

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

# DRAFT

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Exit/In  
Other names/site number N/A  
Name of related multiple property listing N/A  
(Remove "N/A" if property is part of a multiple property listing and add name)

## 2. Location

Street & Number: 2208 Elliston Place  
City or town: Nashville State: TN County: Davidson  
Not For Publication:  N/A Vicinity:  N/A Zip: 37203

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this  nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of certifying official/Title:** **Date**  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission  
**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

In my opinion, the property  meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Commenting Official:** **Date**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Title:** **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
 County and State

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register
- \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ removed from the National Register
- \_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
1	0	objects
2	0	Total

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register** \_\_\_\_\_ 0

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/music facility

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No style

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; STUCCO; WOOD; ASPHALT; METAL

**Narrative Description**

The Exit/In<sup>1</sup> is a one-story brick, commercial building on a concrete foundation that abuts the sidewalk at 2208 Elliston Place in Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee. Originally built in 1953, the building was converted to a live music venue in 1971. The building embodies what had been two separate buildings that were combined into one c. 1980 and given the single address of 2208 Elliston Street. The roof is flat. Rough-faced stucco and plywood cover the west half of the façade; brick covers the majority of the east half. There are two doors in the façade, the main entrance located in the middle of the east half of the building and an exit-only door located near the building’s southwest corner. On either side of the main entrance are horizontal windows filled with translucent glass blocks. The building is painted black with white trim. On the west half of the facade, a large rectangular panel displays the names of famous musicians that have played at Exit/In. A small concrete block room with flat roof abuts the north elevation (rear) of the brick building. Another building with a flat roof, concrete foundation, and wood paneling abuts the north

<sup>1</sup> Some sources refer to the nominated property as “The Exit/In,” while others refer to the property as only “Exit/In.” Many sources that repeatedly reported the goings-on of the nominated property are inconsistent in their usage of the article “the” – sometimes dropping and adding it within the same piece. An early example of both usages within the same piece is an article in the Tennessean (Nashville) from July 23, 1973 titled “Exit/In Offers ‘Different’ Luncheon.” There appears to be no significant reasoning as to whether the article “the” is used or not used when referring to the nominated property.

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

elevation (rear) of the concrete block building. The wood paneled building was originally an outbuilding but is now connected to the main building via the concrete block room and overlapping rooflines.

### Site Features and Setting

The Exit/In faces southeast onto Elliston Place, a commercial street west of downtown Nashville and north of Vanderbilt University. A concrete sidewalk runs in front of the building and the adjacent buildings' facades. Near the building's front entrance, a square metal post in the sidewalk raises a large, c.1975 marquee sign just above the building's roofline (Contributing Object). The sign announces upcoming shows above the words "EXIT/IN." The building's east wall is shared with the adjacent building. West of Exit/In is an open area with a wooden deck. The neighboring establishment to the west is a one-story brick building. Across Elliston Place is a three-story brick apartment building, a small asphalt parking lot, and a one-story commercial strip of buildings. Behind (north) Exit/In is a raised asphalt parking lot.

### Exterior

The south elevation is the façade and has two distinct sections resulting from combining two adjacent buildings into one c.1980. The original configuration of the combined buildings is seen on the 1931-1932 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map in Figure 1; a contemporary aerial view with visual evidence of the original roof boundaries is seen in Figure 2. The east section of the building is brick painted black and has three symmetrical bays with the main entrance in the middle bay. The single-leaf metal entrance door is framed by two flat, concrete pilasters whose slightly Doric capitals support an unadorned frieze over which sits a wood projection with metal shed roof that protects the entrance from rain. Placed in the middle of the frieze are metal numbers "2208." On either side of the door are two slightly recessed, horizontal windows, each filled with 36 translucent glass blocks.

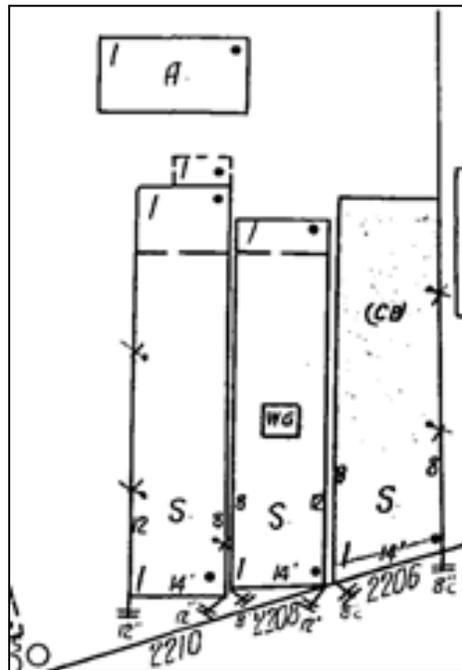


Figure 1. Cropped from Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Nashville 1931-1932, map 12. The Exit/In building now embodies the buildings with numbers 2210 and 2208 in this image.

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

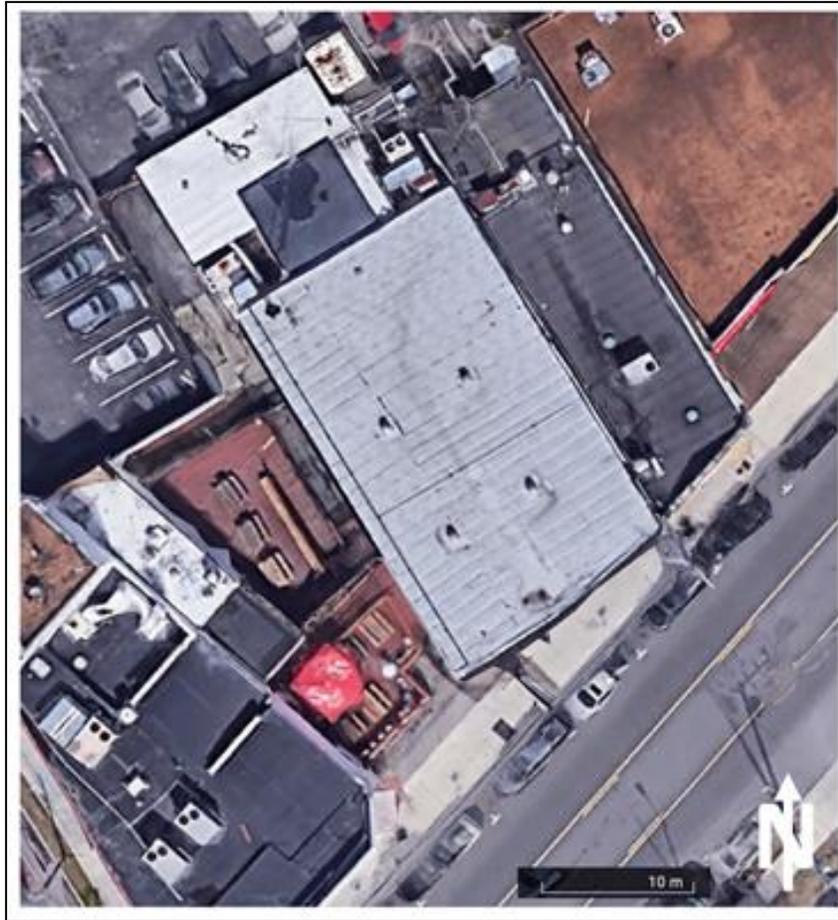


Figure 2. Aerial image of Exit/In building. Note evidence of building seam near the center of the roof.

The west section of the facade provided the original entrance to the building. It is covered with rough-faced stucco that has largely been covered with plywood and metal, painted black. A large, rectangular, framed panel lists the names of different artists who have performed at the building since 1971. At the western end of the section is a single-leaf metal door that has been used as a second patron entrance into the building since c. 1980. The roof was raised c.1980 to its current height by approximately two feet. This expansion is most evident at the southwest corner of the building, and the east section of the south elevation.

The western elevation is a brick wall that was stuccoed at an unknown date and painted in two solid colors, approximately one-third white and two-thirds blacks. The elevation has four bays, each with a window filled in c.1971. A wood plank fence runs from the west elevation of Exit/In's building to the east elevation of the neighboring establishment. Behind (north) this fence, two c.1971 metal security doors provide emergency exits from the building's music room. These entrances were used as the "side" entrances when a restaurant was installed c.1972. These doors provide access to the c.1990 wooden deck area behind the wood plank fence. This addition allows patrons to leave the building and enter a secure, outdoor area.

Attached near the center of the original building's rear brick wall (north elevation) is a one-story, concrete block room with a flat, asphalt roof that reaches about two feet below the roofline of the main, brick portion

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

---

of the building. Large heating and cooling units flank the east and west elevations of this concrete block portion of the building.

Attached to the north elevation of the concrete block room is a former outbuilding that was connected to the original brick building via the concrete block room at an unknown date. The construction date of the former outbuilding is unknown but appears on the 1931-1932 Sanborn map in Figure 1. The building has a flat, asphalt roof, concrete foundation, and the walls are covered with wood paneling. There is a single-leaf, metal security door in the west elevation. Through this door is the only way to access the interior of the concrete block portion of the building. The concrete block and wood-paneled portions of the building are used for storage.

The east elevation of the Exit/In building is a solid brick party wall that abuts an adjacent building.

### **Interior Evolution**

The interior configuration retains the character-defining features of the property as it evolved as a performance venue from 1971 to c. 1980. A year after opening, in 1972, the owners removed an interior wall to create a larger music room. They installed carpet and wood paneling and moved a small stage from the west wall to a larger stage on the east wall (where the venue's bar is now located). In 1976, new owners acquired the property and further interior changes took place. The owners modernized the restrooms; removed the carpet and wood paneling to accommodate an improved sound system, and built a new ceiling, again for the sound system and to install better lighting on the stage.

Lasting changes came with yet another set of owners c. 1980. Their expansion physically adjoined the space next door, creating the space as presently configured with a shared flat roof. The owners relocated the stage to its present location at the north end of the building and raised the roof approximately two feet after the roof collapsed during construction. The owners also installed a small balcony at the south end of the building that could be used for VIP seating. They built a wood rail around the balcony and installed wooden benches along the southwest corner for seating. In addition to the permanent seating, the balcony has enough space to rearrange tables and seating as needed. This space has not been altered except for the addition of photographs on the wall of performers who played the club.

In 1980 the owners also relocated the bar to its present location along the east wall. They installed church pews on the main floor, which proved immediately unpopular and were removed in March 1982. Outside of the technological upgrades, the interior space today retains its 1980 appearance and the primary spaces (the stage, the balcony, and the bar) are intact. The backstage area is extant to c.1980.

### **Music Room**

The interior of Exit/In is separated into two parts. The large music room takes approximately two-thirds of the interior space and includes the stage, a VIP balcony, restrooms, and bar. The floors are concrete, except for a section of brick flooring beneath the balcony along the south wall. The walls in the music room are covered in wood paneling that rises approximately two feet above the doors. Above this paneling, the walls are covered in plaster. The ceiling is exposed with lights hanging from the metal ceiling joists. The walls, floor, ceiling, and ceiling joists are painted black.

