

# THE TENNESSEAN

## **Nashville must evolve from a party town to a more family-friendly destination | Opinion**

**To preserve its independent venues and vibrant cultural scene, Music City needs a new approach that balances nightlife with daytime, better reflecting how more and more of us want to live.**

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Guest Columnist

*Updated to add a new video interview with his guest opinion column writer's author.*

Nashville's music scene is facing a quiet but growing crisis – one that threatens the city's cultural soul. Rising rents and an explosion of entertainment options have left independent venues struggling. Some have shuttered; others are barely hanging on.

At a deeper level, Nashville's music scene is being reshaped by a more fundamental shift in how we live and experience culture.

Up until recently, music scenes were built around booze, bars, and late nights. But that model no longer reflects how many of us want to be entertained. The share of young adults ages 18 to 34 who don't drink alcohol has grown significantly, rising from 28% in 2003 to 38% in 2023, according to a [Gallup survey](#).

That's nearly 4 in 10 who say they do not drink at all. Meanwhile, alcohol consumption for those who drink has fallen by 30% from 5.2 to 3.6 drinks per week over the same period.

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Around the world, preferences for consuming culture are shifting from nightlife to *daylife*. Healthier living, less boozing, and earlier bedtimes have become the new mainstream. This shift has been building for some time.

A couple of decades when I was researching my book, "The Rise of the Creative Class," a college-age computer scientist joked, "Dude, you're a Baby Boomer: We can't afford the

recovery time.” Reflecting this new reality, in October 2022 the Metro Nashville City Council passed an ordinance [prohibiting smoking](#) inside most music venues.

Families and children are increasingly important audiences for music. My daughters ages 8 and 9 love music, especially performers like [Taylor Swift](#), Olivia Rodrigo, and Sabrina Carpenter who are among today’s biggest and most successful artists. These acts draw huge intergenerational crowds to their family-friendly concerts.

## **Nashville should not just be for late-night, hard-partying adults**

The shift is happening everywhere. New York, “the city that never sleeps,” is now full of running and biking trails, health and wellness studios, juice bars, and kid-friendly amenities. Even Las Vegas, long defined by gambling, clubbing, and all manner of late-night debauchery, is changing its stripes with venues like The Sphere, catering to an older, earlier-to-bed crowd.



Nashville has long been seen as a place that is great for families. It’s a big part of the reason so many people have moved to the region over the past few years.

A more balanced, all-ages approach to music and cultural consumption can help enhance and solidify Nashville’s family-friendly appeal.

The music and creative economy I'm imagining includes early shows, weekend matinees, outdoor concerts, coffee-shop sets, church concerts, and all-ages events.

This isn't about watering down music; it's about expanding access by drawing in new audiences that either cannot or don't want to drink and stay out late.

Opinion: [Is Nashville in an urban crisis?](#)

There are clear benefits for musicians. Artists can reach larger and more diverse audiences and gain experience playing in different kinds of venues and are able to experiment with new formats and approaches to performing. And, of course, emerging musicians gain more opportunities to perform.



## 'Blotto-tourism' is doing Music City more harm than good

Independent music is the veritable backbone of Nashville's tourism economy. It has long powered the city's global brand and helped drive the strongest downtown recovery of any city in America.

But the explosion of pedal taverns, party buses, and bachelorette parties, what I've dubbed *blotto-tourism*, is starting to do more harm than good.

It's driving locals away and even prompting businesses to move their headquarters off Broadway. [Mayor Freddie O'Connell](#) campaigned to make Nashville less touristy and more

focused on residents and families. Maybe down the road, some of those same bachelorettes and partygoers will return – this time with their kids.

Independent music venues can work with nearby parks, open spaces, and plazas to provide programming for daytime audiences. City and state governments, economic development groups, cultural organizations, and local foundations can further support alternative spaces like coffee shops, community centers, and other third places, helping them diversify their offerings. Larger venues, like Ascend Amphitheatre and the famed Ryman Auditorium, can also play a role by expanding their matinees and daytime programming.



It's also good for business. The old nightlife model misses a huge market of families, teens, older adults. Broadening the audience base will help generate new revenue streams and make the music scene more financially resilient. Other local businesses benefit from increased daytime foot traffic and more customers. And when people of all ages come together through shared cultural experiences, it strengthens neighborhoods and creates a deeper sense of connection throughout the city.

The time has come. To preserve its independent venues and vibrant cultural scene, Music City needs a new approach that balances nightlife with daylife, better reflecting how more and more of us want to live and consume culture today.

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