults and tombs and mausoleums, generation after generation side-by-side. In a way, the various scenes that have existed in Edmonton over the years, and the venues that have housed them, are kind of like those family vaults. We've lost so many venues that it's easy to wonder what other places will come and go in the years ahead. In a way their disappearance has elevated their status and elevated the status of those around the scene long enough to have gone to shows at them, to

have played with some legends of the blues on those very stages. Take the story of my friend Rodger Stanley, for instance. He recounted a lot of this to me during many a time at the Commie…

… I was born in Edmonton, at the Royal Alex Hospital, to blue collar parents, mom at home, dad working in sales. I grew up in St. Albert…I had played a little bit of drums and I had no experience, my brother had a drum kit, so I just sort of self-taught myself to play drums. Coming out of high school, actually, I was playing drums behind a guy that was interested in punk rock and new wave music, just jamming with him in my basement. I hadn't started playing guitar yet, but a friend of mine from high school said that his brother had got us tickets to a concert. I said, 'OK,' he said, 'it's gonna be eight bucks, though,' and I'm like, 'whoa, that's a lot of money.' 'Well, it's a guy—Muddy Waters—you're gonna want to come see, he's very good. I know you like the Rolling Stones and stuff…you'll enjoy this Muddy, you gotta go see this Muddy Waters at the SUB Theatre, U of A Campus.' And I said, 'Ok, I'll go,' and so I was 17 and coughed up the eight bucks and that date that changed me was Tuesday, September 30th 1980, that's when Muddy played the SUB Theatre and I witnessed that so that was my first real outing seeing a blues show, a performer, nice place to start, you know? Basically, king of Chicago blues, him and Howlin' Wolf, Muddy and Wolf were the, I guess, constantly fighting for, friendly fighting for who was the boss of Chicago blues, so it was pretty fortunate to have seen him!

He came back a year later, I think it was September, no, August 27th of 1981, and I knew *what I was going to see—I still have the ticket stub, I could show that to you another time…I still have that stub and it had gone up to 9 bucks, a very expensive concert. So, seeing the world's greatest blues band, right here in the city, two years running was pretty inspiring. Not so much*

as to even want to necessarily play right away but just to witness it. You know, it's the osmosis of it, the energy of the crowd, and seeing all these bearded hippy types and white, long-haired, obviously drug culture sort of local people going to this show and just going haywire over this band, this Chicago blues legend…that stuck with me.

In 1983, I started going to NAIT, I was taking a course called materials engineering, and the same summer I started toying with guitar, I was 19 years old. I started to learn from playing vinyl, dropping the needle and trying to copy what Keith Richards and the Stones were doing as blues covers, and learning the guitar parts over and over and over just by ear. I tuned a guitar to open G to learn how to play some of the structures of Keith Richards. They [the Rolling Stones] covered Robert Johnson songs, 'Love in Vain' and 'Stop Breaking Down' and they did a bunch of Muddy Waters stuff too. It kind of makes sense, looking back, that I'm a kid from my generation listening to rock music, you know, what was available on the radio at the time and they were sort of pointing the way to what influenced them and, in turn, influenced me. It was bold to be able to cross that barrier and understand that they were working on something a little bit deeper than 4/4 rock 'n' roll music. So, in 1983 I started to teach myself guitar and my studies suffered…I'd stay up until 3 in the morning playing with a band and I ended up getting kicked out of school. I tried to go back the next year, reapply, student loans and everything again, and I didn't make that year either. But now I'm getting pretty proficient on guitar, so that was the trade-off. If I look back on the amount of time spent, I guess, I'm kind of a natural for it because, again, no education, no internet lessons, no one-on-one lessons, just records and a guitar and screwing around and figuring it out myself and learning open tunings just through boinging open strings until the chords sounded right and later discovering I did hit it right.

That same year I also witnessed BB King a couple times, and he gave me a couple of his picks each time I'd seen him, unbelievably inspiring he was playing in a position in the neck that was different than the regular 12-bar—perhaps it's called pentatonic box—he was a little further up the neck and I was very in awe of how he could make it sing with a few notes and that signature butterfly tremolo… just an unbelievable showman. I just sat and watched and studied from the front row in a beautiful venue downtown called the Wintergarden, that was in the Northlands inn—it's no longer—but I saw him two years in a row there. Fabulous shows.

When I was going to NAIT as well, downtown there was a place called the Ambassador Hotel, on 106th street, just off Jasper Ave, and they were a long-time running, six-night-a-week blues bar of real blues and touring Chicago bands—Jimmy Rogers Band, James Cotton Band, Eddie Shaw and the Wolfgang—the original lineup—Son Seals Band, Koko Taylor, Willie Dixon came through. There were some monstrous acts and we would go down there, being very young and very drunk but again we're living an experience, we're in the element, but whether we were drunk or not…we were in the essence of it, again, it's hitting you, and that's what you're visually seeing and witnessing and absorbing and hearing. I started to build my own persona, [seeing those acts] helped form my thoughts and appreciation for real roots music, people who were self-taught, [people who came] from the source…I mean, blues goes back a long, long ways but the stuff I was interested in was after the acoustic storm. I liked the postwar electric stuff, when Elmore James came out and Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters and all those great bands. And there was the second generation, the second wave of guys, like Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, and Magic Sam…all the bands I was seeing were spinoffs of that first and second generation of electric Chicago Bluesmen. And I was seeing them six nights a week, if I wanted

to. If Jimmy Rogers was in town I could go Monday through Saturday, and I would because I could. I was still living at home, I had money to burn and I would just get absorbed in the music.

I had a band called the Purple Gang…back in '84, and we opened up for Long John Baldry at a place called the Roadhouse… it was on the south side. We did that for a couple nights. Long John goes way back to England and he was a pretty good, incredibly tall, white, skinny British Bluesman. And well respected. He knew Rod Stewart, and the Stones and John Mayall and Alexis Korner and all those guys of the original British blues boom… he was part of that scene. To open for him was pretty incredible. Around the same time, we were all sort of taken by the wave of Johnny Winter and Stevie Ray Vaughan and that was the next hill to climb, to try and match those guitar titans and learn their stuff. I had a trio called Rolling Thunder which developed into a band called the R&B Dealers, and we were the first band to play in the Commercial, the first front three, when they renovated, because this bar used to be just one, long shoebox…where the door is to the bathrooms is where the stage was…so when they busted this open we were the first Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday group.

I was playing at the Commie quite often back then. I bumped into this harmonica player, Bernard, he went by Schwartz or something. We got together and did three nights here at the Commie, that was 1988. He was a different guy though. The band didn't like how…onstage he would start calling songs that he'd promised he wouldn't. It made the drummer and bass player very pissed off, they said, 'Fuck you,' and they walked on him. And it's a legendary story around here. Some of the young musicians that I helped bring up still know the saying 'the money's in the duck.' Bernard left the pay for the other two guys in the mouth of a little toy duck thing that his infant son could ride on the front deck of his house and someone had to come pick it up

because he wouldn't, to their face, pay them. It was hilarious. And he wouldn't come in here and get paid because he said this place was run by the mob and he was scared to come in at night, so I had to come in with him during the day and collect the money with him because of fear and paranoia…[5]

…Talking to Rodger is always amazing. He's so full of stories, so full of knowledge. All that stuff before is just the tip of the iceberg. The guy played with *Albert Collins* in the early 90s, not too long before he passed. He put together a band of Edmonton upstarts—Graham Guest, Grant Stovel, Rusty Reed, Fred LaRose—to play a few nights with Pinetop Perkins, a legendary piano player that was at one time part of Muddy Waters band, at the King Edward Hotel in Calgary, the, 'King Eddy.' He played with some real greats at the Yardbird too—Little Smokey Smothers, Shirley Johnson, Maurice John Vaughn, U.P. Wilson, Kenny 'Blues Boss' Wayne—and at the short-lived 'Sneaky Pete's,' another long gone downtown venue, with the likes of Billy Boy Arnold and George 'Wild Child' Butler. Rodger has an encyclopaedic knowledge of music here in the city, of the blues especially. Play a blues song and he can tell you, just based on the tone of the guitar, who recorded that lick in the studio or elsewhere. I remember once, I mentioned that I had recently bought a new car, 'new' being used in the sense of 'new-to-me.' It's a 2003 Focus, still has a tape deck and manual windows. Anyways, he started telling me about back in the day learning guitar, wearing out cassettes, playing a lick on the tape and then trying to replicate it, rewinding, doing it all over again, destroying roll after roll of tape. It's a little reminiscent of the Clapton myth, the one that, as the story goes, has him locking himself in his room with only his guitar for a year, trying to perfect his playing. Since then, Rodger has been making me tapes of my own, to play in the car, loaded with the albums of all the masters

of guitar. Every time I see him, he has a new one for me…Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Albert King, Junior Wells. Every new tape is a treat—maybe I should hone my chops the same way.

The era that Rodger was talking about, during his formative years as a player as it were, are the years that Cam Hayden, who started the Edmonton International Blues Festival, refers to as the Golden Age of the Blues, what would have been about '86 to '92. All those venues we talked about were still open, bringing high-end blues talent to Edmonton on a regular basis. It's almost unfathomable to me, as someone who was only born at the tail end of all that, that on any given night you could be that close to Koko Taylor, BB King, or Muddy Waters, so close that *they* could see *you*. Another of the guys that came of blues age during that time, one of the locals that Rodger mentioned playing with, was Grant Stovel. I actually met him right over there. See the High-Level Bridge? Well, we met just on the south end of it in the High Level Diner, a culinary cultural landmark, named for its proximity to the High Level bridge, another equally important Edmonton landmark.

Grant's story of getting introduced to the blues is a little different than Rodger's. His dad, a former English professor at the University, was an avid blues fan. I remember I had asked him a little bit about that. Before we met, I had read a few pieces from *Jane Austen Sings the Blues*,[6] a collection of essays on the Blues and Jane Austen, two of the late Dr. Bruce Stovel's passions, written by colleagues, former students, friends…

… well I got into it through my dad, who was a giant blues fan, a lifelong blues fan but never really pursued it as an interest very actively until he was maybe in his 40s. I and my sister were teenagers or just about and right about that time he just sort of went hog wild and bought

zillions of records, it just sort of became a passion of his. He had some great blues records around the house. He also began to sub in at the university station, at CJSR, doing the blues show there periodically. So, I was kind of around it for that reason and then ended up helping him out…well I guess it was a pretense of my helping him out…I ended up sort of hanging around while he was doing the radio show and just sort of became more and more interested in the music myself. As I grew older and became old enough to start getting into bars, or at least sneaking in to bars, I used to go to the Commercial a lot as a teenager and the Ambassador Hotel which was still happening when I was 17, 18, 19. I got to see some great music that way as well as at many other local live music establishments and got to see a few really outstanding legends of the blues—Gatemouth Brown and Albert Collins and Lowell Fulsom, BB King—when I was really young and that left a huge impression. I also got to see a few local blues acts when I was also very young and that made a—or I was not yet of age of maturity—so that was a big part of my 'teenagehood' and it just kind of stuck with me ever since.

[Those experiences, in the studio and in the audience really stuck with me]. I only started doing radio because of the blues and because of my dad's involvement in it. For the longest time, even though I had been doing radio for many years before I started at CKUA I had only ever done Blues shows. We had had a series of sort of fill-in situations, my dad and I, filling in on the blues show. And then we ended up getting a couple of different slots of our own at different times, doing blues and R&B, old-time R&B music, and then eventually the host of the regular weekly flagship blues program moved away and so we just basically inherited a show from him. And I've been doing it ever since. After my dad passed, in January of 2007, I continued hosting Calling All Blues, but with my friend Graham Guest as cohost. He was always sort of part of the

fold from the get-go anyway, you know, an unofficial member of the team, I guess. When I first started at CKUA, I'd never dreamt I would ever do anything like that, but it turned out they really needed somebody on short notice to fill a slot a couple of nights a week doing the overnight, graveyard shift on the station. I happened to know the guy who was the production supervisor at the time, in charge of hiring people…I just ran into him at the Commercial one night, he was also a musician and I knew him from playing music on the breakfast TV program on what used to be known as A Channel and became Global, but anyway, he was the producer of that show before he went to CKUA. Literally just ran into him at the Commercial and I interviewed and got the job…it was amazing for me because I'd never done anything other than a blues program and, for the most part, we have always programmed the shows out of our own music collection…CJSR has a pretty impressive collection of stuff but, you know, the blues collection isn't gigantic, so a lot of it is just from our own material, so going to CKUA where they have more than a million musical selections available, and doing an eclectic show in the middle of the night when you could play anything, was quite overwhelming. It was difficult, I learned a lot about music other than blues—and now I'm doing eclectic music programming at CKUA full time as well as the blues show at CJSR.