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

Upon entering through the main entrance from the sidewalk, there is a short corridor created by balcony stairs to the west and the outer wall of the small bar storage room to the east. A single-leaf doorway beneath the balcony stairs provides access to the space beneath the balcony. A single-leaf door leads to the storage space to the east and is also the only access that leads behind the bar. Beyond this brief corridor, the venue's concrete block bar is located along the east wall. Names of performers who played the venue are listed above the bar and along the southeast corner of the room.

The northeast corner of the music room contains men's and women's restrooms. Beyond the bar (northward) on the east wall, concrete steps lead to the women's restroom. Beyond the women's restroom, five concrete steps lead to the men's restroom.

The wooden balcony takes up the south wall of the music room. The balcony is flanked by two sets of stairs, one on its east side, and a longer staircase on its west side along the west wall of the room. Wood railing is along the northern edge of the balcony, and permanent bench seating is built along the southwest corner. Beneath the balcony is an open area that is elevated approximately four inches from the ground. There is an exit door that is no longer used as it is boarded up from the outside, in the west wall near the southwest corner.

Just north of the space beneath the balcony, in between the balcony's two staircases, are the consoles and computer for sound and light control. This space is raised approximately four inches from the ground. A wheelchair ramp is located in between this platform and the west set of stairs.

North of the balcony staircase along the music room's west wall are two single-leaf, metal, emergency exit doors. Each door has a single light above the push rail. Each door is accessed by two concrete steps. North of these doors is a drink shelf approximately six feet long. There are four concrete steps along the west wall that ascend to the stage which is raised approximately two feet from the ground. The stage takes up the entire north wall of the music room.

### **Backstage**

Eight concrete steps located just past the northeast corner of the stage leads to the c.1980 backstage area which takes up the remaining space at north end of the building. Backstage includes a green room, office, employee breakroom, beverage storage, and storage closet.

The concrete steps land at the southeast corner of a small hall area. Each backstage room opens into this space. The floors of the hall and each room are concrete. The south wall of the hall area is concrete block. The north, east, and west walls are drywall, as is the ceiling. Florescent lighting is attached to the ceiling in the hall.

In the south wall, there are two single-leaf doors. The door closest to the stairs leads to the green room. The east and west walls of the green room are drywall; the north wall is concrete block; the south wall is exposed, unpainted brick. The ceiling is covered in drop ceiling tiles.

Further west along the south wall of the backstage hall is a second single-leaf door that leads to beverage storage. Stacked supplies obscured inspection of the wall materials in this room.

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

In the west wall of the hall are two single leaf doors. The door closest to the southwest corner of the room opens to an employee breakroom. There is a single leaf, metal security door in the west wall of this room. The walls and ceiling are drywall.

North of the employee break room is a small office accessed through the second single-leaf door in the west wall of the backstage hall. The walls and ceiling are drywall.

The north wall of the backstage hall area contains no windows or doors. This wall has large panels displaying the name of artists who have performed at the venue.

The west wall of the backstage hall area has a single-leaf doorway that leads into a small storage closet. The door is made of wire mesh.

### **Integrity**

The Exit/In retains its strongest aspects of integrity relative to location, setting, feeling, and association. The building remains at its same location, set within a section of Elliston Place that became known as ‘The Rock Block’ by the early 1980s, so named for the multiple businesses associated with Nashville’s counterculture movement. The building itself has seen changes over the years, but the space has functioned since 1971 as a live music venue and continues to reflect that use. The changes to the building enabled this continued use, and many changes date to the Period of Significance, such as those that resulted from the c. 1980 renovation. The building has been painted, and the west half stuccoed since the early 1970s, for most if not all of the time that it has been a live music venue. The metal and glass marquee sign that stands out front on the sidewalk replaced an earlier sign further east (seen in historic photographs) c.1975.

On the exterior, the current owners have made only minor and reversible cosmetic changes, including the installation of lamps on the south wall in 2016 where previous sconces had been. Original window openings on the south wall near the west corner, which historic photos show to have been altered sometime between November 1975 and October 1977, were covered with boards and there is now a wall of artists’ names placed there in 2006. Windows along the west wall were filled in sometime post-summer 1980 and remain filled in. A mural was added to the west exterior wall in 2006.

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**  
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

PERFORMING ARTS \_\_\_\_\_

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1971-1988 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1980 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Exit/In at 2208 Elliston Place, Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its exceptional local significance in Performing Arts and Entertainment/Recreation. Under criterion A, the Exit/In’s significance spans from its early roots from 1971 to 1979 when its reputation was first established as one of the nation’s premier artist showcase venues, then continuing to its transformation into a modern rock hall from 1980 to c. 1988, when Nashville was recognized as a site of “rock renaissance.” During this period of significance, 1971 to 1988, the Exit/In has exhibited a number of performative styles of alternative American music and survives today as a rock performance venue in the heart of mainstream country music’s proverbial Mecca. The list of performers who passed through the doors is broad and the breadth of the Exit/In’s performance history speaks to a more important moment for alternative performance styles and the acceptance of nontraditional attitudes in the nationally recognized Nashville music scene. The Period of Significance begins with the Exit/In’s opening in 1971 and ends in 1988 with the Nashville Entertainment Association’s three-day showcase for local rock and pop music artists, a culminating event for the Exit/In’s role in developing Nashville’s alternative music scene.

Exit/In meets Criteria Consideration G for its “exceptional impact...on the creation and spread of music during the late twentieth century.” As a fundamental component of Nashville’s modern music industry, Exit/In is exceptionally significant due to its association with a “copious number of artists, musicians, singers and songwriters... who have had extraordinary impacts on music” from within its performance spaces. According to contemporary observers and later popular music historians, the Exit/In ranks with the Troubadour in Los Angeles and the Bottom Line in New York City as pivotal popular music clubs in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

Many of Nashville’s earliest major live music venues were associated with blues music, beginning with the Bijou Theatre in the 1920s. Erected in 1904 on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Nashville as a company play and movie house for white patrons, the theatre became a leading venue for African American performances c.1916. It was part of the vaudeville circuit and attracted blues acts such as Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, and Ma Rainey. Venues in the Jefferson Street area followed suit in the 1940s with several rhythm-and-blues venues, including Del Morocco, Club Baron, Maceo’s, and the New Era Club that attracted musicians such as Etta James and B.B. King.<sup>2</sup> According to one historian of the Nashville music landscape, in the mid-twentieth century, the city’s “night clubs thrummed with creamy swing, elaborate floors shows, and fervent jazz and R&B” at many of the places listed above as well as the Skyway on Murfreesboro Road, the Revillot on Jefferson Street, and the Carousel and the Gaslight downtown in Printer’s Alley (Printers Alley Historic District NR 8/26/1982). As Richard Frank, Jr., a music attorney, observed, “In the forties and early or mid fifties [sic], jazz, blues, and race music were as important in Nashville as country music,” as were the venues that supported these genres.<sup>3</sup> Until interstate construction severely impacted businesses and the area’s Black neighborhoods, the Jefferson Street vicinity was the center for R&B, soul, and jazz venues. Ironically, the 1950s-1960s construction of the James Robertson Parkway project and its centerpiece, the Municipal

<sup>2</sup> Matt Tate, “Nashville Music Venues,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* online edition, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/nashville-music-venues/>, March 1, 2018, accessed July 29, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Havighurst, *Air Castle of the South: WSM and the Making of Music City* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 156.

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

Auditorium, led to the demolition of several Black music clubs in the downtown area, including the Bijou Theatre. The new, modern arena with 9,900 seats featured pop, country, and, increasingly, major Rock-n-Roll shows by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Municipal Auditorium was where “arena rock” flourished in the city for the next thirty years.<sup>4</sup>

Though county music station WSM’s Grand Ole Opry was certainly popular from its inception in 1925 as WSM Barn Stage, it took place in a studio not equipped to handle clamoring fans until moving to Hillsboro Theatre (today the Belcourt Theatre) in 1934. The Grand Ole Opry moved several times, including to the War Memorial Auditorium (NR 11/16/2017), before making its home at the Ryman Auditorium in 1943 (NR 5/6/1971; NHL 1/3/2001). Before the Grand Ole Opry found its home there, the Ryman had been an eclectic Nashville music venue for decades. As one local writer described, “...the hall rang like the inside of a grand piano, first with fire and brimstone, then with choirs and hymns. Symphonies and opera companies followed, as did vocal recitals, ballet dancers, theatrical spectacles, political rallies, fiddlers, and banjo pickers.”<sup>5</sup> The Grand Ole Opry’s audience grew with its residence at the Ryman, further popularizing the show, drawing fans to Nashville, and prompting other venues to open, some of which were in Printer’s Alley but the most famous one being Tootsie’s Orchid Lounge on Broadway (Broadway Historic District NR 7/18/1980).

In 1974, when the Grand Ole Opry moved from downtown to the outskirts of Nashville near the Cumberland River and Opryland theme park, it took much of the country music scene with it (Grand Ole Opry House NR 1/27/2015). According to one source, “Downtown became a wasteland of adult bookstores and broken-down honky tonks,”<sup>6</sup> though Robert’s Western World (first Rhinestone Western Wear, then Robert’s 3 Doors Down, then Robert’s Western Wear Bar & Night Club) on Broadway emerged as a traditional country venue in the early 1990s, followed by Legends Corner, the Second Fiddle, and The Stage. The relocation of the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2001 from Music Row helped recenter the downtown districts of Lower Broadway and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North as places to hear live country music, with one of the first themed music clubs being Margaritaville by Jimmy Buffett (Second Avenue Commercial District NR 2/23/1972). By the twenty-first century, downtown was *the* scene for country music clubs again, and major mainstream country artists located their own themed clubs in this part of the city.

### The Listening Room Era, 1971-1979

The Exit/In opened in 1971, a nationally momentous time when “big cities on both coasts were home to legendary venues for rock ‘n’ roll and counterculture.”<sup>7</sup> Nashville, up until that point, did not share any major resemblance with the cultural terrain of San Francisco, New York City, Los Angeles, or Austin in the way of small music spaces and listening rooms. Liz Theils, one of the early owners of the Exit/In, described the early days of the space as a “forum,” where a predominantly younger crowd could come in, listen to live

<sup>4</sup> Tennessee SHPO staff determined the Municipal Auditorium eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Havighurst, *Air Castle*, 122.

<sup>6</sup> Tate, “Nashville Music Venues.”

<sup>7</sup> Noel Murray, “About the Exit/In,” *Nashville Scene*, December 5, 2002.

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

music, and find a general escape from the stress of the outside world.<sup>8</sup> Nightlife and live music in downtown Nashville “consisted of Printer’s Alley or on the Grand Ole Opry, two widely divergent experiences.”<sup>9</sup> The building for the Exit/In had originally been built in 1953 as the “the offices for Rockwood Theater and a pinball machine company,” about as non-descript a building as could be found along Elliston Place, a small commercial strip of buildings near Vanderbilt University.<sup>10</sup>

Owsley Manier and Brugh Reynolds, the Exit/In’s original owners, decided on 2208 Elliston Place for a live music venue in large part because of its proximity to Vanderbilt University as well as the neighborhood’s trajectory towards a “youth-oriented” area.<sup>11</sup> “In a music town, there was no place to gig....We wanted to provide a place where the audience and the entertainer could both get off,” Owsley later remarked.<sup>12</sup> The original seating was for 90, and the model that Owsley and Reynolds had in mind was the Bottom of the Barrel, “an Atlanta bistro where ‘magic things were happening.’”<sup>13</sup>

By the fall of 1971, reporters for *Billboard* magazine, a key music industry publication, noted performances at the Exit/In, including a series of October shows by songwriter/performer Jimmy Buffett.<sup>14</sup> Buffett was considered the first music star or celebrity to evolve out of the club's music environment. He played the Exit/In in its opening weeks and then returned, a bigger name each time, from 1972-1974.<sup>15</sup> One music industry writer considered Buffett's work at Exit/In in those years as significant to the evolving “fusion” between country and rock music, citing in particular a session where Buffett joined Nashville session musician and bluesman Delbert McClinton on stage at the club.<sup>16</sup>

In the first few years of its existence, early advertisements for the Exit/In do more to showcase countercultural undertows that rumbled under the surface of Nashville’s music mainstream, and also work to uncover a broader commercial struggle for alternative performance spaces for songwriters and folk music performers, such as bluegrass legend Doc Watson and folk music artists Joan Baez and Odetta, who was the first nationally recognized African American artist to play at the venue. The club's immediate success convinced the owners to close temporarily in the summer of 1972 so they could knock down a wall to create more room, install carpet, expand the kitchen, and build a new stage. Thus began the process of the Exit/In's physical changes from 1972 to 1982, changes that reflected not only the growing audience for the venue but also the evolving need for the space to accommodate both its showcase mission and later its rock music tradition.

The expanded kitchen of 1972 led to new experiences. In defining the business as a place where the music and the experience of hearing the music was different, club owners also wished to define that difference in

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Ghianni, “Big Names: Big Stories: Details of Exit/In Lore Lost to Time,” *Tennessee Ledger* (Nashville), July 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Alice Alexander, “Exit/In: Good Vibes, Hard Times,” *Tennessean* (Nashville), December 14, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, “About Exit/In.”

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, “Exit/In: Good Vibes, Hard Times.”

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. The Bottom of the Barrel in 1971 was located in Atlanta's Baltimore Block, which was that city's center of counterculture life. The building still stands but was renovated in the 1990s into offices.

<sup>14</sup> “From the Music Capitals of the World,” *Billboard*, October 23, 1971, 62.

<sup>15</sup> Steve Eng, *Jimmy Buffett: The Man from Margaritaville Revealed* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Romn Kozak, “Country Talent Linking Up with Rockers on Bookings,” *Billboard*, September 23, 1978, 81.

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

the overall image of the property. The venue dabbled in food service during its daytime hours. Healthy, natural food luncheons—hardly a staple in Nashville then--were a regular occurrence for at least the summer of 1973. Nashville *Tennessean* reporter Kathleen Gallagher interviewed husband and wife in-house chefs Voro and Iroa Maitreya about the venue's luncheon menu and their spiritual attachment to vegetarianism via Eastern religion. The story indirectly poked fun at the couple but the presence of this different type of lunch experience underscored the point that the Exit/In was a different place even if lunch patrons entered the club through the side door entrance (still extant) and not through the front door.<sup>17</sup>

The expanded building and new stage became central in the creation and performance of the movie *Nashville* in the summer of 1974. Robert Altman's production of the movie *Nashville* has been ranked among the best American films of the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> The Exit/In as a building and as central to the city's music scene had played a major role in Joan Tewkesbury's original thoughts for the screenplay as she visited the club on numerous occasions in 1973. Jan Stuart, a historian of the movie, observed: "The stage was over against the long wall, just beneath where the honor roll is now plastered. The bar was in another corner. Wooden banquettes and paneling, long gone, gave the place a kitschy, warrenlike warmth. More people smoked then, more drank hard liquor. Still, the essential Exit/In hasn't changed. One comes here now, as did Tewkesbury back then, to catch the hot young country-music dreamers cut their teeth."<sup>19</sup> Tewkesbury chose the club as the backdrop for two of the movie's pivotal scenes, one with Lily Tomlin's character discussing with Robert Doqui's character about the latter's time in prison and the possibilities of buying drugs, and the second with the performance of the song "I'm Easy," sung by Keith Carradine. The song won the movie its only Oscar award.<sup>20</sup> In July 1974 most of the cast invaded the club one night and performed their own and some of the movie's music (Ronee Blakley, Dave Peel, Keith Carradine, Allan Nichols, and Henry Gibson) as well as comedy (Lily Tomlin and David Arkin) for what had to be a startled audience. That event, the filming of music club scenes, and the success of the song further solidified the club's reputation as the city's "must" music club.<sup>21</sup>

By the mid-1970s, the Exit/In had established a foothold in the Nashville music scene as a songwriter hangout with then-largely unrecognized names, but today several are recognized giants in the field such as John Prine, Guy and Susanna Clark, David Allen Coe, Billy Swann, and John Hiatt.<sup>22</sup> Swann remarked: "You just can't tell regular people how important the place is...I guess only music people understand that."<sup>23</sup> Rodney Crowell arrived in the city in 1972 and immediately discovered that "the Exit/In was the primo showcase folk club in Nashville...The whole idea out on the street was that, "Man, I've got to work hard enough and have the dedication to left my art up to a level where I can get on the Exit/In stage."<sup>24</sup> Songwriter

<sup>17</sup> Kathleen Gallagher, "Exit/In Offers 'Different' Luncheon," *Tennessean* (Nashville), July 23, 1973.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the BBC in 2015 ranked it 14th in its list of 100 best American films. "The 100 Greatest American Films," [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150720-the-100-greatest-american-films), July 20, 2015, accessed November 19, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150720-the-100-greatest-american-films>. The Library of Congress in 1992 added *Nashville* to the National Film Registry.

<sup>19</sup> Stuart, *The Nashville Chronicles*, 46 and 57-58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-241; Gayle Magee, "Songwriting, Advertising, and Mythmaking in the New Hollywood: The Case of *Nashville*," *Music and the Moving Image*, 5(Fall 2012):33-34.

<sup>21</sup> Stuart, *The Nashville Chronicles*, 179.

<sup>22</sup> Sally Hinkle, "Exit/In Launching Performer's Night," *Billboard*, July 29, 1978.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander, "Exit/In: Good Vibes, Hard Times."

<sup>24</sup> Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, *County Music: An Illustrated History* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2019), 377.

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

Mickey Newbury agreed: "The important thing about a club this size is that it gives young writers a chance to play to Nashville musicians. And, a good percentage of the audience is musicians. That keeps the fire alive--it gives the younger writers a chance to hear the people who've made it, eyeball to eyeball."<sup>25</sup> Marty Stuart, who in the 1970s began his Nashville career performing with bluegrass legend Lester Flatt and in Johnny Cash's band in the 1980s, observed that the Exit/In scene "was kind of like what Paris in the 1920s must have been... because it was all bohemians and new-thinking, forward-thinking country music people."<sup>26</sup>

The venue attracted alternative country artists such as Linda Ronstadt coming from California and Jerry Jeff Walker and Doug Sahm from Texas.<sup>27</sup> Leonard Cohen from Canada tested out new songs he was recording over on nearby Music Row for his *Live Songs* (1973) album, and returned three years later to highlight his album *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*.<sup>28</sup> Billy Joel of New York City believed he enhanced his headliner abilities by playing the Exit/In. In 2009 he told *Billboard* magazine: "I remember the Exit/In in Nashville had a good PA system. They had a good piano there, they have a good sound system, they've got good acoustics, they've got good music audiences. So places like that were really key for us. They were watershed gigs."<sup>29</sup>

The regular presence of African American performers such as Odetta, Papa John Creach, and Bill Withers also made Exit/In different in the Nashville of the mid-1970s. While segregation legally ended in the mid-1960s, it remained uncommon for Black and White audiences to mix at music clubs in Nashville. The Exit/In was an important exception.

The national trend of performance spaces acting as casual listening rooms was typical for scenes in New York City or Los Angeles but the existence of the Exit/In as a mecca for Music City songwriters speaks to its unique status in Nashville's music scene. One legendary night in 1974 featured John Prine on stage who, before the night was done, was joined by fellow songwriters Kris Kristofferson, Shel Silverstein, Linda Hargrove, Steve Goodman, Chris Gantry, and David Allen Coe and performers Waylon Jennings and Johnny Rodriguez.<sup>30</sup> In October 1974 the Exit/In welcomed Rock-n-Roll legend Jerry Lee Lewis back to Nashville. His agent recalled, "It was a small club, and the atmosphere was electric with anticipation. I could actually feel the energy. It honestly seemed to me that if someone had waved a knife through the air that it would have produced sparks."<sup>31</sup>

The Exit/In also spotlighted comedy, with no more important act than Steve Martin, who highlighted his week at the Exit/In in 1975 in his autobiography, *Born Standing Up*. Martin wrote of his Nashville appearances at the Exit/In where the club held 200-250 people per show: "When I was performing, I could touch the ceiling with my hand, and I had to be careful when jumping onstage not to knock myself out." He was unknown to Nashville audiences and those who came did so out of "word of mouth only, so everything they saw me do was new." But, Martin added, "even though I had done the act hundreds of times, it became

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Duncan and Burns, *Country Music*, 377.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Elliott, *Have a Little Faith: The John Hiatt Story* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2021), ch. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Jeff Burger, *Leonard Cohen on Leonard Cohen: Interviews and Encounters* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014), 104-106.

<sup>29</sup> Ray Waddell, "The Legend of Billy the Kid," *Billboard*, May 9, 2009, 32.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Eipper, "Exit/In's Renaissance Retains Flavor of the Past," *Tennessean* (Nashville), September 14, 1980.

<sup>31</sup> Scott Faragher, *Music City Babylon* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992), 114.

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

new to me this hot, muggy week in Nashville. The disparate elements I'd begun with then years before had become unified; my road experience had made me tough as steel, and I had total command of my material. But most important, I felt really, really funny."<sup>32</sup>

Don Light, noted music producer and a leader in the gospel music industry who had offices in the RCA Studios Building on Music Row, observed "The way a room like the Exit/In becomes important is by becoming a room you **have** to play--to launch a young artist, you **must** book him there. The club is on the way to becoming such a room [emphasis in original]."<sup>33</sup> Alice Alexander of the *Tennessean* added that by late 1975 the Exit/In had "become 'the' place--few would deny the quote marks' right to be there--for the so-called tastemakers, music industry people, and newsbounds to practice hanging out, as well as for both the performing and appreciating side of the musical element."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, while songwriters and alternative acts dominated the stage in 1975 that year also saw the first appearances from Melissa Manchester and Barry Manilow.