When I was first listening to blues shows, the one at CJSR, the host—I remember so well, would play records that he had obtained which, were difficult to get from independent artists from Chicago or from wherever and a large part of the show would be him meticulously describing the liner notes to you, reading out the mailing addresses of these artists if you wanted to get their records…you'd have to listen to this guy's radio show and write down the address and then, try to write away for a record. Which seems crazy now, but that was the only

way…like not only could you not get those records, you had to know somebody that knew enough to tell you whose records you should be looking for. You know, it was a little bit…it was definitely a different era, it was definitely the hub then… it was Holger on CBC or Holger and Cam on CKUA, or whoever was at CJSR, they were massively important—and I'm still amazed, like nowadays I tend to think of it more, when we're doing our show, I tend to think of it more as a fun thing and a celebration and a way of raising awareness to some extent, particularly for the local community so people can hear some examples of what's going on in Edmonton or in the larger Alberta community, blues-wise…and also to raise a little bit of awareness about, you know, what's going on in the Canadian blues scene too, because a lot of people don't know about that. And I'm always amazed by how much I hear about…even Holger listens to it sometimes, which blows me away… Of course, blues used to be a chart-topping medium and those days are long gone, but…campus and community and public radio is definitely the lifeline.

Without any doubt, Edmonton is unusual for the amount of interest in blues there is, just in general, on the part of the everyday person, whether they're committed, passionate connoisseurs or they're just dilettantes. To me, there's no question that the Blues on Whyte pub is a massive reason why there's such a great blues scene in Edmonton, overall… It's just a weird confluence of things. They're on Whyte avenue, and the owners of that building have owned it, or its been bought and paid for… they're not paying crazy Whyte avenue rent—they own that place so they don't have to hustle and turn over the latest craze, you know, they're just doing their thing and I don't think, historically speaking, it's been out of a high-minded sense of trying to maintain a cultural legacy for the community—maybe a little bit—but I think mostly they just, you know, they were a tavern, like a zillion other taverns in Alberta, and across Canada that had

a……you know, I mean, a hotel's got a tavern and a tavern's got a band, I mean that's just the format that used to exist and the band would play for 6 nights a week and that's just the way it was in all formats of music all across Canada. Specifically in Edmonton, you know back in the day…you couldn't really get a liquor license without having entertainment…you had to also do something edifying for the community like have music so basically Blues on Whyte is kind of a throwback to that era, and they've changed very little since then and that's amazing because the whole rest of the world has totally, totally passed them by, you know? And I don't mean that in a pejorative way, but no other place is like that anymore anywhere in the world, like as far as I know, I don't think there are any. It used to be that every single major city would have at least one six-night-a-week blues bar, like in Calgary it was the King Eddy, in Winnipeg it was the Windsor, in Saskatoon Buds on Broadway, the Yale in Vancouver, and bands would come up and play a six-nighter at each of them, you know? And there'd be six or seven in Western Canada and that's just how the scene was then. And then you'd travel on Sunday. But you'd play six nights in every, major western Canadian city…none of those remain any longer. I mean, the places may still be there, but their formats have long since changed. And even though the Commercial has tweaked theirs a little bit lately, they're still presenting mostly blues and the bands still play it for most of the week. And they have live music seven nights a week still, and its, you know, that legitimately does not belong in our era any longer, it hasn't for a long time, it's a real anachronism, but because they are on Whyte Avenue and because their business model is basically like it was thirty years ago.

There aren't too many places on Whyte Avenue that people of any walk of life can go into, and most of the week there's no cover charge. And they know that they can get served

right until last call, like, right until 2am every night, even if its Sunday and its -40, and they have off sales, and its cheap, so this is a place that people frequent, you know? And they wind up there…it's become this cultural crossroads for Whyte Avenue, which, in its own way, is such an amazing cross-section of Edmonton's cultural community overall…

To add to that there was also the Ambassador Hotel downtown, which was a going concern a couple of times, as I understand it there were a couple different incarnations of the Ambassador as a blues venue, and again, it was a six-nighter, and again little or no cover charge except for on weekends…as a result, I remember going to see Jimmy Rogers when I literally didn't know who he was and it was free, you know? I went for six nights—I just read an article by Peter North in the paper that said this guy was really good and he played with Muddy Waters and was like, 'great, let's go!' and it was amazing, you know? And in retrospect the guys in his band that I got to see were like, I mean, you know, the whole thing was mind-blowing--Ted Harvey, the drummer from Hound Dog Taylor & the Houserockers was the drummer in Jimmy Rogers band and you know, I didn't know then that that would be a big thing for me but it is, you know, and so the Ambassador was a huge, like they had a kind of a, I think, if memory serves, I kind of an incarnation from around the early to mid 80s sometime as a blues hotspot, and then it became a punk rock bar for a while, and then it became blues again circa 90 through 93 roughly. It was a very important period. There were a couple others I can think of, just from a personal vantage point—Sneaky Pete's, although it was only open for a couple years, it was in the basement of the Mayfair hotel which used to be on 109 street and Jasper and on the southeastern corner, and while they were only around for a couple of years they brought in a huge number of really great acts and they used to sometimes get local people to back up too,

people like Billy Boy Arnold and Big Jack Johnson, and all these great, great acts would come and play there and that was huge for me.

Of course, the Yardbird Suite is also really a big one too, for me, at least, and my crew. Partly because they just, for years and years, they had a pretty strong emphasis on their blues programming, maybe once every two months or so they would have a blues headliner, and they would frequently bring in local musicians to flesh out the lineup…so many great people came there. And I got to play with Lazy Lester there and Billy Boy Arnold…it was nutty.

And, way before my time there were places like the Hovel in the late 60s/early 70s some really neat alternative venues where they would be not just showcasing the local blues artists but also Johnny Shines or Louisiana Red or any number of great legendary figures, John Hammond, all these people would be playing these small coffeehouse type joints…that really built the scene in spectacular fashion…kind of created a culture, a collective consciousness in Edmonton and it's just sort of stayed there ever since, even though those venues have come and gone, you know?..[7]

…I remember walking out of the High Level that day, back into the blistering cold—it was winter then, I don't think I mentioned that—just sort of awestruck. I'd been listening to CKUA for a number of years at that point, and I'd always tune in to Grant's morning show on my way to work. There's something intimate about a car radio. You pick a station, you listen long enough, and, after a while, the voice coming through becomes a familiar presence. But you never really expect to meet the person on the other side. And there I had been, sitting across from Grant, talking about all the time spent in these legendary (in my mind) Edmonton venues, casually discussing playing with legendary figures like Lazy Lester, Billy Boy Arnold, Pinetop

Perkins, and so many others. And Grant's dad, Bruce Stovel, as the blues booker at the Yardbird for years, had brought in so many of those legendary figures, had introduced up-and-comers like Ruthie Foster and Gary Clark Jr. to Edmonton, and helped foster the growth of local players as well, people like Graham Guest and Kat Danser, among others.

Speaking of the Yardbird, I met the latest blues booker a couple years back. Julie King is her name. Again, one of the nicest, most unassuming people you could meet. And I think, to some extent, she tends to underestimate her importance to the blues scene here. I mean, just the other day I was flipping through Holger's book, *Talking Music*, and there, in the acknowledgements, is a Julie King. That cannot be a coincidence. Just like Rodger, her first blues concert was an absolute doozy…

…I was somewhere around, you know, 17 or 18, I was already listening to a lot of folk music. You'd go to the folk festival or go hear live music. I was buying records back then because everything was on vinyl. I did come across blues records, and did start to buy them but, the first blues show that I saw was John Lee Hooker at the Sidetrack. It was probably around 1980 or 1981, '82. I wasn't familiar with his stuff before I saw him, back then you could only hear so much. But that show probably helped a lot—I kept on listening to blues, buying records and listening to Holger's show, Saturday Night Blues.

Initially, early on, I was listening to Sonny Boy Williamson, Rice Miller, Little Walter, Mississippi John Hurt, John Lee Hooker, of course. A little bit later I was listening to a lot of Magic Sam, Freddie King, Mississippi Fred McDowell, Ella Fitzgerald—I probably have to think and let them come to me…I guess it would have really been a kind of a combination of, Delta Blues, Chicago Blues…and some Texas Blues like T-Bone Walker, you know?

I started getting involved with the Yardbird in about 2001. You know, there are a few blues weekends every season there—it's mostly jazz, its run by the Edmonton Jazz Society. I organize the blues shows there. What I try and do is, I try and get a mixture of different…performers from different places, different instruments—some acoustic, some electric acts. I try and get women performers, some local, some from other places, whether in Canada or the United States. I try and keep, a bit of an eye on not representing, just middle-aged guitar players or something like that – some young, some old, right?...[8]

…I could have sat for hours talking to Julie. I wonder how many musicians, local musicians, years from now, will be telling the stories of *their* first blues concerts and one of them will have been a show that Julie booked. During her time, she's met Texas Johnny Brown, a friend of Lightnin' Hopkins. There's another story she recounted, of a tale that Joe Beard, an electric blues guy, had shared with her, of a time when Son House was his neighbour, living in New York. You hear so many stories like this, the longer you spend diving into the oral histories of the blues, stories that emphasize the *connectedness* of the blues world, and the connections that Edmonton has to these mythical people and places. There're really only ever a few degrees of separation between members of the blues world. There are a couple names that kept coming up though, in all of my formal and informal conversations.

Holger Petersen was one of them. Julie kind of summed it up well, she said something like, *'his interviews with artists while they're in town record these experiences for posterity, sort of mementos of a time and place in the blues history of this city. They make a difference to the perception of the city to the artists, too, Holger shows them that this place really cares about them, that their time is valued, it's not just another stop on the tour—there's something*

different here.' Same goes for his work with Stony Plain records, CKUA, and CBC. But we'll get to all of this later. The other name was Cam Hayden. His work with the Friday night blues show and the foundation and growth of the Edmonton International Blues Festival has been huge for our musical community. They both bring different styles and approaches to the music, they bring different blues sounds to the ears of listeners, acting as gatekeepers to the world of the blues, for old and young alike.

But perhaps its best if we get a move on, the suns getting a little high in the sky, and I'd like to make it to the air-conditioned refuge of the Commie before I melt. We can keep walking and talking, if you'd like? I think from here we can just start walking straight south. We might have to backtrack a little bit to get to Blues but it was worth it for that view, wouldn't you say?

What else, haven't we covered yet…ah yes. Remember how the Commercial Hotel was built in 1912? Well not too long ago now, 2012, obviously, Blues on Whyte staged a celebration to celebrate 100 years. The Blues on Whyte *Block Party*. It fell around Canada Day that year, as it has ever since. Denton told me they get "*about 20 to 25,000 people out to it over the weekend*," they shut down Whyte and put up three stages outside, one in the park over there, one *on* Whyte Ave, a beer garden stage in the parking lot beside. I wasn't actually able to go to one until a few years back. That year I saw Louisiana's Troy 'Guitar Burner' Turner in the Beer Gardens. I remember, one woman came up to me, we were chatting and dancing in a group, but I remember, she told me, 'see that guitar he's playing right now? That one was given to him by Stevie.' I was a little taken, I remember asking her, 'wait, you don't mean Stevie as in *Stevie Ray Vaughan*?' She just flashed me a knowing smile and a nod. I've seen him play a few more times since, as it turns out, he actually married a woman from Edmonton a few years back and

spends a lot of time here. Which, again, is hard to believe, that someone who's played with the likes of Stevie Ray, Brian May, Albert Collins.[9] I guess I could ask him, the next time he comes through, whether it's true or not. I'm not sure I would want to know though. I think it might ruin the magic, ruin the mystery a little bit.

Here we are, Whyte Avenue. Like Grant said, it's sort of a crossroads of the city. And it holds a bit of a mystique. Aside from the heavy flow or traffic, with its mix of buildings, the brick, it could be the main street from any number of towns I've travelled to across Canada. It is everywhere and nowhere, it's both Edmonton of the now and Edmonton of a different era. It's an idea of place. It's a living museum of the city, it allows the imagination to wander backwards in time but only so far. I often find myself wondering what it would have been like to have seen it change over the years, to have been there for the changes.