Such success at Exit/In may have helped pave the way for the establishment of other, similar venues in the city. The Station Inn, known today as Nashville's premiere listening room for bluegrass and roots music, opened its doors in 1974 after Exit/In's small club/listening room setting had achieved success. After several management shifts throughout the mid-1970s and a relocation on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue South near the city's railroad corridor (known today as The Gulch), the Station Inn "quickly established itself as one of the most important live music venues in Nashville, a frequent hangout for the elite of bluegrass and country musicians," confirming the drawing power of small venues that offered a showcase/listening room format.<sup>35</sup>

The Nashville music industry rushed to support the business in the fall of 1975 when the original owners announced that bankruptcy was on the horizon. In "Nashville Clubs a Breeding Ground for Local Names," *Billboard* reporter Bob Kirsch observed: "The labels stepped in to help save the only real "Troubadour-Bottom Line" type club in town [a reference to two renowned clubs, respectively, in Los Angeles and in Greenwich Village, New York City], however, and the result has been the appearance of such name pop and country talent as Dr. Hook, Jim Dawson, Waylon Jennings, Tompall Glaser, Asleep at the Wheel, David Allan Coe, Goose Creek symphony, Kinky Friedman, Alex Harvey, Michael Murphy and Jack Clement."<sup>36</sup> The list of country music performers is interesting since it included many of the most important artists, especially Waylon Jennings, Tompall Glaser, David Allan Coe, Kinky Friedman, and Jack Clement, associated with the Outlaw movement. The outpouring of artist and industry support reflected a reality best recognized by William Morris agent Dave Dowds. The building was certainly nothing special either in appearance or sonically, "physically, really, it's just four walls--it's all the other things that count."<sup>37</sup>

While the reputation of the club as an underground haven for new talent and sold-out performances preceded itself, the financial instability of the venue proved to be too much to overcome for the original owners. As

<sup>32</sup> Steve Martin, *Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 165.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander, "Exit/In: Good Vibes, Hard Times."

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Chase Bringardner, "'For the Children': Doyle and Debbie at The Station Inn; or the Politics of Space in 'The Gulch,'" *Theatre and Space* vol.2 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016): 102.

<sup>36</sup> Bob Kirsch, "Nashville Clubs a Breeding Ground for Local Names," *Billboard*, September 20, 1975, A4, A48.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, "Exit/In: Good Vibes, Hard Times."

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

Guy Clark said in a *Tennessean* interview, "They take good care of you there, the audiences are always good, but sometimes the people just don't come."<sup>38</sup> In December of 1975, the same year that the venue received a nomination for "Club of the Year" alongside the renowned Troubadour in Los Angeles, Exit/In owners filed for bankruptcy and reorganization but also kept the performances coming.<sup>39</sup> The owners "cited inexperienced management early in the game, plus a chronic lack of operating capital, as chief reasons" for their initial financial failures.<sup>40</sup>

The reorganization of the club's ownership did not necessarily mean certain closure, but this repetitive cycle of financial hardship created many crucial moments for the cultural and physical viability of the Exit/In's future on Elliston Place. Owners put out a brave face and filed papers showing financial improvement in May 1976. Co-owner Liz Thiels also provided the bankruptcy judge with a scrapbook of reviews and performances to prove that the club could be successful if only it could be reorganized. Profits were up and the performers had broadened to include acts such as jazzmen Stanley Turrentine and McCoy Tyner and trendy songwriters Tom Waits, Townes Van Zandt, and Guy Clark.<sup>41</sup> The bankruptcy proceedings extended into the summer of 1976, and the club continued to operate even as the federal bankruptcy judge ruled that the club had to be sold to satisfy creditors. In search of the largest possible audience, and to sustain its reputation as an open, welcoming venue for performers, the owners also sought more and more African American musicians. Summer 1976 acts included such major African American blues artists as James Cotton and Bobby Blue Bland along with favorites Texas rocker Doug Sahm and bluegrass favorite Doc Watson.<sup>42</sup> Club manager and part owner Owsley Manier recalled that some nights 80 percent of the patrons were African Americans, attracted not just by the blues artists but also by popular jazz bands like Weather Report. "The diversity of bookings was designed to prevent burnout from any one customer base," reported Noel Murray.<sup>43</sup>

A coalition of leading Nashville radio stations, including the soul music format WVOL, the country music giant WSM, the rock music leaders WKDF, and Top 40 station WMAK, joined to stage a benefit concert to keep the Exit/in open as the bankruptcy uncertainty continued into the summer.<sup>44</sup> That grouping of stations demonstrated the broad audience reach of the club--from soul and blues music to Outlaw country, the evolving Rock music scene, and the always popular Top 40 Format. Owsley Manier explained why so many in the music industry stepped up to help: "Magic had the possibility of happening there all the time and it did. There was some creative thing going on there that was pretty intense."<sup>45</sup>

In September 1976 ownership changed hands, and the doors reopened in November. Nick Spiva and Vianda Hill bought the Exit/In with the specific aim of expanding the club's capacity, sonic reach, and overhauling

<sup>38</sup> "Sunday Showcase," *Tennessean* (Nashville), December 14, 1975.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander, "Exit/In: Good Vibes, Hard Times."

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.; also see "Exit/In Will Reorganize After Filing Bankruptcy," *Billboard*, December 13, 1975, 8.

<sup>41</sup> Gerry Wood, "Nashville's Exit/In Now Profitable," *Billboard*, May 15, 1976, 30.

<sup>42</sup> "Nashville Exit/In Goes on the Block," *Billboard* July 17, 1976, 10; "Bankrupt Music Club In Nashville Up For Sale," *Variety*, July 21, 1976, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Noel Murray, "In through the Out Door," *Nashville Scene*, December 5, 2002, accessed November 19, 2021, [https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/in-through-the-out-door/article\\_5643f1ef-2d34-5f6d-9ecf-81e0fde716c.html](https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/in-through-the-out-door/article_5643f1ef-2d34-5f6d-9ecf-81e0fde716c.html).

<sup>44</sup> "Exit/In to Receive \$ Help From Radiom," *Billboard*, August 14, 1976, 55, 60.

<sup>45</sup> Murray, "In through the Out Door."

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

the interior design to accommodate updated sound systems, plumbing, bathrooms, and a new ceiling.<sup>46</sup> But true to their word they kept the focus on songwriter-driven and diverse performances with the first week featuring Jose Feliciano, Leon Redbone, and Richie Havens. Of the many high hopes for the club's reopening, owners and patrons of the Exit/In looked forward to the 1976 renovations and the "possibility of a happy hour film series, a wider variety of food and quite possibly a television show."<sup>47</sup>

Television did not happen immediately, but stereo radio latched on to the club and sounds from the Exit/In began to filter into the mid-state. In the summer of 1978, local progressive rock station WKDF began to sponsor "performers night," which was intended to "provide a foot-in for performers in town who are professional or semi-professional" to "showcase for agents and label officials" for a shot at "opening for headliners."<sup>48</sup> Kip Kirby of the Exit/In explained that the shows would not be like a Writer's Night "because the acts will be allowed to perform non-original material as well as original."<sup>49</sup> The popular rock music station also sponsored late night performances from southern rock bands such as Le Roux.<sup>50</sup> Also that summer, Nashville's public radio station broadcast a Sunday Night Jazz show from Exit/In.<sup>51</sup> A third Nashville radio station broadcasting from the Exit/In, WRVU based at Vanderbilt University, broadcast the weekly writer's night performances.<sup>52</sup> Some of these shows had big surprise guests as when Johnny Rodriguez and then Waylon Jennings joined the Equal Opportunity Employment Band on June 26, 1978.<sup>53</sup>

While the music played on, ownership changed again in July 1978 when music veteran Jack Denett and restaurateur Wayne Oldham acquired the property. Denett told *Variety* magazine: "we plan to keep the same image, but widen the base of appeal."<sup>54</sup> That fall, Denett admitted to *Billboard*: "We want to re-create that unknown excitement that the club has always been famous for with the public, and to try and make it more alive and more important to both the local and national music scenes." He wanted his club to answer the question then dogging the Nashville music scene from the industry at large: why can't more than country music "come out of Nashville, or there's more coming out of here than anyone realizes. How do you open the doors to both country and other forms to get this [city] to be more of a center for the kind of thing the Exit/In is doing?"<sup>55</sup> That answer was still two years in the making.

The start was the formation of the Progressive Music Association at a meeting at Exit/In. The group of artists, agents, and record label executives wanted to interject more pop and rock into the Nashville Sound. Then in February 1979 the Exit/In hosted a three-day mini-festival of R&B, pop, and rock music called Changing Currents as a demonstration of what the Progressive Music Association was all about, with

<sup>46</sup> Marsha Vande Berg, "New Owners Plan Similar Exit/In Club," *Tennessean* (Nashville), September 14, 1976; Evie Zibart, "Exit/In: Second Coming," *Tennessean* (Nashville), November 7, 1976; "Nashville Club Goes At \$22,500," *Billboard*, September 25, 1976, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Sally Hinkle, "Talent: Hail Exit/In Reopening," *Billboard*, November 27, 1976, 36.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Hinkle, "Exit/In Launching Performer's Night," 62.

<sup>50</sup> "Today on Radio," *Tennessean* (Nashville), June 20, 1978.

<sup>51</sup> "Today on Radio," *Tennessean* (Nashville), July 23, 1978.

<sup>52</sup> Jean, Williams, "N.Y., L.A., Nashville Showcase Clubs Provide Outlets For New, Untested Acts," *Billboard*, May 27, 1978, 44.

<sup>53</sup> Pat Nelson, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, July 15, 1978, 44.

<sup>54</sup> "Nash. Music Spot in New MGT. Switch," *Variety*, July 12, 1978, 61.

<sup>55</sup> Sally Hinkle, "Nashville's Exit/In Winning a Struggle," *Billboard*, September 23, 1978, 50, 81.

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

Nashville radio stations WKDA and WKDF sponsoring live broadcasts that took the rock sounds of the Exit/In throughout the Nashville region. Exit/In officials asserted "We wanted this mini-series to emphasize the breadth of the Nashville music scene" while the concerts also helped to "shore up the Exit's position in the community."<sup>56</sup>

Still the club catered to the Nashville's traditional music scene for special events and showcases. Within weeks of the Progressive Music Association event, the Exit/In hosted a star-filled tribute to Grand Ole Opry legend Ernest Tubbs in a release party for a new album that also attracted U.S. Senator Jim Sasser, Congressman Bill Boner, and all sorts of Nashville public officials.<sup>57</sup> Songwriter, and Music City insider, Bobby Braddock wrote about his 1979 album showcase in his memoir, *A Life on Nashville's Music Row* (2015): "Practically everyone from Tree [Publishing] was there, and there were forty Elektra [Records] people who had flown in from all over the country." Braddock felt the night bombed and noted that the record company people lost faith in his new recording, did little promotion, and his album sold a mere 18,000 copies.<sup>58</sup>

Seeking an ever more inclusive audience, while reinforcing its "inside the industry" reputation, the club hosted a benefit concert for the Humphrey Street School of Music and Community Project, located in the African American neighborhood of Chestnut Hill, that featured Memphis artist, producer, and songwriter Cowboy Jack Clement and African American country singer Stoney Edwards in October.<sup>59</sup> Johnny Cash and Cowboy Jack Clement performed in December 1979. An earlier benefit concert in February 1979 was for the Nashville chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences and featured contemporary Gospel music artists Reba Rambo and Jeannie C. Riley.<sup>60</sup> The Exit/In had become a showcase of all sorts of musical styles--country outlaw, songwriter, R&B, blues, jazz, gospel, and, increasingly, rock music.

As a preview of what was to come, blues artists and rock guitar great Rory Gallagher of Ireland played the Exit/In for the first time in late August 1979. Gallagher coincidentally was the perfect artist to bridge the past and present at the club. As Walter Carter of the Nashville *Tennessean* observed, Gallagher does not "fit into strict categories like heavy metal or even hard rock, and as a result he must write almost all of his material"--he was a songwriter first, a rock guitar god second.<sup>61</sup> Also playing the Exit/In that summer was Talking Heads, the first "punk" band to be booked into the nightclub, and the Exit/In broadcast the show live via WKDF--listeners were not impressed, the radio station reported. Thus, the radio station did not immediately embrace the punk music movement. But the Exit/In took a chance and allowed a punk music show from two Nashville bands, Cloverbottom fronting for the Hots, in the fall of 1979.<sup>62</sup> Later that year, Cloverbottom fronted a show featuring David Johansen of the New York Dolls. An important English band sometime looped into the Punk category, The Police, played the club on October 15, and when the group's third album came out in early 1980 lead singer Sting was sporting an Exit/In t-shirt in a back cover image.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Kip Kirby, "Changing Currents' Shakes Up Nashville," *Billboard*, February 24, 1979, 55 and 68.

<sup>57</sup> Kip Kirby, "Tubb Tribute Successful," *Billboard*, March 3, 1979, 114.

<sup>58</sup> Bobby Braddock, *A Life on Nashville's Music Row* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 157.

<sup>59</sup> Exit/In, "Concerts for People presents the Jimi Records Revue" (advertisement), *Tennessean* (Nashville), October 21, 1978.

<sup>60</sup> "Rambo, Riley headline Gospel Music Evening," *Tennessean* (Nashville), February 25, 1979.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Carter, "Irish Singer Playing for 'Time,'" *Tennessean* (Nashville), August 30, 1979.

<sup>62</sup> Pete Wilson, "The Other Nashville Music," *Versus* [Vanderbilt University student magazine], Fall 1983, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Dave Paulson, "Sting on Nashville, Death and the Creative spark," *Tennessean* (Nashville), February 23, 2017.

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

By the end of 1979 Wayne Oldham and a new group of partners including the Sound Seventy Corporation purchased the Exit/In.<sup>64</sup> Wayne Oldham was the new CEO; he owned and operated successful franchise restaurants in Nashville. Steven J. Greil of Sound Seventy Corporation (whose other principals was Joe E. Sullivan and southern rock music star Charlie Daniels) had a big vision for the club. Oldham and Greil planned a \$250,000 expansion that would physically adjoin the space next door to the Exit/In, creating the space as presently configured in the nominated property. The new space increased capacity for the venue by adding a small balcony, relocated the stage from today's Wall of Fame to the back of the room, installed church pews for seating rather than tables, and raised the roof that Steve Martin had been afraid of hitting. The roof was not really a reaction to Martin's worries--while the work was ongoing the ceiling collapsed and had to be rebuilt. The owners envisioned that these changes with new funds for promotion would hopefully alleviate the club's first decade trend of financial distress while maintaining the club's reputation as a "must" venue for both new and established artists. The Exit/In closed at the end of the year for the planned renovations with the final shows featuring Nashville blues and country rock stalwarts Tracy Nelson and Barefoot Jerry.<sup>65</sup>

#### Transformation into the Rock Hall, 1980-1988

The grand reopening of the expanded Exit/In happened in mid-September 1980 with a major industry embrace from Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI). Music publishing has always been the long-term foundation of Nashville's reputation as Music City, U.S.A., and BMI made quite the statement. The night before the public grand-opening BMI hosted a "gala invitation-only celebration for the music community" with performance by rhythm and blues and rock and roll great Chuck Berry. According to *Billboard's* coverage of the event, after Berry's first set, Frances Preston, BMI's Nashville vice president, "created BMI history by welcoming the first member writer ever to win four of the organization's prestigious commendations of excellence."<sup>66</sup>

The three-day public reopening followed the BMI event the next night with performers Thomas Cain, Tracy Nelson, and Jimmy Hall backed by a "12-piece cast of supporting musicians." Jimmy Buffett and his Coral Reefer Band performed two nights with "impromptu" performances by Tommy Crain (of the Charlie Daniels Band), Steve Davis, and singer Deborah McCall. Each night before the music began, there was a 12-minute slide show of the Exit/In's history up until that point. According to one reporter, "Audiences broke out into cheers as they spotted familiar faces of performers who had once headlined at the listening room before their major success: Linda Ronstadt, Barry Manilow, Billy Joel, Chuck Mangione, Steve Martin, Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers." After the presentation, "A brief moment was devoted to the Exit's role" in the filming of the movie *Nashville*.

Of the public reopening, *Billboard* reported "capacity crowds that didn't diminish until closing time and enough celebrities in the audience to start a second performance offstage." Local coverage of its reopening is staggering. An important similarity in the journalism that covered the club's reopening in 1980 was the reference to the Exit/In as a cultural space lovingly stuck in time. Although the interior of the space seemed

<sup>64</sup> Walter Carter, "Exit/In Sold; Expansion Set," *Tennessean* (Nashville), December 2, 1979.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kip Kirby, "Nashville Welcomes Back Exit/In With High Style," *Billboard*, October 4, 1980, 35, 98.

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

“modern and attractive,” the Exit/In remained a “child of the times” with its reverence for countercultural aesthetic and free flowing performative style.<sup>67</sup> The feeling amongst many was to “take the best of everything the club has been in the past,” but work past the commercial mistakes that plagued former iterations of the venue.<sup>68</sup>

For all of the economic and business changes the Exit/In endured in the process of its comeback in 1980, the dawn of a new decade proved the club’s commitment to good music and good company. As Frances Preston asserted, “The Exit/In has been important to the development of Nashville as a total music center.”<sup>69</sup> It was the same building but with a different concert experience in the offering; the changes in the building set the new tone. Laura Eipper commented in the Nashville *Tennessean*, “Gone are the rough-hewn booths, unintentionally shaggy carpeting and dubious sound and light systems, replaced by state-of-the-art technology, snazzy high-tech decor and comfortable seating... More than \$300,000 has been spent on turning what was an unmistakable--if lovable--sow's ear into the silk purse of Nashville night life.”<sup>70</sup> Kip Kirby added in *Billboard*, “Nashville has sorely missed this familiar stomping ground--judging from the excitement of industry executives that packed the Exit in its first few days, the club is being welcomed back with assured support.” Kirby concluded his coverage of the Exit/In’ reopening: “The rapport of the entertainers coupled with the obvious enjoyment the band earned from working together firmly established the old atmosphere that formerly marked the Exit/In.”<sup>71</sup>

Owners of the old building with the new technology promised that the approach to music would remain rooted in groups termed as the regulars--Barefoot Jerry, Delbert McClinton, Papa John Creach, Tracy Nelson, Leon Redbone, John Prine, and Asleep at the Wheel were among those mentioned--but also introduce new artists to the Nashville music scene such as Dire Straits from England or the husband and wife songwriting team of Rodney Crowell and Roseanne Cash, who were still relatively unknown in 1980. Crowell and Cash would become pivotal figures in the country music roots revival of the early to mid-1980s and their presence in the "new" Exit/In was a passing of the torch from the Outlaw music songwriting tradition of Guy Clark, David Allan Coe, and Jack Clement from the club's founding years. Co-owner and booker Griel noted at the reopening, “We want to continue to bring in new talent and focus on Nashville as well. We are not going to forget where we came from.”<sup>72</sup>

Almost immediately the Exit/In broadened its radio broadcasts from regional to international. In December of 1980 the club served as the stage from which a live broadcast of Bobby Bare and Charlie McCoy, renowned county music stars, played for listeners of Radio Luxembourg, which was the most successful commercial radio station in Europe and reached a potential European audience of four million people.<sup>73</sup> Bobby Bare, who recorded with RCA in the 1960s and 1970s before moving onto Columbia Records in 1978, exhibited the outlaw style of performance with his hits “Speckled Pony” and “The Winner.” He set an important precedent for other Nashville-based artists who were seeking greater creative input in

<sup>67</sup> Laura Eipper, “Exit/In’s Renaissance Retains Flavor of the Past,” *Tennessean* (Nashville), September 14, 1980.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Laura Eipper, "BMI Welcomes New Exit/In Back in Style," *Tennessean* (Nashville), September 19, 1980.

<sup>70</sup> Laura Eipper, "Exit/in Reopens Sept. 19," *Tennessean* (Nashville), September 7, 1980.

<sup>71</sup> Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, October 4, 1980, 96; Kirby, “Nashville Welcomes Back Exit/In.”

<sup>72</sup> Kirby, “Nashville Welcomes Back Exit/In.”

<sup>73</sup> Laura Eipper Hill, “Live Exit/In Broadcasts to Reach Fans Overseas,” *Tennessean* (Nashville), December 14, 1980.

Exit/In

Davidson, Tennessee

Name of Property

County and State

producing their own albums.<sup>74</sup> McCoy was, at the time, a seasoned and greatly respected session musician who played on Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* and *Nashville Skyline* albums that had been recorded in Nashville and also played on albums from Joan Baez and Leon Russell. McCoy even contributed to a number of soundtracks for Elvis Presley movies.<sup>75</sup> The broadcast also included guest appearances from singer Billie Jo Spears, Cajun-music artist Jimmy C. Newman, and Dobie Gray, a Black R&B artist who lived and recorded in Nashville.<sup>76</sup>

The Bare-McCoy concert was the first of a planned series of six international radio broadcasts scheduled from the Exit/In. Interestingly enough, the decision to produce a live broadcast of country music from the Exit/In to Europe correlated directly with an international spike in listeners of the Grand Ole Opry broadcast from the WSM radio towers (NR 3/15/2011). Bare and McCoy as headliners were performers in stark contrast to the country music permeating from the Grand Ole Opry stage. The broadcast, in retrospect, almost seems like an intentional alternative offering for European listeners from the very stage where alternative performative ethos thrived.