Now we're just about to cross Calgary Trail. Just across the street there you can see Block 1912. That's the place I first met my friend Tommie, and many times since. Tommie's a real interesting guy, he's sort of been my spiritual guide through the blues here. He's from Halifax, originally, he came out west in the early 70s, '71, I think he said, to do a Masters of Fine Arts at the U of A. He's a sculptor. You've probably seen some of his installations around town, whether you knew it or not. He's the president of the Edmonton Blues Hall of Fame. For the last while it's been working to recognize the people that have made significant contributions to the Edmonton blues scene, people that may have otherwise gone unrecognized. Regardless, in the past few years I've had a lot of interesting conversations with Tommie. He's not a blues player himself, but he's a real ardent supporter of the blues. And he's been here since the 70s, he's

seen the changes, he's watched the local players hone their crafts, and he's watched it all grow…

… yeah, it's gotten really good, because I think what's happened now is that a lot of the younger artists are really learning their skill on the guitar and harmonica and stuff and the standard is really high now…the information is out there, and the exposure is stronger, you know? Cam brings in people from the states and across Canada and the clubs bring in top talent, so you get to see a lot. But most importantly, a lot of the clubs have used local musicians to back 'em up. The Yardbird Suite was very good at that. They didn't have the money to bring in the whole band so they would get the headliner, and they would get the crackerjack young players, who are now older guys, to back them up – people like Jimmy Guiboche, Graham Guest, Rodger Stanley, and Crawdad Canterra, Chris Brzezicki. So, the young talent played with these guys and actually learnt, not so much how to play, but how to prepare, to present themselves, to study the material, and that's how I think the community has developed.

As for the Blues Hall of Fame, the mandate is to celebrate the artists and the history and the legacy [of the blues here] because nobody else is going to do it, quite frankly. There's a need for it. Being an artist there're very few perks, very few perks. People have to scuffle to make a living and at the very least we can acknowledge some of the great people who have made our community what it is. Because this really is a strong blues town.

There are things that happen when you go to a club or a festival and it's a magic thing that will happen. It's not necessarily on the stage, but it can be. I've done a lot of travelling around the states to festivals and shows, and I remember being in Portland, Oregon for a festival and Kenny Neal was onstage talking about the Sidetrack café in Edmonton, and he's

talking to basically an American audience but he said, 'hey, is there anybody out there who knows the Sidetrack in Edmonton?' and my wife and I put up our hands you know, so it just kind of amplifies his story a wee bit.

Until most recently, American bands would come up here to the Commercial and they could play for 6 or 7 nights and no place in North America had that, nowhere! You go stateside in a big city and the blues clubs will have their major acts on a weekend but for a band to come all the way up here to spend six or seven days is a bit of treat. That's one of the reasons I think a lot of the bands that have come up here have made a lot of friends with the local musicians and the fans. You get to know the artist more, and that's a good sign. And they like to come up 'cause they've got a little following and whatnot. Edmonton's a good blues town because its isolated, it's got two good radio programs, one at the university and CKUA, and they play good stuff, its informed. And then, of course, there are the blues and the folk fest. The Edmonton Folk Festival has brought in a lot of blues over there and other music that's related and folk music. Everybody has a different contribution.

They used to have a program at the Yardbird. They would bring in pretty substantial musicians and the promoters, that would be Bruce Stovel and Doug Langille [and Julie after that] who are both in the Hall of Fame would have a list of local talent and they would listen to the CDs and they would be prepared and know the material so that when the artists arrived there would be a little get together and BOOM they'd be off to the races. Now some people really objected to that because they wanted to hear the full band, but they couldn't afford to bring in the band, so they did the next, best thing which was getting the young hungry musicians who were keen, and I thought that was a pretty smart way to go, actually. Cause you

talk to some of the senior musicians and they talk about how they learned to play, they learned to play with Lazy Lester and Eddie C. Campbell, and all the Chicago guys. And a lot of times, when these guys were travelling from the states they were given kind of a local pickup band and they [the local pickup band] couldn't play shit, they didn't know the blues, they couldn't play a shuffle, they couldn't do anything except basically be background noise, so you got a good treat in Edmonton when you got some young, talented, well-informed, well-schooled musicians who knew their job was to make those legends look good. They weren't there to grandstand, they weren't the show. And that was the professionalism they learnt. It's pretty self-evident that it came out that way in the last 20 years or so. I'm a bit chauvinistic about the local talent, though.

And I guess the thing about the blues is that it's a black art form. It comes from the struggles of the black communities in the states. And here in Edmonton we don't have that, to the same extent. Because the blues is a story and a story has a context, we don't have that context, here. All most of us can have is an appreciation for the context…But the place [Edmonton] is kind of important…this is a working class city and…maybe the blues has more similarities with country and western than, I'd say, jazz in that it's about the storyline, it's always been a narrative, it's basically poetry when you get down to it. If you were to read blues lyrics, it's all poetry, its structured like poetry, it's got rhythm like poetry. Rap music comes out of the blues, it's just a story, you know? And that story is usually not a pleasant story, and that's what really hurts—annoys people a lot, that's why some people don't like rap music, cause its very truthful and it hurts when you're confronted by the reality of it.

Anyways, what I noticed about Western Canada is that you've got Regina and Winnipeg and Calgary and Edmonton and they're basically like city-states in the middle of fucking nowhere but they pulsate and they have to make their own, their own entertainment so it's usually very, very good because at least if you've gotta listen to this shit, to your friends for 12 months a year, they better be good. So, you end up creating a good environment artistically. The theatre, for example, in Edmonton is very strong. Music is strong. And they bring in people who are strong. So, you know, they don't bring in mediocre acts to town, they bring in the top-notch stuff, it's just a question of taste after all.

I remember listening to a conversation in a bar between Holger Petersen, Bruce Stovel, and…and…oh my mind…talking blues, right? And I just sat there listening like a fly on the wall. And now blues stories are all bullshit, because it's all myth, it's all oral, right? And musicians are the greatest bullshitters on the planet…their stories are just totally…you know, visual artists don't lie cause we just like the facts. I'm very academic that way. This is the facts, there's no anecdote. We did this, this, this, and this. And we document it, right? We document it, archive it. But musicians, man, they lie. The lie and they distort and they fabricate, you know? And they have the greatest stories.

And, we haven't talked much about this; as an artist on a lot of my pieces I use titles, blues titles…I did a big piece downtown in an underground pedway. It was called 'Hidden Charms' which is from a Willie Dixon song because its hidden, yada yada yada. And when I did the piece, they were doing a shoot, so I phoned Holger and I said 'Ok, I need to play the Hidden Charms song by Willie Dixon over the film, and that worked. And then I did a show at the Edmonton Art Gallery called Nine Below Zero, you know, Sonny Boy [Williamson] and it was in

the fall, so… it's like shooting pool, you pick your spots. But I didn't make blues art…and I'm very political but I don't make political art either…[10]

…I often wonder, when I pass by a public installation, how many have been made by Tommie. He was pretty active for a while. He used to teach at the university too, many years ago, long before my time there. I'm sure now that you know the story you might look for some of the pieces as well. You'll probably see him around, too. He calls Block 1912 his office, he's always meeting people there. He's a regular at the Saturday Blues jam too. The Black Dog's comedy night? You guessed it, Tommie's taken me there a few times now as well.

And there's the Commie. I wonder who's playing tonight? You have to love the posters in the window of the Hotel lobby, advertising the months upcoming acts. I wonder if any much more than a handful of people ever actually read them? Just like the building that houses the bar, it's a throwback to another, long gone era. Tonight, we are in luck! It looks like Big Dave McLean is playing. He just received the Order of Canada,[11] as it were. We inducted him into the Hall of Fame last year too. It seems we were ahead of the curve on that one! There are still a few hours left until the show, maybe we can grab a pint, sit down and chat a bit more. Does that sound alright?

I think I might have a Lucky, I'm feeling a little nostalgic right about now. Lucky used to be the beer of choice at high school parties back in the day, at least out in the country. I don't know what kind of bourgeois beer city kids snuck. This is the only place that I've ever seen in the city to Lucky on tap, maybe I just haven't been to the right bars. And what'll you have? A porter? Alright, these ones are on me, why don't you go grab a seat?

Here's your drink, sorry for the wait, they had to change the keg. Where were we? Oh yes, Big Dave McLean. You're in for a real treat tonight, he's such a great storyteller, funny too. And on top of that a great acoustic blues player. You know he knew Muddy Waters too, even learned a thing or two from the guy, at least that's what I've heard. And you'll get to see some of Edmonton's best play with him too, he's been such a great mentor to the players here over the years. Cam even had him as the Artist-at-Large for last year's blues festival. I told you about Cam, right? Cam Hayden? He's another guy that's been working at CKUA for years now. It seems that wherever you go in this town, whatever scene, that station is an important cornerstone…

…I got the job at CKUA where I've been since 1978. That was really the start of a whole different universe of music out there. That's when I got exposed to all kinds of music from all over the world. I was talking about this with someone not too long ago, when I started working at CKUA the first six months I would do what I called 'records by the yard.' I would grab, literally, a yard of LPs out of the library and I would slap 'em down in front of a turntable and I'd just drop the needle on records all day, and I'd do that a couple times a week. It was amazing, I thought I knew something about music when I got there and I realized how ignorant I really was in short order.

In the mid 80s I got involved in the City Media Club in Edmonton—I was a volunteer—I ran that club for about 5 years and decided, along with some other people, what it really should be is a blues club, and that was probably the way that we were going to be able to keep the doors open so that all the guys who worked at the newspapers could come down and get shitface drunk on a Friday afternoon and we could keep the doors open for them. So, we started

booking blues acts and I became the president and talent booker and bathroom cleaner and volunteer bartender in about the second year. I actually booked in and ran it from about 1988 to 1992. And that's when I really started to get to know a lot of the travelling, touring blues acts. We had people in there like Gatemouth Brown and Luther Tucker and Matt Murphy and John Hammond. Los Lobos played down there one night after a gig they did at the convention centre. They came down because I'd booked some friends of theirs, the Paladins, into the club that night. They knew the Paladins were in the club and they figured they would come down after their big show at the convention centre. They got up onstage and of course I was thrilled, I went up and asked, 'is there anything I can do for you? How long are you going to play?' I mean, I'm full of questions, right? They said, 'look, put a bottle of whisky and 24 beer up on the stage and we'll play until its done.' Well they played for about 90 minutes and it was one of the coolest nights of music I've ever had in my life.

Later on, I started doing shows on my own, free standing shows. I had a company called Wingtip Productions. We would do hall gigs, we rented the top of the Howard Johnson downtown on a number of occasions, I think it's now a holiday inn. It had a beautiful showroom on the penthouse, it was about on the 8th floor, it was glass on three sides, you could see the river valley on one side and downtown on the other, probably did about 8 or ten shows in there, a few dozen in other places, standalone gigs, which taught me a lot about the business of putting on shows—how to lose money, mostly. And along the way I still had my fulltime gig at CKUA.

Wingtip sort of ran its course…I was still doing the occasional show and the opportunity came around to try starting a festival. I actually talked with Terry Wickham over at the Folk

Festival on more than one occasion, we were golfing buddies and spent a lot of time on the golf course. When I told him what my plan was and that I had 18 months lead time before the first event and that I had a venue and that I had a lot of the basic things that you need to put on a show in place, he said, 'you know, you're probably as well situated to pull this off as anyone I know so why don't you go for it?' So, we went for it. As with most big live events, like festivals, most of the time you have to go anywhere from two to three years before you can break even and start making some money—I actually mortgaged my house the second, third, and fourth years, and then hoped that we would sell enough tickets and beer so that I could buy my house back from the bank. I sort of had that Charlie Brown thing in my head, 'how can we lose when we're so sincere?' The bottomline is that I still have my house and I now have a fairly successful festival and it's just been a sort of a learning experience all along the way about how to make a live show work, what kind of music resonates with people around Edmonton, and I can't underestimate or undervalue the help that I've received from media in this town—both the Sun and the Journal, very supportive, CKUA of course very supportive, CJSR very supportive. There's just a real climate in Edmonton, I think that supports roots music of all kinds.

I don't know if there's one basic, underlying reason for that. I think part of it is that Edmonton is a little bit of a combination of a blue-collar and arts-oriented town. I have a lot of friends from Texas and a lot of them said to me, after being in Alberta for a while, that Calgary and Edmonton are kind of like Dallas and Austin. Calgary's like Dallas, Edmonton's like Austin. And if you know Austin and Dallas, and you know Edmonton and Calgary, you can see the parallels. In fact, Doug Sahm, a very famous Austin musician—passed away about 8 or 9 years ago—he stayed with me when he was recording an album up here with Amos Garrett and Jean

Taylor for Stony Plain Records in the mid 80s. I'd take him around here and show him stuff and we'd do things and he always said to me this is just like Austin twenty years ago. I think with the broad-based support of arts in Edmonton, that included support for blues music.