But in late February 1981--as the recession of 1981-1982 began to take hold of the nation's economy--owners again closed the doors of the Exit/In, claiming declining attendance along with a dispute among the venue's major partners.<sup>77</sup> Regular patrons did not like the church pew seating and the more formal setting, and business declined. Insiders predicted that Wayne Oldham and Hank Hillenmeyer would buy out the Sound Seventy partners--Steve Greil, Charlie Daniels and Joe Sullivan--but that did not happen.<sup>78</sup> Kip Kirby reported in *Billboard* in mid-March that "Nashville is feeling the loss of the Exit/In for live music."<sup>79</sup> Reports indicated that the Exit/In needed "\$3,000 per night to break even," but since the club re-opened in 1980 it consistently "lost \$50,000 to \$60,000 per month."<sup>80</sup> In June, Kirby wrote "Will [Exit/In] continue to exist as a sorely-needed live music spot for Nashville and a breaking ground for new national acts? Or will it become an eatery? We'll keep you posted...and our fingers crossed."<sup>81</sup>

The Exit/In reopened a year later in March 1982 with new owners, Jim Mullins and Charles Schrader, and a new format, a Top 40 dance club with occasional rock music acts.<sup>82</sup> Although puzzled by the change in music direction, Music City insiders were just glad the venue had opened; they packed the place for a National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) showcase/fundraiser with country music duo Shelly West and David Frizzell. *Billboard* magazine approved of the new owners' changes: "Gone are the previous owners' ill-advised church pews, replaced by small club tables and chairs [as in the initial use of the

<sup>74</sup> Dale Vinicur, "Bobby Bare," Artist Bio, Country Music Hall of Fame website, 2013, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://countrymusichalloffame.org/artist/bobby-bare/>.

<sup>75</sup> Kim Field, "Charlie McCoy," Artist Bio, Country Music Hall of Fame website, 2009, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://countrymusichalloffame.org/artist/charlie-mccoy/>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.; Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, January 10, 1981, 78.

<sup>77</sup> Walter Carter, "Exit/In Club to Take Final Bows Saturday Night," *Tennessean* (Nashville), February 12, 1981.

<sup>78</sup> "Inside Track," *Billboard*, February 21, 1981, 78.

<sup>79</sup> Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, March 14, 1981, 63.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene," June 19, 1982.

<sup>82</sup> "Exit/In Open," *Billboard*, March 13, 1982, 36.

Exit/In

Davidson, Tennessee

Name of Property

County and State

club]. The stage has been lowered for more intimate viewing."<sup>83</sup> British writer Stephen Foehr later described the room as "a large, high-ceilinged rectangular box with a full stage at the far end. The walls and ceiling are painted black."<sup>84</sup> The Top 40 dance club did not draw well but a handful of performers quickly booked the Exit/In for rock shows, such as a three-night set by Leon Russell in late April.<sup>85</sup> By May the new owners had given up and let the club sit vacant. Building owner Wayne Oldham let the industry know that the venue could be rented for \$5,000 a night or purchased for \$150,000. Oldham told *Billboard* magazine: "I know Nashville needs the Exit/In ...and that's why I'm still trying to find the right people to take it over."<sup>86</sup>

The uncertainty brought out by the recession of 1981-1982 at the Exit/In opened the door for the emergence of new rock venues in Nashville while owners fought over the future of the Exit/In. Two proved important for the Exit/In's renaissance in 1983-1984 because they paved the way of new sounds whether in the Punk, New Wave, or Cowpunk styles. Phrank'n'Steins (not extant) was the city's first punk club, a basement hole-in-the-wall on Broadway near Vanderbilt University. It operated from c. 1978 to c. 1980. Cantrell's (not extant) was the second, just up the street from the punk club on Broadway. Its impact was immediate but not long lasting--it did not last the decade. Nashville punk mainstays Cloverbottom played both clubs. Cantrell's was where such important bands as The Replacements, The Dusters, and 10,000 Maniacs first performed in Nashville.<sup>87</sup> Neither club had the size of the Exit/In, but they still kept the nascent rock scene moving forward as the Exit/In recovered from its financial difficulties. Following Exit/In's original showcase format, the Bluebird Café, 12<sup>th</sup> & Porter (closed), Park Avenue Lounge and Restaurant (operated largely as an African American showcase, closed), Elliston Square (renamed The End, open), and Boardwalk Café (closed) opened in the early and mid-1980s. *Billboard* quoted Boardwalk's production manager, "We'll be the next Exit if we get the support we need from the music community."<sup>88</sup>

The New Wave scene arrived at the Exit/In in 1983. In the spring, when the city codes department temporarily closed Cantrell's, the club became the site for a renamed Alternative Jam, a show put on by local Punk and New Wave bands in opposition to the much more famous Volunteer Jam hosted by Charlie Daniels in the downtown Municipal Auditorium. To appease Cantrell's, the Exit/In renamed the show Modern Music Mania.<sup>89</sup> In one week in May 1983 Los Angeles' Wall of Voodoo and London's Bow Wow Wow played the club.<sup>90</sup> Oingo Boingo from Australia played a late October 1983 gig at the Exit/In.<sup>91</sup> Then in 1983-1984 came the venue's strong identity with the Cowpunk movement in rock music, led initially by the Nashville-based White Animals who eventually gave way in popularity to Jason and the Scorchers. The Scorchers were part of the short-lived scene at Phrank'N'Steins and Cantrell's, but when the band hit it big, it turned to

<sup>83</sup> Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, 94(March 20, 1982): 52. The stage remains at the lower level as of 2022.

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Foehr, *Waking Up in Nashville* (London: Omnibus Press, 2002), ch. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, May 8, 1982, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, June 19, 1982, 43.

<sup>87</sup> Tracy Moore, "Hot Bands, big deals, a buzzing music scene," *Nashville Scene*, August 10, 2006, accessed November 16, 2021, [https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/hot-bands-big-deals-a-buzzing-music-scene-nashvilles-80s-rock-scene-had-it-all/article\\_82b25deb-9626-582f-b8fe-cd96baff0db0.html](https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/hot-bands-big-deals-a-buzzing-music-scene-nashvilles-80s-rock-scene-had-it-all/article_82b25deb-9626-582f-b8fe-cd96baff0db0.html).

<sup>88</sup> Kip Kirby, "New Showcase in Nashville: Boardwalk Café Booking Name Acts," *Billboard*, June 8, 1985.

<sup>89</sup> Wilson, "The Other Nashville Music," 20.

<sup>90</sup> "New Nashville ticket Agency," *Billboard*, January 28, 1984, 70; Robert K. Oermann, "'Voodoo' Not Just a Piece of the Rock," *Tennessean* (Nashville), May 1, 1983.

<sup>91</sup> Robert K. Oermann, "Oingo Boingo's Music Bounces Like Its Name," *Tennessean* (Nashville), October 30, 1983.

Exit/In

Davidson, Tennessee

Name of Property

County and State

the Exit/In. On January 28, 1984, Jason and the Scorchers held a special show at the Exit/In as part of its night-long celebration of signing a recording contract with EMI America. Attending the concert were key EMI executives from New York City, and they experienced "a wild night: colorful, loud, unpredictable."<sup>92</sup> Once the concert ended the party moved to the iconic Tootsie's Orchid Lounge on Lower Broadway, all in celebration of the rock industry's embrace of Cowpunk, highlighted by MTV's decision to begin airing the first music video, shot in Nashville, by Jason and the Scorchers that very week.

The band, originally called Jason and the Nashville Scorchers, was the first to emerge nationally on what was called the Cowpunk scene in American rock music. Andy McLendon, an independent music producer in Nashville, observed: "There'd never been a band like that... There had been country rock and there had been Gram Parsons. But there's never been Gram Parson meets Iggy Pop meets the [New York] Dolls meets the [Rolling] Stones. The whole idea of that happening in Nashville--the concept--I thought was gonna be bigger than U2."<sup>93</sup> Michael Barackman, a music executive with EMI-Manhattan added: "They were the pioneers, and they embraced all of the great qualities of rock-n-roll: guts, integrity, passion. They paved the way. Now all these strong, new groups [in Nashville] -- the Royal Court of China, Questionnaires, Raging Fire--are going to keep the ball rolling."<sup>94</sup>

In February 1984, Exit/In hosted a who's who for local alternative and Cowpunk bands for the National Association for Campus Activities (a professional organization that booked on-campus concerts for college and universities). Over four nights, important bands such as Will Rambeaux & the Hurricanes, Steve Earle & the Dukes, Dave Olney & the X-Rays, and Tim Krekel & the Sluggers performed for the campus talent buyers.<sup>95</sup>

The year 1985 proved transitional for rock music in Nashville. Leslie Alridge, who was the manager of Will & the Bushmen and co-manager of the very important Nashville group, Raging Fire, recalled that she was told in May 1985 not to mention to record labels that her groups were associated with Nashville, but by November "when I said I was from Nashville, they wouldn't let me out of their offices. Everyone wanted to know what was going on here."<sup>96</sup>

The music industry remained focused on Exit/In as a key venue. In the summer of 1986 Capitol Records, based in Los Angeles but owned by EMI based in London, held its international division meeting in Nashville for the first time. Representatives from 35 countries attended and witnessed label showcases for Walk The West and Jason and the Scorchers from Nashville and the Del-Lords from New Jersey at the Exit/In.<sup>97</sup> Tracy Moore in an overview of the quick boom of the Nashville rock scene in the 1980s concluded that the closing of Cantrell's club in 1986 marked "the moment when the burgeoning rock scene became an industry to be tended, not a spontaneous convergence of luck, opportunity and excitement."<sup>98</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene: Annette Funiceilo Joins a New 'Club'," *Billboard*, February 11, 1984, 49.

<sup>93</sup> Moore, "Hot Bands, big deals."

<sup>94</sup> Michael McCall, "Labels Discover New Music's Last Untapped Frontier--Nashville!" *Billboard*, September 10, 1988, MN 18.

<sup>95</sup> "Campus Talent Buyers Head for Nashville Meet," *Billboard*, February 25, 1984, 80.

<sup>96</sup> McCall, "Labels Discover," MN 3.

<sup>97</sup> Andrew Roblin, "Nashville Capitol Parleys" *Billboard*, July 12, 1986, 32.

<sup>98</sup> Moore, "Hot bands, big deals."