I did some math the other day, there's been over 250 acts at the festival over the years. I think one of my favourite memories is the closer of our first year. Ronnie Earl and his band the Broadcasters out of the Boston area. Ronnie very rarely tours, but he came out here and closed our festival the first year and I had never been in an audience that was so quiet—particularly an outdoor audience. Ronnie was having an inspired evening. I was sitting in the Beer Garden at a picnic table with a bunch of people and there were probably 8 or 900 people in the audience total, it was our first year and I couldn't believe that we only had 8 or 900 people, that's ridiculous, but regardless, there was a lot of talking and general chit chat and people moving around and Ronnie started playing and all of a sudden you could hear a pin drop in the whole place, it was unbelievable there was just sort of…I guess the only way to describe it would be to say it was magical…He was just putting on such a spiritual show, it was impossible to not be there and not be deeply affected.

Over the years there's been so many, it would be hard for me to pinpoint just two or three or four… I guess when I think back on it, the performances with some of the real legendary figures in the blues that are no longer with us, people like Koko Taylor and Pinetop Perkins and Hubert Sumlin…there are so many who played the festival and are no longer with us now.

There was, and I hate to sound like an old fart, but I think there was a golden time for blues here. I hope it comes back. It would've been in, probably about 1986 to about 1992. There were about a half a dozen venues in town that were doing blues all the time…there was the

Ambassador, Blues on Whyte started in 1984, the Media Club was going a couple of years after that with blues, there was Andante's, there was the Boiler…there were just a lot of venues that were doing blues. And there were a lot of people that were around during that time who have continued to be blues fans. They're the people that you see now on special occasions, out at the blues on Whyte or out at the blues festival or at the soft seat concerts at Festival Place or the Arden Theatre, or sitting in front of the blues tent at folk festival on a Saturday afternoon enjoying everything that's going on there…if it was a beautiful, perfect world it would be nice to see a whole bunch of different venues doing blues again. It's a tough road though. Part of the success of that was that there was a regular circuit in Western Canada with blues bars in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Regina, Edmonton, Calgary, and through the interior of BC and out to Vancouver. Now that circuit does not exist anymore, in fact, the Blues on Whyte is one of the last rooms that I know of anywhere in North America that has blues 7 nights a week. I believe that the health of the scene, the health of the music scene, the health of the live music scene, in general, depends on people being motivated to get off their asses and go out and see a show. That's what it's all about. If there's no audience there's no show. And there's something special about the appetite for blues here in Edmonton.

In 2008, actually, the festival got a 'Keeping the Blues Alive' award, presented by the blues foundation out of Memphis. We were the first Canadian festival to get that. I'm particularly proud of it because it's an award that is voted on by previous winners. It's not an open fan vote, it's the people who are actually in the business, who've received this award before, they nominate and vote on who they think should be getting an award in whatever category. So, what I think happened, and I don't know any real specifics, other than I've got

some inklings from people that I've spoken with, is that there were so many musicians who were so impressed with their experience at the festival that they nominated us as the best international festival in 2008. So many of them had been there and had such a great time that they said, 'yeah, that's my vote too' and that's how we won the award. And I've always lived by the motto that happy musicians give good music. That's my job as the producer of the festival, to make sure that every musician has everything they need so that they're totally comfortable, totally rested, totally ready to give us 110% and it works…I had over 180 acts contact me about putting in applications to perform at the festival—I can only hire 14 people a year, 14 acts a year…[12]

…It's amazing, really, that of all the places in the world that a festival like the one Cam started right here, of all the bars in North America that *could* play live blues seven nights a week, Edmonton is the one where it's all happening. On any given night, right here in this room, you might see any number of Edmonton Blues royals. Once, even Flea from the Red Hot Chili Peppers made a stop at Blues on Whyte, such is the draw of this place. I think we take it for granted. No, I *know* we take it for granted. CKUA and its blues programming. Cam himself. Without him that festival wouldn't be happening, certainly not to the level it operates now. And his radio show, the *Friday Night Blues Party* has introduced me and others like me to a whole range of blues that I would have been hard-pressed to find without him. The same goes for the host of the other blues show at CKUA, Holger Petersen.

Holger has been hosting Natch'l Blues on the CKUA for fifty years now, since 1969. It's the longest running blues radio program in the country. That on its own is laudable, but that's not all there is to his story. He's also been hosting CBC's *Saturday Night Blues* since 1987, a

national blues radio program on CBC Radio One. That's as big as it gets in public broadcasting in this country. And he's been doing it all from right here in Edmonton. But still, there's more. Since 1975 when he started Stony Plain Records with his friend Alvin Jahns, he's been the President of the that Label. He was also involved in the Edmonton Folk Festival for its early years. In the music world, you name it, Holger has done it. He's even received Honorary Doctorates from the University of Alberta and Athabasca University, as well as the Order of Canada. If there's such a thing as Canadian music royalty, he's up there with the Gord Downie's and Neil Young's of this world.

I had been wanting to talk to Holger for a long time, years, really. We'd tried once, but he was out of town, in Memphis, I think the only time I was free. It wasn't like I hadn't had plenty of opportunities to introduce myself. I had seen him at Blues Hall of Fame events as an audience member before I'd ever been involved with the Board. I'd seen him at a few shows around town, Festival Place and elsewhere. And there was once that was particularly embarrassing, although only in my mind, I'm sure. I had been given some free, last-minute tickets to a Mike Farris show at the Winspear. Terry Wickham from the Folk Fest had brought him back here for a gig. Anyways, these seats were in the Orchestra section, right in the centre. As I was walking to my seat, I spotted him in the crowd and, when I looked at my ticket, realized that my seat was the one directly in front of his. I think I spent more of that show in a sweat realizing that I was sitting *a few feet* away from one of Canadas most important musical figures than I did watching the actual stage, although what I remember of the show was stellar.

I think Grant kind of put it well. At one when I was chatting with him, he told me something like this: *"I always joke, like when I'm travelling around playing, like if I go*

somewhere really crazy far away to play blues and I tell people I'm from Edmonton, you know, it's very likely that they'll ask me if I know Wayne Gretzky or its equally likely they'll ask me if I know Holger Petersen, cause everybody knows Holger. Like everybody all around the world, in the blues world, know him, 'cause he just goes everywhere he's such a fan of music, he's at all these festivals and he's so well connected because he knows all these amazing musicians and it's amazing, just...everybody knows Holger, all over the world. It's incredible."

The day that I was set to meet with Holger I was nervous. I was shaking as I walked up the stairs to ring the doorbell to *Stony Plain Records*. I had arrived early but sat in my car, checking and re-checking the address. It still didn't seem real that this was about to happen. Someone else answered. I sat in the waiting room, staring at the endless vinyl, CDs. Names that had no business being tied to Edmonton, of all places. And yet here they were, records that had been produced here or distributed in Canada by some real heavy hitters. Albums from Emmylou Harris, Eric Bibb, Steve Earle, Sue Foley, and so many other *great* artists.

And then, there he was, I was shaking his hand, and he was touring me around the place, showing me where everything happens. Stony Plain Records had recently celebrated forty years and, as we toured the collections, he gave me an album *40 Years of Stony Plain: Canada's Roots, Rock, Folk, Country and Blues Label*. It's absolutely chalk full of legendary figures in the roots music world: Taj Mahal is on there. Sonny Rhodes. Big Dave McLean, the guy we're waiting to see tonight, he's on there too. Ruthie Foster, another person that I mentioned briefly earlier. You should really give it a listen, if you get the chance. There's some really great stuff on there. Anyway, we found a spot to sit, and like that, I was chatting with Holger. Looking around the room it was hard to believe that we existed in the same time and

place. I remember, as we were walking around, see a framed vinyl, signed by Mavis Staples, to her 'dear friend Holger.' I don't think it would be an overestimate to say that hundreds of other like that hang on the wall. I think I saw one from John Lee Hooker as well. And then, there I was, sitting across from the man that all these roots and blues legends call a friend…

… Around the time I was going to NAIT, in the Radio and Television Arts program, I was listening to Tony Dillon Davis a lot, he was doing an eclectic radio show on CKUA, a Saturday night show. I basically called him one night—that was in the old days where a radio station announcer would pick up the phone and you could talk to them and ask them questions or whatever—so I told Tony I was a Radio and TV Arts student at NAIT and I was really interested in what he was doing and he said, "well, do you want to come down and check it out sometime when I'm on the air, just come and, you know, be a fly on the wall?" and I said, "yeah, absolutely," he said, "come whenever you want" and so I started just hanging out at CKUA on Saturday nights, watching what he was doing. At the same time, I was going to NAIT and I was doing interviews with people as well, at concerts and that sort of thing and Tony said, 'well maybe I could run some of these interviews on my show.' I got to be introduced to the management of CKUA and had a few of my interviews on the air. That lasted for a while and then I, I remember I was getting ten dollars for an interview and I would go out and do the interview and come back and edit it and put it all together with music and everything. After several months of that I summoned up my courage and went to see the manager at CKUA, I said, 'Do you think I could get more than ten dollars?' I did. I got a little more.

In about 1970, I was playing drums with Hot Cottage, and one of the managers said that he knew somebody in New York who was a student of the Reverend Gary Davis, and that the

Reverend himself might be available to come to Edmonton and play a show, and his fee was, I think, 500 dollars plus a plane ticket and so three or four of us thought this was a great idea and put some money together to make it happen. Reverend Gary Davis came to Edmonton and he spent, I think, about five or six days here. He was the first kind of exposure that I had, directly, to acoustic, rag-time guitar playing and acoustic blues and acoustic gospel music. It was incredible to have him there and to go over and hang out with him every day—he was always playing, you know? Just picking on guitar. I got to know him a little bit and spend some time with him and that really was monumental for me. I took him to CKUA and recorded him there

At the beginning of the 70s then, I also had this kind of idea of wanting to record and put out records. The first one was Hot Cottage with Walter Shaky Horton [aka Big Walter]—we did two songs in April of 1972 and they came out on a single on London Records in Canada. And so, having that connection with Walter Horton and his contact information I asked if he would be interested in coming back and doing a full album in September of 1972 with Hot Cottage. He came to Edmonton and spent a week, mostly in the studio and did a concert with Hot Cottage at the U of A…and that kind of started that whole process of recording blues artists and…I got…after that I had to kind of find a way to get these things released and, you know, it was all my money so……then I started making other contacts in the music industry and I got that record licensed in Europe to Transatlantic Records and in Canada through London Records and then once I had done that I brought Johnny Shines in, did a record with him, and then Roosevelt Sykes, and another record with Johnny Shines, ……that kind of got me going Pre- Stony Plain.

And just having all these great people coming through Edmonton gave so many musicians here the chance to play with and learn from the very best. It affected so many

different players…Graham Guest is a perfect example. He's a world class piano player and he would play for Eddie Shaw. Eddie Shaw really kicked it off for him and he ended up being invited to go on the road with Eddie Shaw, a very important Chicago blues horn player. And then, you know, through that, working with Maurice John Vaughn, and other people, it gave the local players a chance to learn from Masters, you know, these are still some first- or second-generation electric Chicago blues players who had connections to the 60s, certainly. You're getting pretty close to the source. Especially then, there was the tradition of the Saturday afternoon jams which, the same story held true in Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Saskatoon. You had these people on the circuit and part of their obligation, contractually, was to kick off the jam—another chance for these local players to sit in and get to know them. Western Canadian heroes like Big Dave McLean, taught and helped out Colin James when he was eight years old and Shaun Verreault, it was happening all over. And Edmonton was a hub *of that. We had all these great players coming through constantly, every week there was another legendary jazz/blues person coming through, for years and years.*

The club scene back then was pretty cool. I used to book Amos Garrett back then and we would do these tours that would be 6-8 weeks. It would be a week in Victoria, week in Vancouver at the Yale, a week or even two weeks sometimes at the King Eddy in Calgary, and then a week in Edmonton at the Ambassador or Sidetrack or something, and then, you know, a week in Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, you know. Amos ended up moving up here because of that, because of the amount of work that was here, but also because he loves his outdoor interests like fly-fishing and duck hunting, so we actually booked some tours where he would hit

certain cities based on the hatching of certain flies on certain rivers so that he could go fly-fishing and play gigs.

I think historically there's always been a blues scene and an active blues culture in this city as far as musicians being able to play. Of course, we're lucky to have Blues on Whyte which is one of the very few clubs left in North America where people come in and do five or six nights in a row, you know? It's just not happening anymore that way. As far as working blues musicians go, you know, it obviously has been a lot better in the past. There's a lot more gigs and the same thing holds for country music or rock or whatever. There's just…a lot of that stuff has been lost over the years for various reasons……eh, liquor laws, changing tastes in music, DJs, karaoke, whatever, you know? But Edmonton has been a bit of a mecca because of places like Blues on Whyte…and over the years there were, you know, times when we had two or three blues clubs active every night.

Of course, the scene has changed—it's just not as active as it used to be—yet there's no shortage of talented, committed people who are really actively part of it. Musicians, people in the media, the supporters. This wouldn't exist without support from the community. That part of it hasn't changed, and I think the natural dropoff of the club scene is typical of any genre and any city. But Blues on Whyte has been just an incredible inspiration for so many people who have been part of it, who've come through, who've been there on Saturdays for the jam sessions. I'm really happy to see the Edmonton Blues Hall of Fame, for example, acknowledging some of those great people, the legends, the current performers, the people who have been part of the scene, you know, doing that once a year at Blues on Whyte. The Yardbird Suite of course, they've been great over the years. The Sidetrack Café, when it was going, I mean everybody

from Ike Turner and Bo Diddley and James Cotton played there. We've been so fortunate, we really have had all of the blues giants. I've had a chance to interview BB King, I think maybe seven or eight times over the years, because we were lucky enough to be on his circuit. And the presence of the blues stars playing larger venues has really also been a, I think, a force.

BB King. He was probably my favourite musician to be around ever, you know? The reason he was called the "ambassador of the blues" or the "king of the blues" or whatever you want to call him was because he was so generous and gracious, sensitive, intelligent, combined with his pioneering talent – you just couldn't get any bigger in the blues world and you couldn't feel better about meeting somebody in the blues world than when you had an opportunity to spend some time with BB King

And to interview him, to be able to spend time with him…you know, the first time was at the Kinsmen Fieldhouse, as it was called back then, and he made lots of time for me. After that it was a number of different venues and situations and interviews on his tour bus…I spent an afternoon with him one time, we did the interview and he said, 'well, what are you doing now?' and I said, 'well, not much' and he said, 'oh do you want to come and, you know, hang out?' and he said, 'I just got this new video of me in a film and do you want to come and watch it with me?' and was like, 'yeah!' But he was like that, he was just so generous with his time and his spirit and the more time I spent with him and the more interviews I did, the more information I gathered but, you know, I think every time I was around him I'd just have a smile on my face for a week, you know?! And he had more friends on the road and just in the world, I think, than just about anybody. Even at the end, you know, the last couple times I saw him he was just so nice and just referred to me as a friend. It doesn't get much better than that.

I interviewed Honeyboy Edwards several times, the most significant one was backstage at the Edmonton Folk Festival and he gave me a lot of time. That day he really felt like telling stories and if you can capture that, get somebody in the right mood and the right conditions then that's wonderful. And he had so many stories. When I started going to the blues awards in Memphis, he would be backstage there every year, and I'd always get a little more from him. I knew his manager and some of the people around him and they provided the access to him whenever I wanted it…he was quite amazing, his memory for detail and the people that he'd worked with was quite amazing and he lived well into his 90s, as you know. And after a while I got to Johnny Shines too, who was a contemporary of Robert Johnson's and who travelled with Robert Johnson and, in their early days, Honeyboy Edwards, they wouldn't mind talking so much about Robert Johnson but I think they got a little burnt out about it and it just seemed like everybody was more interested in Robert Johnson than Johnny Shines or Honeyboy Edwards. But in the early days with Johnny Shines, I have some amazing stuff about him talking about him and Robert Johnson coming to Canada, for example.

When the Edmonton Folk Music Festival began I was actually the chairman of the board at the initial folk festival for the first several years and then I became the artistic director. I started bringing in blues acts and putting together a house band to back up people like Gatemouth Brown and Sunnyland Slim and Lowell Fulson and various others. And that house band involved local people like Dave Babcock, Rusty Reed…and these people played with sooo many different artists over the years at the folk festival—again, that's another example them getting that firsthand experience, you know? How many chances do you get to play with Sunnyland Slim or Lowell Fulson? And that tradition carries on, you know, now its Amos Garrett

and the House Band and they still back up various people every year at the Folk Festival. It's just all such a blur, there's been so many people and so many highlights. And then, a lot of the blues people also playing the parties at night, just incredible parties, you know? We've had some pretty amazing Folk festival weekends here and over the years we've had pretty much all the major people that you can get, you know?

But something that came out of the Edmonton Jazz Festival is another one we should acknowledge. Big Miller had a role in all this in Edmonton. Big used to sing with all the big bands in the states and one of them was Jay McShann's band, so, Jay and Big did a couple of dates in Edmonton at various places. I was at the concert and I really wasn't that hip to Kansas City Jazz, you know? I mean, all the information was there but I never quite got there. And then all of a sudden to hear Jay McShann, one of the pioneers of the last generation. He arrived in Kansas City in 1939 and started recording in 1941 with Charlie Parker and his band and that whole swing sound that developed out of Kansas City with Jimmy Rushing and Count Basie and "Big Joe" Turner and Albert Ammons and "Hot Lips" Page and all these other incredible players. They invented a new form of blues, really, and I got to find out about that because of Big Miller and through him, getting to know Jay McShann. I ended up producing Jay's last records and brought him to the folk festival a couple of times, to play with the local cats. That led to me producing those records…one of them was nominated for a Grammy…after that people started contacting me and saying, you know, "we'd love to have Jay" – back then it was Jay and the Duke Robillard Band, which was a pretty strong combination in that the Duke Robillard band understood how to play Kansas City swing, blues and jazz and not only understood it but they were as good as anybody at any time pretty much. We got some offers to do some festivals and things like that I

would be the conduit to Jay. Before I knew it, I was the guy who was travelling with Jay and I'd fly down from Edmonton to Kansas City, pick him up and then we'd go to Monterey Jazz Festival or Montreal Jazz festival or. North Sea Jazz Festival in Holland. That was an incredible time for me, to be Jay McShann's road manager, and to be taking care of him. He was into his 80s, but such a legend that people would seek him out. You know, one time, when we were in Holland, we were on a gig with Van Morrison and we were sitting in the restaurant and Van Morrison came in and I just walked up and introduced myself, I said 'I'm sitting here with Jay McShann if you'd like to meet him' and he was like 'wow, Jay McShann, Yeah! I'd love to meet Jay McShann!" So, he came over and he had tea with us and we hung out, you know, Van Morrison, Jay McShann, and me, you know?

To jump back in time a little bit, in the fall of 1975, Alvin Jahns, my partner at Stony Plain Records who continues to be my partner, I approached him about starting a label—he had a background as a chartered accountant and so we started Stony Plain Records. The first record came out in 1976—that was Paul Hann—and that kind of started the ball rolling. At the time I was producing records myself and for that reason there weren't a lot of releases on it. I certainly had no funding or anything. After about five years I was aware enough that labels like Flying Fish and Sugar Hill and Rounder weren't getting Canadian distribution. They had some but it was not happening, and nobody was licensing some of their great stuff, only the odd time. I eventually got to know all those labels, the first one that opened the door was Flying Fish records and as a result we licensed a whole bunch of their wonderful records in Canada. That led to us licensing their artists, you know, like Johnny Copeland and Gatemouth Brown. And then that kind of led to other opportunities. I remember when Robert Cray's first album came out

through Hightone, I became a huge fan and I approached Hightone and I said, 'can we license this for Canada?' That would have been about '85, I guess, and like that we started licensing Robert Cray. There'd be other kind of one-off things, I became a huge Lucinda Williams fan after I heard her record and started licensing her. And we were very, very active in licensing and putting out a lot of different records. But we started wanting to establish the Stony Plain Label more as an identity. And that's when I started working with Downchild and Long John Baldry and David Wilcox and Amos Garrett. Of course, Amos was one of the first and that's gone on in that same direction working with so many different people over the years right up until now, you know, with Monkeyjunk and Sue Foley and Kenny 'Blues Boss' Wayne.

As for where I see the blues in Edmonton going? I don't have any crystal ball or anything. What I do know is that there's a lot of good musicians that are dedicated to it and its certainly not something you do to get rich or even scrape by but, for now, the really good players continue to do what they do and make a living and I think we'll see a good live music scene. Compared to a lot of other cities we're doing quite well, and I expect that's going to continue…[13]

…If Holger had a smile on his face for a week after every time he got to hang out with BB King, I had the same for the week after I met Holger. I keep trying to figure out a way to check out if I picked anything up through osmosis. I have started playing more shows around the city and writing quite a few more songs. But that's probably just a result of me actively pursuing that side of myself instead of some mystical force. It's amazing, when you really think about it, we've been blessed to have such wonderful tastemakers here. And to have had such wonderful venues, even if the life of some was only a flash in the pan.

Take this place that we're sitting in, for instance. There's really no reason that of all the blues joints that have come and gone in the city *this* is the last one standing. And, for that matter, that in all those years, the space has remained relatively unchanged. The stage is still where the stage has been since '87. Same for the dancefloor and the bar. I can't *really* comment on what Blues on Whyte was like before the renovations though. I mean, if you showed me a picture I might say, 'oh yeah, that's it,' but those would all be fabricated memories, not really my own at all. What I remember of blues before was maybe just a feeling. A feeling of community, of contentment, the mingling of a youthful and a drunken haze, as the night rolled to a close.

Maybe *that's* what it is about this place that's kept it going all these years. That *feeling* that no matter what walk of life you're from—blue-collar, white-collar, no collar, down on your luck or rolling in it—there's a space here for you. There's certainly a reason that the Blues Hall of Fame has chosen to host its induction events here every year. I'm sure that a lot of those people that have walked onto the stage for recognition felt some of what I was saying. Holger spoke highly of this place, he was inducted here in the very first celebration. Cam has been inducted too. There must be something to it. Looking through a list of the inductees into the Hall of Fame would tell you as much. All those people found something here, in Edmonton, and later at the Commie as well, that drew in. Edmonton did something to Big Miller, the Kansas City singer and trombonist. After getting Canadian citizenship he moved here. It certainly had an impact on all the other legends we've had roll through, all those players we've been talking about, ones like Big Walter Horton, Johnny Shines, Eddie Shaw, Sonny Rhodes, Sue Foley. The list could go on.

Maybe, when you boil it all down, there's nothing really unique about Edmonton, nothing that might predispose it to becoming a Canadian blues town. Maybe it was all just luck. Luck that all the right people moved here, luck that it persisted after other cities failed. But luck in itself can be mythical. You might even say it enhances the mythology of a place. And when push comes to shove, there's no way to verify everything, that I've been told. I wasn't around for it all, only heard whispers of a time long gone. Maybe that's not important. If someone says something enough, it becomes part of the cultural imagination and it becomes important. The truth doesn't always matter. As soon as someone utters the words, that may be all it needs to gain a life of its own.

It doesn't really matter what outsiders think, Edmonton *is* a blues town because we believe it to be. The Commie is just another hotel with a bar until you understand its history. Holger is just a man until you understand all that he's done for this city. The Alberta Hotel is just another old building until you know the Cohen story. These stories, these places—that's all they are, stories and places. until you know them it's all just brick-and-mortar.

I know I've told you this before, but maybe all we can do is just be thankful that this exists, in the here and now. Be thankful that we're sitting in the Commie about to see a masterclass from one of our very best. With the high turnover of venues, it would seem that the mythical status of the Commie grows higher and higher. And until it ceases to exist, you'll be able to find me here, *listening*, *learning*, *living*.

How's your beer though? One more? Same as last time? Sounds good, I'll just go grab another round. You sit back and enjoy the show; Big Dave is about to take the stage. We're in for a real treat……

(Myth)Making a Scene

A young man goes down to a crossroads, meets the devil, exchanges his soul for guitar virtuosity. At another time in another place, a fight breaks out in a bar over a girl. The joint goes up in flames. A young man rushes back into the building hoping to save his guitar. The events of that night provided a name to the generations of guitars that followed—'Lucille.'

As a genre, the blues has been substantially infused with mythologies shared not only among those on the inside but also with a wider popular audience. These stories can offer considerable insight into how a musical community views itself. And not only have the stories of people been written into the fabric of the genre but those of entire cities and regions as well. Whether related to the formulation of a legendary venue or figure, or to the songs written about them that add to their mystique, these have become the stories the general blues population 'tell themselves about themselves' (Geertz 1973: 448).