Exit/In

Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee

County and State

The Exit/In reassumed its role as an important showcase and break-out venue for young performers. Michael McCall, who covered local music for the *Nashville Banner* in the mid-1980s, recalled: "I spent more time at the Exit/In than at home. It was the center of the rock scene outside of the more underground places like Cantrell's."<sup>99</sup> McCall added: "It was the place you aspired to play...so early on when you had people like The Nerve, Afrikan Dreamland, they would pack the place out without having any national attention at all." He emphasized: "You played the Exit/In, you'd made it."<sup>100</sup> Jason Ringenberg of the Jason and the Scorchers agreed: "because it had such a history of playing great music before the music broke, there was a certain feather-in-your-cap if you played there."<sup>101</sup>

For instance, in March 1987 Rosie Flores, combining both traditional Tex-Mex sound with what was still called cowpunk, showcased at the Exit/In.<sup>102</sup> Also in 1987, k.d. lang of Canada played the Exit/In. Gerry Wood reported on the show for *Billboard*: "Some call her music punkabilly. Others call it cowpunk. I call it different--and k.d. calls it 'torch and twang.'"<sup>103</sup> The Grinning Plowman and Simmonz played the club on November 12, 1987, for the debut of indie label Carlyle Records.<sup>104</sup>

For the industry 1988 was the breakout year, starting with the Nashville Entertainment Association's decision to put together a three-day showcase for local rock and pop music artists. This event marks the end of the period of significance. With performances held at the Exit/In, across the street at Elliston Square, and the Cannery, record executives from Chrysalis, MCA, Wing/Polygram, Capitol, Warner Bros., A&M, Epic, Atlantic, Virgin, Columbia, Arista, RCA and Elektra companies attended. Tony Brown of MCA/Nashville observed: "This event has brought more pop A&R [Artists and Repertoire] people to Nashville and exposed them to the talent here than anything else."<sup>105</sup>

In 1988 music journalist Michael McCall explored the significance of the rock music scene in Nashville for *Billboard* magazine. Acknowledging that for decades, rock labels shunned Nashville, McCall reported that since 1984 fifteen rock and pop bands out of Nashville had signed with major record companies.<sup>106</sup> By the late 1980s, *Billboard Magazine* called Nashville a site of "rock renaissance," where groups uprooted and moved to Music City not only because of its reputation as a recording industry town, but because the cultural geography of Elliston Place welcomed "youth, energy, and talent."<sup>107</sup>

During these years, according to Noel Murray, the Exit/In evolved into "a 'big box'-style club, more like the grubby, punk-friendly dives that were springing up in college towns throughout the '80s."<sup>108</sup> The building had the open floor in front of the stage while the balcony could still be reserved for VIPs in showcases. The sound system of the 1980s met the needs of rock music dynamics, and the place had a history and a vibe. The

<sup>99</sup> Murray, "In through the Out Door."

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Bob Millard, "Tin Pan Alley: Nashville," *Variety*, March 25, 1987, 152.

<sup>103</sup> Gerry Wood, "Nashville Scene: Canada's k.d. lang Gains Acceptance," *Billboard*, September 26, 1987, 36.

<sup>104</sup> Bob Millard, "Tin Pan Valley," *Variety*, December 2, 1987, 91.

<sup>105</sup> "Labels Trek South for Fest," *Billboard*, February 6, 1988, 26.

<sup>106</sup> McCall, "Labels Discover," MN 18-19.

<sup>107</sup> Bob Millard, "Nashville Rock Spots Heat up the Beat for Young Crowd," *Billboard*, September 10, 1988.

<sup>108</sup> Murray, "In through the Out Door."

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

appeal of rock ‘n’ roll in Nashville satisfied a need for a more diverse musical terrain but also proved to outsiders that Music City could be about more than just the mainstream vein of country music performance and recording. For the Exit/In, a club and venue with such a varied past, local bands could share the same stage as the artists that influenced them.

In his 2002 history of the club's first thirty years, Noel Murray observed: "the Exit/In is little more than a block of real estate where--thanks to the imagination and good taste of a handful of determined people--some amazing things occurred."<sup>109</sup> Nashville music historian Robert K. Oermann agreed that by appearances, the Exit/In wasn't much. "Nearly all the famous rooms in America are real dumps," he added, "The Troubadour's a dump. The Bottom Line is a dump. And the Exit/In to a certain extent was a dump. It was who was there and the music that was made. It wasn't the club itself, although it was a good room. The Exit felt like a hundred-seat room even with 300 people in it."<sup>110</sup>

The Exit/In exists as a part of intangible cultural heritage. Its value stems from collective experience and performative memory. The building itself is small and unassuming, yet its physical existence on Nashville’s Rock Block, a stretch of businesses on Elliston Place that helped establish and maintain the city’s counterculture, makes it invaluable to the preservation of Nashville’s music scene.<sup>111</sup> Though its history endured drastic commercial and economic turmoil, the cultural memory and geography of live music venues are centerpieces to contemporary historical understanding. The preservation of alternative music spaces in Nashville is, frankly, harder to achieve compared to some of the goliath mainstream country music stages. It goes back to the nature of recording and performance in Music City. Nashville thrives on industry and recording, therefore the interpretation and preservation of performance, subculture, and the sonic underground make for a daunting task. The nature of live music dictates a kind of transcendental intangibility in the way of cultural heritage significance. The Exit/In’s dynamic history, its longevity, diverse cast of musical stylings, and its adaptability to performance and broadcasting trends make it an exceptional and truly unique example of a rock performance space in twentieth-century America.

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> The Metro Historical Commission in 2020 erected a historical marker about “The Rock Block,” just outside of Exit/In, recognizing the area’s cultural significance and Exit/In’s role in it.

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

---

---

## **9. Major Bibliographic References**

---

### **Bibliography**

Alexander, Alice. "Exit/In: Good Vibes, Hard Times." *Tennessean* (Nashville). December 14, 1975.

"Bankrupt Music Club in Nashville Up for Sale." *Variety*. July 21, 1976.

Berg, Marsha Vande. "New Owners Plan Similar Exit/In Club." *Tennessean* (Nashville). September 14, 1976.

Braddock, Bobby. *A Life on Nashville's Music Row*. Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015.

Bringardner, Chase. "'For the Children': Doyle and Debbie at The Station Inn; or the Politics of Space in 'The Gulch.'" *Theatre and Space* vol.2. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016.

Burger, Jeff. *Leonard Cohen on Leonard Cohen: Interviews and Encounters*. Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press, 2014.

"Campus Talent Buyers Head to Nashville Meet." *Billboard*. February 25, 1984.

Carter, Walter. "Exit/In Club to Take Final Bows Saturday Night." *Tennessean* (Nashville). February 12, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Exit/In Sold; Expansion Set." *Tennessean* (Nashville). December 2, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Exit/In To Reopen March 1." *Tennessean* (Nashville). January 1982.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Irish Singer Playing for 'Time.'" *Tennessean* (Nashville). August 30, 1979.

Duncan, Dayton, and Ken Burns. *Country Music: An Illustrated History*. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2019.

Eipper, Laura. "BMI Welcomes New Exit/In Back in Style." *Tennessean* (Nashville). September 19, 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Exit/In Reopens Sept. 19." *Tennessean* (Nashville). September 7, 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Exit/In's Renaissance Retains Flavor of the Past." *Tennessean* (Nashville). September 14, 1980.

Elliott, Michael. *Have a Little Faith: The John Hiatt Story*. Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Review Press, 2021.

Eng, Steve. *Jimmy Buffett: The Man from Margaritaville Revealed*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

Exit/In. "Concerts for People presents the Jimi Records Revue" (advertisement). *Tennessean* (Nashville). October 21, 1978.

"Exit/In Open." *Billboard*. March 13, 1982.

"Exit/In to Receive \$ Help From Radiom." *Billboard*. August 14, 1976.

"Exit/In Will Reorganize After Filing Bankruptcy." *Billboard*. December 13, 1975.

Faragher, Scott. *Music City Babylon*. New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992.

Field, Kim. "Charlie McCoy." Artist Bio. Country Music Hall of Fame website. 2009. Accessed November 16, 2021. <https://countrymusichalloffame.org/artist/charlie-mccoy/>.

Foehr, Stephen. *Waking Up in Nashville*. London, England: Omnibus Press, 2002.

"From the Music Capitals of the World." *Billboard*, October 23, 1971.

Gallagher, Kathleen. "Exit/In Offers 'Different' Luncheon." *Tennessean* (Nashville). July 23, 1973.

Ghianni, Tim. "Big Names: Big Stories: Details of Exit/In Lore Lost to Time." *Tennessee Ledger* (Nashville). July 22, 2016.

Havighurst, Craig. *Air Castle of the South: WSM and the Making of Music City*. Chicago: University Press of Illinois, 2007.

Hill, Laura Eipper. "Live Exit/In Broadcasts to Reach Fans Overseas." *Tennessean* (Nashville). December 14, 1980.

Hinkle, Sally. "Exit/In Launching Performer's Night." *Billboard*. July 29, 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville's Exit/In Winning a Struggle." *Billboard*. September 23, 1978.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Talent: Hail Exit/In Reopening." *Billboard*. November 27, 1976.

"Inside Track." *Billboard*. February 21, 1981.

Kirby, Kip. "Changing Currents' Shakes Up Nashville." *Billboard*. February 24, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville Scene." *Billboard*. October 4, 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville Scene." *Billboard*. January 10, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville Scene." *Billboard*. March 14, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville Scene." *Billboard*. March 20, 1982.

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property \_\_\_\_\_

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville Scene." *Billboard*. May 8, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville Scene." *Billboard*. June 19, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville Scene: Annette Funiceilo Joins a New 'Club.'" *Billboard*. February 11, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "New Showcase in Nashville: Boardwalk Café Booking Name Acts." June 8, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Tubb Tribute Successful." *Billboard*. March 3, 1979.
- Kirsch, Bob. "Nashville Clubs A Breeding Ground for Local Names." *Billboard*. September 20, 1975.
- Kozak, Romn. "Country Talent Linking Up with Rockers on Bookings." *Billboard*, September 23, 1978.
- "Labels Trek South for Fest." *Billboard*. February 6, 1988.
- Magee, Gayle. "Songwriting, Advertising, and Mythmaking in the New Hollywood: The Case of Nashville." *Music and the Moving Image* 5 (Fall 2012): 28-45.
- Martin, Steve. *Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.
- McCall, Michael. "Labels Discover New Music's Last Untapped Frontier – Nashville!" *Billboard*. September 10, 1998.
- Millard, Bob. "Nashville Rock Spots Heat up the Beat for Young Crowd." *Billboard*. September 10, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Tin Pan Valley." *Variety*. December 2, 1987.
- Moore, Tracy. "Hot Bands, Big Deals, a Buzzing Music Scene." *Nashville Scene*. August 10, 2006. Accessed November 16, 2021. [https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/hot-bands-big-deals-a-buzzing-music-scene-nashvilles-80s-rock-scene-had-it-all/article\\_82b25deb-9626-582f-b8fe-cd96baff0db0.html](https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/hot-bands-big-deals-a-buzzing-music-scene-nashvilles-80s-rock-scene-had-it-all/article_82b25deb-9626-582f-b8fe-cd96baff0db0.html).
- Murray, Noel. "In through the Out Door." *Nashville Scene*. December 5, 2002. Accessed November 19, 2021. [https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/in-through-the-out-door/article\\_5643f1ef-2d34-5f6d-9ecf-81e0fded716c.html](https://www.nashvillescene.com/news/in-through-the-out-door/article_5643f1ef-2d34-5f6d-9ecf-81e0fded716c.html).
- "Nash. Music Spot in New MGT. Switch." *Variety*. July 12, 1978.
- "Nashville Club Goes at \$22,500." *Billboard*. September 25, 1976.
- "Nashville Exit/In Goes on the Block." *Billboard*. July 17, 1976.
- Nelson, Pat. "Nashville Scene." *Billboard*. July 15, 1978.
- "New Nashville Ticket Agency." *Billboard*. January 28, 1984.