In the second chapter we established a few guidelines for our definition of myth, as it may be applied to the Edmonton blues scene. In simple terms, our idea of myth is one that views myth not in the classical sense, of heroes and gods (although Orphic mythology could be an interesting template) nor in the religious sense. My idea of 'myth' or 'mythologies' is as stories or things that bond together people in a particular community, that provide foundational ideas about why a music scene exists, and that helps legitimize a community's presence in the larger cultural landscape. Myth is a "resource for imaginative creativity like nothing else in our cultural production" (Doty 2004:35). A myth can be a thing, a place, or an idea that stories of place develop around and become foundational texts. In our previous

examples, the stories of the Edmonton blues, *the myths*, simultaneously differentiate the local scene from other Canadian urban centres and connect to larger blues narratives.

In chapter two, I proposed a number of questions: What function might the stories being told in Edmonton serve? How does a system of myth-making or mythologizing work in regions that don't have the luxury of being at a blues crossroads? How can places like Edmonton and its people go about mythologizing themselves? What types of stories can be told in regions outside of the hubs of blues production? How do the global narratives of the blues interact with the local? How do the aesthetics of venues contribute to feelings of authenticity? How might the flow of musicians affect community building? How have the myths being told and shared within and without Edmonton been altered to reflect a local flavour? Can we see any ways in which the stories of Edmonton have been disseminated back outwards to the larger blues world? These questions are a lot to answer. But I suspect, after all that I have discussed in prior chapters, it may be somewhat clearer where I am aiming to go with these questions. To answer them, I'd like to take a step backwards, for a moment.

I spent the summer of 2015 in Belgrade, Serbia, in part. While there, I had some grand intentions to study the local soundscapes, as they related to areas of arts and cultural production. While doing this, and completely by accident, I was introduced to the burgeoning Belgrade blues scene. I knew of *one* Serbian blues guitarist—Ana Popovic—before that happy accident. I found myself asking how it was that a genre of music that developed so far away from the Balkans and that has no geographical links to the place could become so popular there. That was a line of thought that I brought back with me to Edmonton. I had long had an interest in blues guitar, having grown up playing the instrument. But it wasn't until Belgrade

and, later, Edmonton, that I began to really try to understand the blues as a *cultural* entity. But of all the genres of music that could have staked a claim in these outlying cities, why the blues?

It's a question that Roberta Schwartz asks in "How Britain Got The Blues." It was through the British blues explosion that a lot of the people I talked to here were introduced to the blues, or at least blues-inspired bands, bands like the Rolling Stones, The Yardbirds, and John Mayall & the Bluesbreakers. During that period, while the number of British 'blues' artists was growing, "discussions about appropriation, exploitation and commercialism once again filled the musical press. The vast majority felt that only black musicians could produce authentic blues" (Schwartz 2007: 231). No matter how hard a British blues singer tried, because of the blues origins with oppressed, black musicians from America's south, "no matter how sincere the singer or sympathetic the rendition, whites could not replicate crucial and indescribable elements of the blues" (232). It's like Tommie discussed earlier, the blues is about its context, and in Britain, just like in Edmonton and Belgrade, that context doesn't exist, for the majority of people.

Why the blues? Michael Urban asks that same question in "Russia Gets the Blues." And again, like Belgrade and Edmonton, Russia is quite obviously a region heavily removed from the context of the blues. The blues in Russia is also a distinctly "postcommunist phenomenon," having entered (mostly through) Moscow and eventually staking a claim separate from the British blues-rock style that had percolated throughout the city (Urban 2004:1). Urban suggests that, giving that it was only after the removal of the Soviet State, perhaps those drawn to the blues in Russia were drawn to it because of historical parallels that they saw with the American experience. With the abolition of slavery, "former slaves were set free to make their way in a

new world in which the direct domination of the masters had been superceded by other forms of economic exploitation which—along with the socio-political constraints and indignities attendant on segregation and overt racial oppression—consigned them to the miserable bottom of a rigid social hierarchy" (Urban 2004: 3). In Eastern Europe, as the former states of the Soviet Bloc were removed from Moscow's control, and the restructuring of society began, those that expected decollectivization of land, resources, and property to improve their economic futures were left in a different sort of servitude, as socialism was replaced by a sort of neo-fuedalism (Verdery 1996: 204-228). Obviously, while these two examples share surface parallels, it's certainly not a nuanced comparison. It's a *perceived* shared struggle, on the part of the Russians. I saw something of this in Belgrade as well, during my time there. After the NATO bombings of Belgrade in 1999 there was a sense, within Serbia, that the Serbian were being unfairly villainized by the global community for what was a multi-sited and sided conflict.

It is, perhaps, understandable why that perception may have arisen. The blues as a musical styling is about hope, about looking forward, despite what may be insurmountable hardship. And perhaps that's a part of what is at play in Edmonton. Edmonton is a blue-collar town. Its geographically isolated. It faces long, hard winters. It's a relatively liberal oasis within a conservative province. All of those factors have played into how Edmontonians view themselves. Persisting *despite* what is around them, despite how they are viewed by outsiders. And maybe it's that *perception* of a shared struggle, that first invites a genre like the blues into a place. In a way it does go back to what Tommie said. Edmonton may not have the same *context* as the places where the blues come from, but it does have an *appreciation* and a *respect* for the context.

Now is maybe a good time to delve into that context a little bit, especially the mythical dimension that the blues has since created within the popular imagination. The blues, as a popular genre of music, can be linked back to the fall of 1912, when W.C. Handy's release of a handful of songs found widespread attention (Wald 2010). But the myths surrounding the birthplace of the blues can be linked to the:

> "…blues revival of the 1960s, when white Americans found new meanings in old recordings that African Americans had long since cast aside. Based in and around New York,…[James] McKune's coterie set up record labels, issued LP anthologies and wrote liner notes, articles and books of blues history that framed the blues as we now know it, a music of pain and alienation, a cry of African American despair. Giving life to that tale were the rough, ragged voices of Delta loners like Charley Patton and Robert Johnson" (Hamilton 2007: 167-8).

The latter, Robert Johnson, has since become a huge part of the collective imagination of the blues, as we understand it today. Robert Johnson the legend has become completely separated from Robert Johnson the man. The story has become full of speculation, by all accounts. Over time, it has come to reflect a mythic hero's journey, of a person finding something lacking, leaving on adventures, and returning a changed person. Patricia Schroeder divides Johnson's myth into three main components: his rapid musical development, selling his soul to the devil, and the cause of his death (2004). He would often turn his back on audiences; this has also been given a few explanations. Some white record executives thought it has something to do with his shyness. Some fellow performers claimed it was because he did not want others to imitate his playing style, so he was hiding his hands. And some of musicians today claim that he was getting acoustic amplification through "corner loading," a process that eliminates the top and bottom end and amplifies the mid-range, as he was after a certain 'sound' (Schroeder 2004: 25-7). Honeyboy Edwards, one of the luminaries of the blues that

Holger mentioned earlier, claimed that Robert Johnson never sold his soul at a crossroads, that he was a story teller, 'a bullshitter' as it were (2004:31). It would certainly be the easiest explanation, and the most logical, considering that Honeyboy was a contemporary and friend of Robert Johnson. What is 'bullshitting' if not the act of creating wild embellishments that add to the mystique of people and places? It is from this term that most of the myths of popular music come from. Bullshitting creates a foundational text.

Yet that popular image persists. It seems that every other year a new book with some 'new' insight into Robert Johnson is published, the fascination with the mythologized figure is that strong. Even Bob Dylan, someone perhaps equally mythologized in popular music culture today, said upon hearing Johnson's recordings for the first time:

"From the first note the vibrations from the loudspeaker made my hair stand up. The stabbing sounds from the guitar could almost break a window. When Johnson started singing, he seemed like a guy who could have sprung from the head of Zeus in full armor. I immediately differentiated between him and anyone else I had ever heard. The songs weren't customary blues songs. They were perfected pieces—each song contained four or five verses, every couplet intertwined with the next but in no obvious way…They jumped all over the place in range and subject matter, short punchy verses that resulted in some panoramic story—fires of mankind blasting off the surface of this spinning piece of plastic…" (Dylan qtd. In Graves 2008: 80).

Dylan, here, is speaking of Johnson as if he were an incomparable talent, a musical genius, and yet "until the 1960s, Johnson's name was all but forgotten, except by his immediate neighbors, his playing partners, and a handful of white folk and jazz fans…It was these white fans who would crown him king of the Delta, and whose opinion has come to be the gospel of blues history…Johnson's obscurity and mystery were part of his appeal" (Wald 2004:188). The

only thing that we can acknowledge with any certainty is that these mythical components of Johnson's story, and elsewhere, emerge from ambiguity.

Another study that touches on the ambiguities of blues myth is Stephen King's research into blues tourism in the Mississippi Delta. Honeyboy is again mentioned, noting that Johnson resurgence into the mainstream is profit driven (King 2011:78), that the "myth [is] something to be marketed" (DeCurtis 1999: 31)—no one was interested until money was available. Mississippi Delta communities have also found ways of self-mythologizing, using links to blues stories as tourist draws, whereby mythmaking has become an important rhetorical strategy for tourism. And there is a lot for them to draw from. We have romanticist view of the lone, downtrodden blues musician, we have the Delta region as a 'holy site' of the blues, the crossroads myths; musicians actively engaged with and promoted their own myths. Entire tourism books are devoted to the so-called 'holy sites of the blues' (Cheseborough 2001). These are all powerful images. Take the crossroads myth, for instance. Despite being so heavily linked with his story, "there is no credible evidence that Robert Johnson ever claimed he sold his soul to the devil" (King 2011: 96). Despite this, a number of tourism ads claim a certain crossroads to be the *exact* place he struck his bargain with Satan—no less than "four Delta counties are laying claim to possessing the definitive crossroads site," as the crossroads that Clarksdale boasts as the site of the transaction "intersect more than once, including seventeen miles north (96). To reiterate, it is the potential for ambiguity in a claim that allows it to be made.

Take Edmonton, for example. Let us focus on Blues on Whyte in particular. Everyone you ask around here, everyone that has a stake in the blues, at least, will tell you some version of the same story—that Blues on Whyte is one of, if not *the* last place in North America that has

live blues music *seven nights a week*. On the surface it seems unbelievable, improbably, but *not* totally impossible. It's astonishing to think that, even in a place like Chicago, the home of electric Chicago blues, the place that Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and Buddy Guy, among others have all called home, there doesn't exist a club that offers the schedule that the Commie in Edmonton offers. And it's almost impossible to confirm or deny such a claim. There are a lot of music venues and, as is the nature of the current musical economy, there is often a high turnover. So *maybe* it is true. That's an extremely powerful claim, a strong unifying image, and a *legitimizing* image.

So how else might the blues scene of Edmonton be legitimized within the larger blues world? To answer this, we may be able to turn to anthropological studies of kinship. Since Morgan and Tylor, anthropologists have long been interested in kinship (Radcliffe-Brown 1941, Levi-Strauss 1969, Sahlins 2013). Many of these studies focus on kinship as a tool for understanding the succession of material goods and inheritances in various cultural groups and the development of certain incest taboos. It is not a biological concept—kinship structures vary greatly around the world. What kinship is, is a cultural creation, designed to meet the specific social needs of those who subscribe to a given framework. The idea of kinship is of "people who are intrinsic to one another's existence" (Sahlins 2013: 2), whether consanguineal, affinal, or not. For the purpose of this study, I would like to focus on the 'or not' portion of that.

As I have delved into the study of the Edmonton blues scene what continually appears, when speaking to members of the community, whether musicians or tastemakers, is a reference to the past—to the historical roots of the musical form, to the different styles, places, and figures. These references are often brought up in relation to inheritance, although not in

the familial sense. What is at stake, what is inherited, is an intellectual tradition, not concrete, material goods. It is an inheritance that local players received when they got the opportunity to play with touring acts, people like Pinetop Perkins, and Johnny Shines and other luminaries. As Holger mentioned, it was certainly something that was passed down to Graham Guest, when he was invited to go on the road with Eddie Shaw.

This proximity to greatness is what I meant when I referred to the idea of 'osmosis' in earlier chapters. By being close to these people, playing with them night after night, some of their skill slowly sinks into your own. Simply by seeing or hearing a legend play live it pushes you in some kind of way, not necessarily in the direction of imitation but rather to allow subtle lessons in musicianship to slowly sink in. Its enchanting, being in the presence of greatness. Watching BB King play live, or Muddy Waters, or Koko Taylor, has layers of mystification, let alone being able to play onstage with them. Those that do not understand the art, cannot comprehend it cognitively, are enchanted by their use of instrumental technology, and those with a base musical knowledge are equally enchanted by their mastery of the craft (Gell 1992). By playing with the figures, local blues musicians have inherited some of that enchantment—it is a rhetorical strategy that helps legitimize their presence as blues players.

I have long thought of how to frame this idea. From my understanding, it is a sort of *imagined kinship*, but perhaps 'imagined' is not the right word. These relationships are very real, these inheritances of knowledge are very real. As a player, you gain legitimacy from the proximity to the source. When Rodger is able to mention that he played with Pinetop Perkins, opened for Long John Baldry, or when Holger discusses his connections with BB King, these are all powerful markers of a transmission of knowledge. They're mystifying markers. They are not

necessarily kinships of 'blood,' although they very well can be but more kinships of proximity. If I may, it is as if there are different levels of legitimacy that can fall within this idea of imagined kinships. Perhaps somewhat obviously, familial relationships are the strongest. Outside of that, apprenticeships with legendary figures, musical proficiency, and locations of learning become increasingly important. If you did not learn from someone, if you do not have familial connections, then *damn*, you better know how to play.

Edmonton does not have direct connections to legendary figures and places. Mostly it is defined by what it *is not*. Edmonton is not Chicago, it's not Memphis, it's not Kansas City. Perhaps that is also part of the draw. There is an opportunity for Edmonton and its blues community to define what it is that it wants to be and how it is that it wants to be recognized. Perhaps Edmonton finds itself in a paradigm shifting moment—Holger and Cam are well-known radio hosts, Cam runs one of the most successful blues festivals in the country, and Holger is the head of one of the most iconic roots and blues labels. It is not unlikely to think that in the decades to come their stock will rise, that they will gain an even more mythical status.

As we discussed earlier, Malinowski saw myths as social charters, as legitimizing devices. That's exactly what these ideas of closeness, of apprenticeship do. They mark your relative status to a certain community. Knowledge of a history or a musical style is increasingly important within the social hierarchy of the blues. Being able to name drop any number of historical figures, lay claim to certain events or places—all increase mythical stock. We might remember the story that Cam told us, of the very first year of the blues festival, about Ronnie Earl & the Broadcasters. Ronnie Earl doesn't tour that much but for whatever reason he came to Edmonton that very first year and put on, by all accounts, an almost divinely inspired

performance. *That* is a foundational story, especially now that the festival has been running for over twenty years.

The presentation of the 'Keeping the Blues Alive' awards by The Blues Foundation out of Memphis to Holger and Cam also provide connections that can be drawn upon to help legitimize the Edmonton scene. I think that is what is perhaps the most important component of 'imagined kinships,' that despite geographical distance from places like the Delta or Memphis or Chicago, certain individuals can gain (in)tangible relations to various times and places.

Now that we're on the topic of connecting to other places I would like to bring in another new idea. Talal Asad has discussed the 'discursive tradition' of Islam (2009). While not explicitly related to the blues, I find this framework particularly useful for thinking about the genre and its history. In the past, Islam has been studied by scholars as one singular thing, as nothing, and as everything. To counter this, Asad has suggested that it should instead be studied as a discursive tradition, beginning with the foundational texts and expanding outwards. In the same sense, we can begin to think of the blues as a discursive tradition. The foundation texts, in this case however, are the places, people, and songs that have shaped it. Every blues performance that you see is reflective of a number of different things. For every new blues artist starting out it is absolutely necessary to play the standards, to show mastery of the tradition, as it were. If we use a set of songs as foundation texts—I know it's a tired example but let's use one of Robert Johnson's most famous ones, Crossroad Blues—the way you play the song can signify I wide range of meanings. Played acoustically it hearkens more back to the source material. Played electrically it may signify your connection to the song is through the British blues boom (specifically the Eric Clapton version). It demonstrates what

lineage of the blues you wish to tie yourself to, to an extent. They're ritual enactments of the blues, of the blues history. Only after paying homage are you really allowed to venture off on your own. The same can be said for how a place connects itself to the blues. Through someone like Holger, as a gatekeeper in the community and as the president of a record label that brings top talent to the city, connections have been made to people like BB King or Honeyboy Edwards, two legends he called friends, to the figures that have been distributed by the Stony Plain Records label, artists such as Kenny 'Blues Boss' Wayne and Maurice John Vaughn. Before the label itself started taking chances on younger artists it was necessary to build a reputation alongside these substantial heavyweights in the community.

Players and figures from Edmonton both minimize and maximize the intertextual gap between their own stories and musical trajectories and those of the legendary blues musicians they have played with and know. By connecting themselves and Edmonton to other places and people they create "textual authority" through proximity to specific discourses and histories, then using these connections as springboards to build "authority through claims of individual creativity and innovations" (Briggs and Bauman 1992: 149). They utilize the genre of blues storytelling to create a legitimate mythology of Edmonton and the blues. When those with blues knowledge hear these stories, they are immediately thinking of the connections between here and there, wherever a bluesy 'there' might be.

Now, if we may, I would like to turn our attention to Blues on Whyte. Blues on Whyte falls on a crossroads. Perhaps I'm being somewhat facetious here, but it is true, to some extent. Its location on Whyte avenue sits between Calgary Trail and Gateway Boulevard, connecting the route to Calgary to the heart of Edmonton. Whyte avenue also connects to Sherwood Park to

the east and the Whitemud to the west. Because of this location, it would be fair to say that nearly everyone from the city and many travelling through it have, at the very least, driven past it if not been inside. It's in a high traffic location, numerous festivals that happen annually in the area bring even the casual blues fan into the general vicinity of Blues on Whyte – the Edmonton International Fringe Festival, the Pride Parade, the Edmonton Artwalk, Sand on Whyte, Ice on Whyte, not to mention the annual Canada Day Blues on Whyte Block Party. It also, to reiterate, is potentially one of the very last blues bars on the continent offering premier blues entertainment seven nights a week. The renovations have also, possibly breathed fresh life into the space, as Grant mentioned earlier. Although the renovations weren't without their detractors. As Denton mentioned, at the time of the changes there were regulars at the pub that found them an unnecessary change, and a major inconvenience. This might come down to feelings surrounding the authenticity of spaces.

Grazian (2003, 2004), in studies on the perception of authenticity within the Chicago blues scene devised a system for discussing the topic. He uses what he calls the "sliding scale of authenticity" as it "not only represents how musicians, consumers, and cultural critics manufacture authenticity through their reliance on stereotypes and urban myths, but also demonstrates how they rank venues and their locales in relation to one another according to these subjective matters" (2004:34). The scale itself is based on the example of three bars in Chicago—Buddy Guy's Blues Legends, B.L.U.E.S, and the Checkerboard lounge. The first, a club located in the heart of Chicago, caters specifically to tourists to the area, and features the same artists on rotation—fresh for visitors but stale for locals. Those tourists that venture a little further from the downtown core might find themselves at B.L.U.E.S., a club in an affluent

neighbourhood on the north side. This place is marked by “intimate and modest décor…exemplified by its worn bar stools and cheap plaster walls, [accentuating] the run-down environment that symbolizes authenticity to consumers of the Chicago blues scene” (39). And finally, there is the Checkerboard Lounge, a blues bar located in one of the city’s predominantly black and impoverished neighbourhoods. Authenticity, as it is perceived by tourists to Chicago, is framed by an Adornian-esque (1991) fetish for ‘blackness’ and poverty and danger.

In Edmonton the case is a little different, however “the search for authenticity in the urban milieu [can still present] a fascinating example of the social production of collective meaning and myth” (Grazian 2004: 32). There is only one bar specific to the blues here now. Sure, blues shows might travel to the Blue Chair Café or Festival Place or the Arden Theatre but the only place to experience it every night is at the Commie. But I think we still can devise ways that the scale of authenticity can be used here. It is an important reminder that authenticity is subjective. To search for ‘authenticity’ is to continually peel back never-ending layers. There was a time here when blues bars ruled the musical landscape, just like everyone I talked to mentioned. Those of us too young to have gone to the Sidetrack or the Hovel or Sneaky Pete’s only have the Commie. That’s our marker of authenticity in this city. But there are those in the generation before that do, and because of that they have a connection to that golden age here in the city. For those who remember the golden era of the blues in this city, perhaps what we’re seeing now is only a cheap facsimile of what once was, a throwback to another time, a long-gone time when the blues ruled—it’s all my generation knows but perhaps that makes the loss of other places and time sting a little more.

Slobin, in *Subcultural Sounds* provides some stirring reasons as to why small musics, as he calls them, should be studied:

> 1. *Homespun*. We are all individual music cultures, using patchworks of compiled sounds stitched into a cultural quilt to help keep us warm. But we are restless sleepers; from time to time we throw off the covers, change the linen, look for sleeping pills, or even buy an electric blanket, which leads us to:
> 2. *Electronic*. Our musical antennae are always waving about in the atmosphere, ignoring some sounds and hauling in others for future reference, although we still don't have a clue as to how we do so or why. We have stored away countless live and recorded sounds, tied to kin, friends, monuments, and often the music triggers the memories rather than the other way round. Yet we are not freestanding, factory-fresh equipment; *context* matters to us as much as inputs, which takes us to:
> -*Environmental*. Amid a set of personal landscapes we can identify formations, musical Stonehenges, that stand free and look communal. Like that ancient pile, such structures are cryptic, mutely posing puzzles of who shaped them and what they represent. Unlike those changeless megaliths, musical monuments are mobile, flexible, more like a mirage. The nearer you get the more their rigid outlines shift in the shimmering air. Less poetically, what I mean is that we make temporary shelters of our musical materials, not only personally, but collectively. Up close, what's "Irish," "American," or "Irish-American" looks like the work of tent-dwellers, not stone-raisers after all" (1993, ix-x).

The shells of former venues are our stonehenges, as are the stories about them. They have shaped the scene as it exists for us today and those latecomers to the scene are subject to that history of change without knowing it. It could be said that the reason the appetite exists for the blues here, and the reason why Blues on Whyte has persisted, is because of all those other places that paved the way or worked concurrently on building the scene. It shaped our forbearers taste and in turn shaped our own. Blues on Whyte has inherited some of the mana

of these places and condensed it. It has become representative of the entire blues history in Edmonton, a relic of a bygone era.

Since the renovations at Blues on Whyte the interior has become a sort of translocal space. It is both everywhere and nowhere at once, both Edmonton and elsewhere. Looking at pictures of *Buddy Guys Legends,* the venue is downtown Chicago, the inside of Blues on Whyte could just as easily be a spin-off of that, if you lost track of where you were. Because it's the only blues-dedicated space in the city we do not have the same volume of acts travelling through on a regular basis. It remains a taste making space and every day of its existence adds to its cultural and mythological legacy, but it certainly is not the only institutional space that forms blues tastes.

While staying in Sirogojno at an ethnovillage, I developed the concept of *rusthenticity*. This term is a combination of "rustic," "authenticity," and "ethnicity." The term itself is derived from the way in which the ethnovillage of Sirogojno attempted to uncover some sort of authentically traditional experience, meant to teach those around what life was like in the past or in another locale while simultaneously pulling some of those ways into the 21st century—in a way, a modern reconstruction of a far-removed place. In that way, the renovations at Blues on Whyte seem to be attempting to create a feeling of elsewhere, to create a *rusthentic* experience, attempting to insert a local Edmonton flavour into larger blues frameworks or styles of place.

We talked a great deal with Tommie, Grant, Cam, and Holger about the importance of radio and, more specifically public/donor supported radio stations. Stations like CJSR and CKUA. In a study on Canadian Campus Radio, Fauteux uses Bourdieu to examine the role that those

involved with Campus radio and other musical institutions have in shaping tastes—given that "artists and cultural producers must choose the most appropriate place to publish or display their work…cultural gatekeepers, and intermediaries such as radio DJs and record store employees, construct musical cultures and the scenes in which they circulate, establishing which musical forms and styles are *in* and which are *out*. This process of distinction weaves through the musical discourse and cultural and institutional sites in a music scene. The creative output of musical communities helps form a scene through the discourses of distinction and evaluation produced by cultural intermediaries" (original emphasis, Fauteux 2014: 131). For many blues fans in Edmonton, Grant on CJSR and Cam and Holger on CKUA act as intermediaries between the larger, translocal blues scene and the local. They also play a role in what stories or myths get redistributed within the city, before finally being repackaged and shared back outwards with the larger blues community. There is a reason that, as Grant said, people in the blues world will ask any Edmontonian whether they know Holger, such is his figure in the international blues community.

The connections between these radio stations and Blues on Whyte is intriguing. They support each other, give the other a leg to stand on. It is interesting, in the streaming era, that two such places that go against the contemporary desire to have everything all at once. While streaming services create playlists and suggestions for their users based on mathematical algorithms, that curation lacks a human touch. Even those who love the radio stations and cultural spaces (CKUA, CJSR, Blues on Whyte) would never tell you that they love everything that is played on the radio and in those spaces. That would be a lie. I think what they really love is the story. They love the reasons behind why a song is being played on the radio, why what

they are listening to matters, simultaneously in the broadest and most minute sense. What they hear in those spaces is catered, not by artificial intelligence but by people who really care about the sounds coming out of all those speakers. That is the foundation that these 'myths' of the blues in Edmonton come from. Perhaps there *will* come a time when radio is replaced by the digital era, when listening tastes change so drastically that brick and mortar spaces like CKUA or Blues on Whyte no longer exist in the same way.

It seems to reflect the colloquial chicken and egg scenario—did Edmonton become the blues capital of Canada because of some kind of historical progression, or is it the result of those creating within its bounds continually framing Edmonton as a blues town and marketing it as a blues space? Maybe that process of self-mythologizing, from the inside—creating spaces or opportunities for the myths themselves to fall into place—leads to being mythologized from the outside. It certainly stems from a concerted effort on the part of the prior blues generation to foster blues development here in the city.

So, what is the blues myth of Edmonton? There is an amount of Boasian diffusionism—at the very least the cultural legacy was a draw for the Edmonton disposition, as it were, as an isolated, northern, working-class town. The *perception* of an understanding of struggle created the conditions for a respect for the context of the blues. Edmonton is still geographically and historically isolated (for most of the population) from that context, the context being the cultural legacy of slavery in the American south. Later, members of the Edmonton blues communities established connections with important blues lineages, whether it was through apprenticing with legends of the genre or creating a space for their music to be shared (on the radio, onstage in the clubs, or through record distribution). Because of the distance we have

from centres of blues production, local musicians had to work harder and travel further to gain recognition. The stories that are told within the community have become social charters that have shaped and legitimized the Edmonton blues scene over time. And the 'texts' of the blues—the stories, the songs, and the performances—all operate to simultaneously pay homage to those that have come before while establishing a local presence and future.

In many ways, the persistence of the Edmonton blues scene and the strength of its image internationally is result of luck. Since the arrival of Clarence 'Big' Miller, we have seen a snowballing effect. Greatness begets greatness. As time has gone on, Edmonton has experienced a sort of mythical positive reinforcement whereby the stories told here over time have collected and become a standardized part of the blues myths of place. There is an 'intertextual thickness' (Marko Zivkovic, personal communication)—as more and more people moved here, as word of Edmonton's blues scene spread outwards and gathered in the minds of players and fans alike, Edmonton became increasingly important. There is no reason to think that the stories being told in Edmonton about the blues were any different than the stories being told in Calgary or Vancouver or Saskatoon. But they persisted, mythmaking becoming an exercise in luck as much as storytelling.

I had started this project with the intention of seeing how the Edmonton blues example might be used to foster growth in other musical communities in the city. I'm not sure that I have found anything to support that. As with nearly everything in the musical realm these days, a lot of the Edmonton case comes down to luck. Luck that people like Holger Petersen, Cam Hayden, and Kat Danser, Grant Stovel, Graham Guest, have come here and *stayed*. Luck that the owners of Blues on Whyte *own* the building that is the Commercial Hotel. And it is not

particularly helpful to say, “just wait and see what happens.” But sometimes, maybe, that’s all you can do. It might be hard, but it might also be worth it.

Epilogue

I struggled a lot with writing this. I mean, a *lot*. There were a ton of sleepless nights, questioning why I chose this topic, questioning what gave *me* the right to write about the Edmonton blues scene. After all, despite being a musician in this city, one thing I'm not is a blues musician. I love the music, but I haven't been around long enough to really appreciate it. Maybe it's a topic I can return to in 20 years, 40 years, maybe even in 60 years, if I'm lucky enough. All I'm really hoping for now is that someone—maybe not tomorrow, or a year after tomorrow, but sometime, someone—will take what I've started with. Maybe it will inspire their own journey into the material. Maybe they'll like it. I'd be quite alright with that.

Notes for Chapter 1

1. Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994). The idea for this chapter was taken from a piece by Barry Shank on the Austin music scene, whereby the author synthesizes a narrative from his research and takes readers on a tour of the city and its important musical locations, weaving in a bit of the general history of the region. Given the connections that are often made between Edmonton and Austin, the use of this narrative framework felt like a good piece of symmetry.
2. Dustin Neilson, "The Good, The Great, The Bad, And The Ugly," *Oilers Nation*, October 9 2018, https://oilersnation.com/2018/10/09/edmonton-oilers-the-great-the-good-the-bad-the-ugly/. If there is one thing that bonds Edmontonians, it is complaining about sports and life in the city in general. This article and the next one touch on that.
3. Terry Jones, "Edmonton – City of Champions. 'Mr. Iveson, Put Up Those Signs,'" *Edmonton Sun*, January 5, 2016, https://edmontonsun.com/2016/01/05/jones-edmonton---city-of-champions-mr-iveson-put-up-those-signs/wcm/45bc346d-aecd-4605-ba41-f58f14277007.
4. "ETS Edmonton Transit System," *Yelp*, accessed February 18, 2019, https://www.yelp.ca/biz/ets-edmonton-transit-system-edmonton.
5. "Transit Reports," City of Edmonton, accessed February 18, 2019, https://www.edmonton.ca/ets/transit-ridership-reports.aspx.
6. "West Edmonton Mall in 1985: the mall that had it all," *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News*, September 11, 2015, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/west-edmonton-mall-in-1985-the-mall-that-had-it-all-1.3224599. In the attached video Anna Maria Tremonti takes viewers on a tour of the new mall and all its outstanding features in 1985.
7. "Population History," City of Edmonton, updated 2016, https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/facts_figures/population-history.aspx.
8. "Metro Line North Project History," City of Edmonton, accessed February 19, 2019, https://www.edmonton.ca/projects_plans/transit/north-lrt-project-history.aspx.
9. Caley Ramsay, "After Lengthy Delay, Metro Line LRT Opens to Riders," *Global News Edmonton,* September 6, 2015, https://globalnews.ca/news/2206051/after-lenghty-delay-metro-line-lrt-opens-to-riders/.
10. "Future LRT," City of Edmonton, accessed February 19, 2019, https://www.edmonton.ca/projects_plans/transit/future-lrt-projects.aspx.
11. As relayed to me in an interview for a previous film project on buskers in Edmonton by Mark Coughlan, an Edmonton-based musician
12. Emily Mertz, "In Photos: Tour MacEwan University's new arts space Allard Hall," *Global News Edmonton,* September 27, 2017, https://globalnews.ca/news/3772589/in-photos-tour-macewan-universitys-new-arts-space-allard-hall/.
13. Mike Sadava, "Mourning the Loss of the Sidetrack Café: move to 104th wasn't enough to save club," *Edmonton Journal*, February 17, 2007. The author discusses the place of the Sidetrack in his obituary for the venue.

14. The sidetrack also came up numerous times in my interviews with Tommie Gallie and informed much of this paragraph and section.
15. “About CKUA,” CKUA, accessed February 15, 2019, https://ckua.com/our-story/.
16. Fish Griwkowsky, “CKUA celebrates 20 years surviving the brink with Alberta tour,” *Edmonton Journal*, March 31, 2017, https://edmontonjournal.com/entertainment/music/ckua-celebrates-20-years-surviving-the-brink-with-alberta-tour.
17. “CKUA History,” CKUA, accessed February 15, 2019, http://www.ckua.com/about/history-2/.
18. Mike Sadava, “CKUA Building Restores History,” *Avenue Magazine Edmonton*, accessed February 15, 2019, http://www.avenueedmonton.com/October-2012/CKUA-Building-Restores-History/
19. Sadava, “CKUA Building Restores History.”
20. Leonard Cohen, “Sisters of Mercy,” *Genius Lyrics*, https://genius.com/Leonard-cohen-sisters-of-mercy-lyrics
21. Wallis Snowdon, “Remembering Leonard Cohen, and Edmonton’s Sisters of Mercy,” *CBC News*, November 11, 2016, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/remembering-leonard-cohen-and-edmonton-s-sisters-of-mercy-1.3847581
22. “@Noon Series: Between Two Gramophones—Toward an Oral History of Legendary 1970s Edmonton Music Venue ‘The Hovel’,” *University of Alberta Sound Studies Institute*, February 8 2017, https://www.ualberta.ca/kule-institute/news-events/events/arts/nbgdanlkvmqhv8qi4e5f03e78g
23. Bryan Birtles, “How Did We Get Here?,”*Vue Weekly*, August 4, 2011, https://www.vueweekly.com/how_did_we_get_here/
24. Sandra Sperounes, “Edmonton to lose another music venue,” *Edmonton Journal*, February 26, 2015, https://edmontonjournal.com/entertainment/music/edmonton-to-lose-another-music-venue
25. Meaghan Baxter, “Wunderbar to close October 31,” *Vue Weekly*, October 29, 2015, https://www.vueweekly.com/wunderbar-to-close-october-31/
26. “Pawnshop closes doors on Whyte Ave live-music venue,” *CBC News*, June 30 2015, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/pawnshop-closes-doors-on-whyte-ave-live-music-venue-1.3133938
27. “Edmonton alt-paper Vue Weekly ends its run,” *Edmonton Journal*, November 16, 2018, https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/edmonton-alt-paper-vue-weekly-ends-its-run
28. “Alberta Register of Historic Places: High Level Bridge,” *Heritage Resources Management Information System*, accessed February 16, 2019, https://hermis.alberta.ca/ARHP/Details.aspx?DeptID=1&ObjectID=4664-0031
29. Brian Fauteux, *Music in Range: the Culture of Canadian Campus Radio* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), 130.
30. From an interview with Tommie Gallie

31. Ron Dicker, “Guess the Humongous Amount a Canada Goose Can Poop in a Day,” *HuffPost,* September 11, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/canada-geese-poop-how-much_us_5a0489bae4b03deac08bdd4b?ec_carp=8229702819700786385
32. Paula Simons, “Hipster makeover planned for historic Strathcona Hotel,” *Edmonton Journal*, July 13, 2018, https://edmontonjournal.com/business/commercial-real-estate/paula-simons-hipster-makeover-planned-for-historic-strathcona-hotel
33. The content of this paragraph taken from my conversation with Denton Morell, former manager of the Blues on Whyte

Notes for Chapter 3

1. The bulk of this chapter comes from interviews conducted with prominent members of the local blues community. These are people who have, and continue, to call Edmonton home. People who have made the blues here special, despite Edmonton’s distance from blues centres. This chapter is a synthesis of all the qualitative research I have undertaken during the course of this project, including interviews with prominent local figures, casual conversations at blues shows and bars and festivals, and my own observations and notes. The portions of text that are italicized are transcripts of *portions* of my conversations with those people, edited for clarity, length, and relevance to the topic. I chose to write this chapter in this way to let the words of these people speak for themselves, rather than to try and force the things we can learn from them into an awkward narrative by myself.
2. This and the next italicized section come from transcriptions of an interview with Denton Morrell, former General Manager of Blues on Whyte/the Commercial Hotel
3. “Heritage Minutes: Marshall McLuhan, produced by Historica Canada, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNKpK_InQHQ.
4. “Dead Venues,” produced by NTT Films, https://epl.capitalcityrecords.ca
5. Based on transcriptions of an interview with Rodger Stanley.
6. Nora Foster Stovel, ed., *Jane Austen Sings the Blues*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009).
7. This section was based on portions of transcriptions of an interview with Grant Stovel
8. This section was based on transcriptions of my conversation with Julie King. Unfortunately, my recording device shut down about 15 minutes into our conversation without my noticing and therefore I was only able to include a short piece of our conversation transcript in this section; the rest of the content relating to Julie’s story came from my notes from that conversation.
9. Roger Levesque, “Louisiana’s Troy ‘Guitar Burner’ Turner packs his blues bag for Edmonton,” *Edmonton Journal,* January 11, 2018, https://edmontonjournal.com/entertainment/music/louisianas-troy-guitar-burner-turner-packs-his-blues-bag-for-edmonton.
10. This section comes from transcriptions of an interview with Tommie Gallie
11. Nadya Pinkiw, “Big Dave McLean, Reggie Leach among eight Manitobans to receive Order of Canada,” *Winnipeg Free Press,* June 27, 2019, https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/big-dave-mclean-reggie-leach-among-eight-

manitobans-to-receive-order-of-canada-511869222.html?fbclid=IwAR2t8MyTups8GOpcNm1LKho8dchjGPhASxZy_FonZ3-IX1SZu6um_aJA248.

12. This section comes from transcriptions of an interview with Cam Hayden.
13. This section comes from transcriptions of an interview with Holger Petersen.

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