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

Oermann, Robert K. "Oingo Boingo's Music Bounces Like Its Name." *Tennessean* (Nashville). October 30, 1983.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Voodoo' Not Just a Piece of the Rock." *Tennessean* (Nashville). May 1, 1983.

"Rambo, Riley Headline Gospel Music Evening." *Tennessean* (Nashville). February 25, 1979.

Roblin, Andrew. "Nashville Capitol Parleys." *Billboard*. July 12, 1986.

Stuart, Jan. *Nashville Chronicles: The Making of Robert Altman's Masterpiece*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

"Sunday Showcase." *Tennessean* (Nashville). December 14, 1975.

"Talent: Exit/In Open." *Billboard*. March 13, 1982.

Tate, Matt. "Nashville Music Venues." *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* online edition, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/nashville-music-venues/>. March 1, 2018. Accessed July 29, 2022.

"The 100 Greatest American Films." *bbc.com*. July 20, 2015. Accessed November 18, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150720-the-100-greatest-american-films>.

"Today on Radio." *Tennessean* (Nashville). June 20, 1978.

"Today on Radio." *Tennessean* (Nashville). July 23, 1978.

Vinicur, Dale. "Bobby Bare." Artist Bio. Country Music Hall of Fame website. 2013. Accessed November 17, 2021. <https://countrymusichalloffame.org/artist/bobby-bare/>.

Waddell, Ray. "The Legend of Billy the Kid." *Billboard*. May 9, 2009.

Williams, Jean. "N.Y., L.A., Nashville Showcase Clubs Provide Outlets for New, Untested Acts." *Billboard*. May 27, 1978.

Wilson, Peter. "The Other Nashville Music." *Versus* [Vanderbilt University student magazine]. Fall 1983.

Wood, Gerry. "Nashville Scene: Canada's k.d. lang Gains Acceptance." *Billboard*. September 26, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Nashville's Exit/In Now Profitable." May 15, 1976.

Zibart, Evie. "Exit/In: Second Coming." *Tennessean* (Nashville). November 7, 1976.

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
 County and State

Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)	X	State Historic Preservation Office
<input type="checkbox"/>	previously listed in the National Register		Other State agency
<input type="checkbox"/>	previously determined eligible by the National Register		Federal agency
<input type="checkbox"/>	designated a National Historic Landmark		Local government
<input type="checkbox"/>	recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #		University
<input type="checkbox"/>	recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #		Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #	Name of repository:	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DV-24351			

Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State

---

**10. Geographical Data**

---

**Acreage of Property** Less than 1 acre **USGS Quadrangle** Nashville West 308-NE

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1. NW corner:	Latitude: 36.151535	Longitude: -86.804594
2. NE corner:	Latitude: 36.151604	Longitude: -86.804448
3. SE corner:	Latitude: 36.151345	Longitude: -86.804239
4. S corner:	Latitude: 36.151266	Longitude: -86.804332
5. SW corner:	Latitude: 36.151258	Longitude: -86.804377

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The National Register boundaries of the Exit/In encompass the building and the venue's c.1975 marquee sign located on the sidewalk near the southwest corner of the building. The north boundary line corresponds with the north elevation of the building. The east boundary line is created by the building seam between the Exit/In building at 2208 Elliston Place, and the adjacent building to the east at 2206. The southern boundary lines run diagonally southward before meeting to include the post that raises the venue's marquee sign above the sidewalk. From the building's southeast corner, the southeast boundary line runs approximately forty-two feet in a southwest direction, meeting the southwest boundary line at an angle just south of the sign post. From the building's southwest corner, the southwest boundary line runs approximately fifteen feet where it meets the southeast boundary line. The west boundary line corresponds with the west elevation of the building. These boundaries are depicted on the enclosed aerial boundary map.

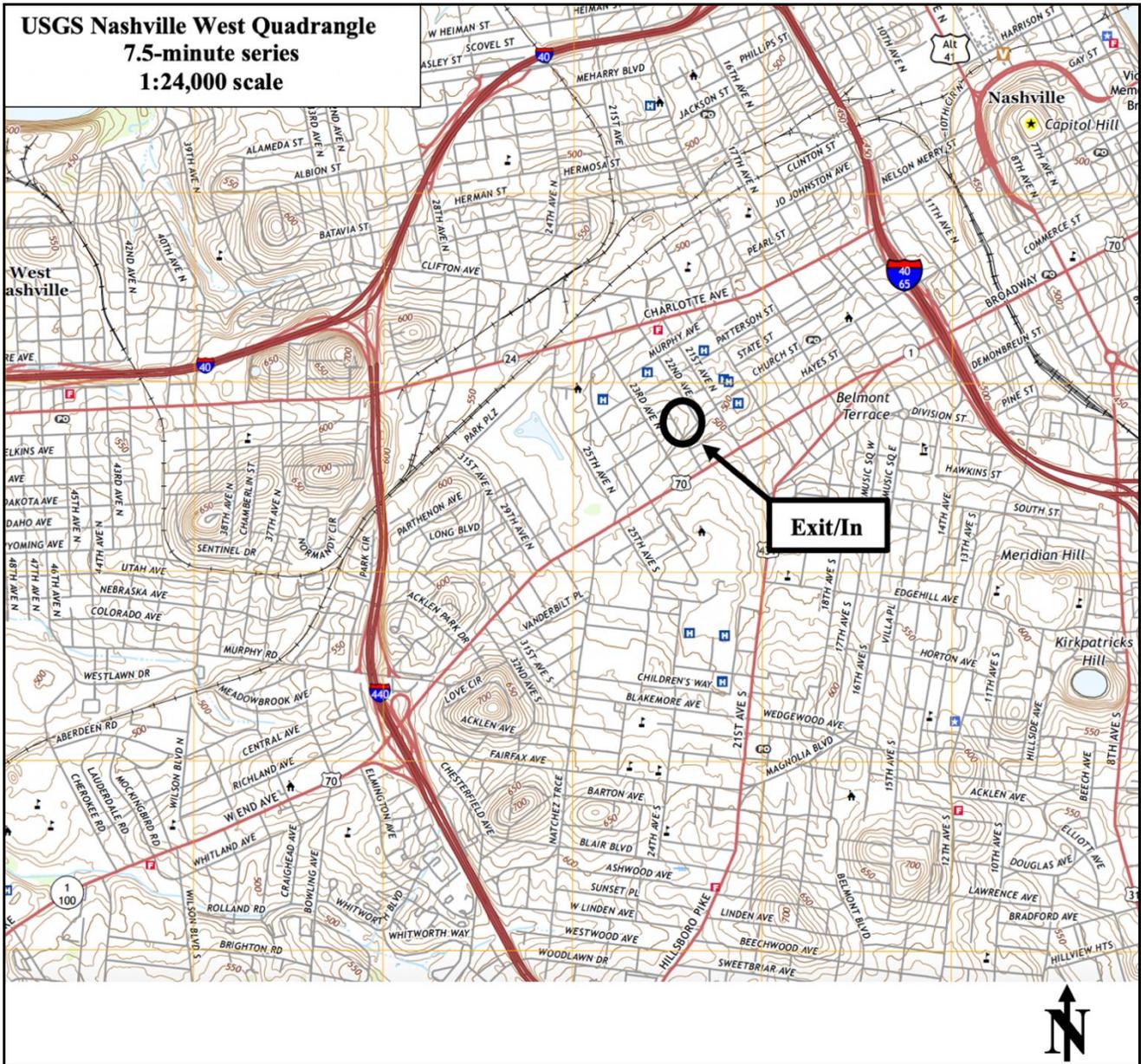
**Boundary Justification**

The boundary of the nominated property encompasses the resources historically associated with the property's established period of significance.

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

**USGS Topographic Map**



Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property \_\_\_\_\_

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State \_\_\_\_\_

**Boundary Map**



Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property \_\_\_\_\_

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

---

---

Name Carroll Van West and Savannah Grandey Knies

Organization Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University

Street & Number 1301 E. Main Street, Box 80 Date November 16, 2021

City or Town Murfreesboro Telephone 615-494-8938

E-mail Savannah.Grandey@mtsu.edu State TN Zip Code 37129

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Photographs** (refer to Tennessee Historical Commission National Register *Photo Policy* for submittal of digital images and prints)
- **Additional items:** (additional supporting documentation including historic photographs, historic maps, etc. should be included on a Continuation Sheet following the photographic log and sketch maps)

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Exit/In  
City or Vicinity: Nashville  
County: Davidson State: TN  
Photographer: Carroll Van West  
Date Photographed: April 26, 2021; July 30, 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 18. Main Façade, Photographer facing northwest.
- 2 of 18. Southwest Oblique. Photographer facing northeast.
- 3 of 18. West elevation. Photographer facing north.
- 4 of 18. West elevation. Photographer facing southeast.
- 5 of 18. West elevation of concrete block room connecting main building to former outbuilding/rear storage section of building. Photographer facing northeast.
- 6 of 18. North elevation of rear storage section of building. Photographer facing east.
- 7 of 18. East elevation of Exit/In, with north elevation of abutting building in foreground. Photographer facing south.
- 8 of 18. Interior. View of stage. Photographer facing northwest.
- 9 of 18. Interior. View of bar and restrooms. Photographer facing northwest.
- 10 of 18. Interior. Bar. Photographer facing southeast.
- 11 of 18. Interior. View of music room and balcony from stage. Photographer facing southeast.
- 12 of 18. Interior. View from beneath balcony. Photographer facing northwest.
- 13 of 18. Interior. Overview of balcony from balcony's southeast corner. Photographer facing west.
- 14 of 18. Interior. Stairs to backstage. Photographer facing northwest.
- 15 of 18. Interior. Backstage. Photographer facing south.
- 16 of 18. Interior. Backstage. Green room. Photographer facing southeast.
- 17 of 18. Interior. Backstage. Break room. Photographer facing south.

**DRAFT**

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

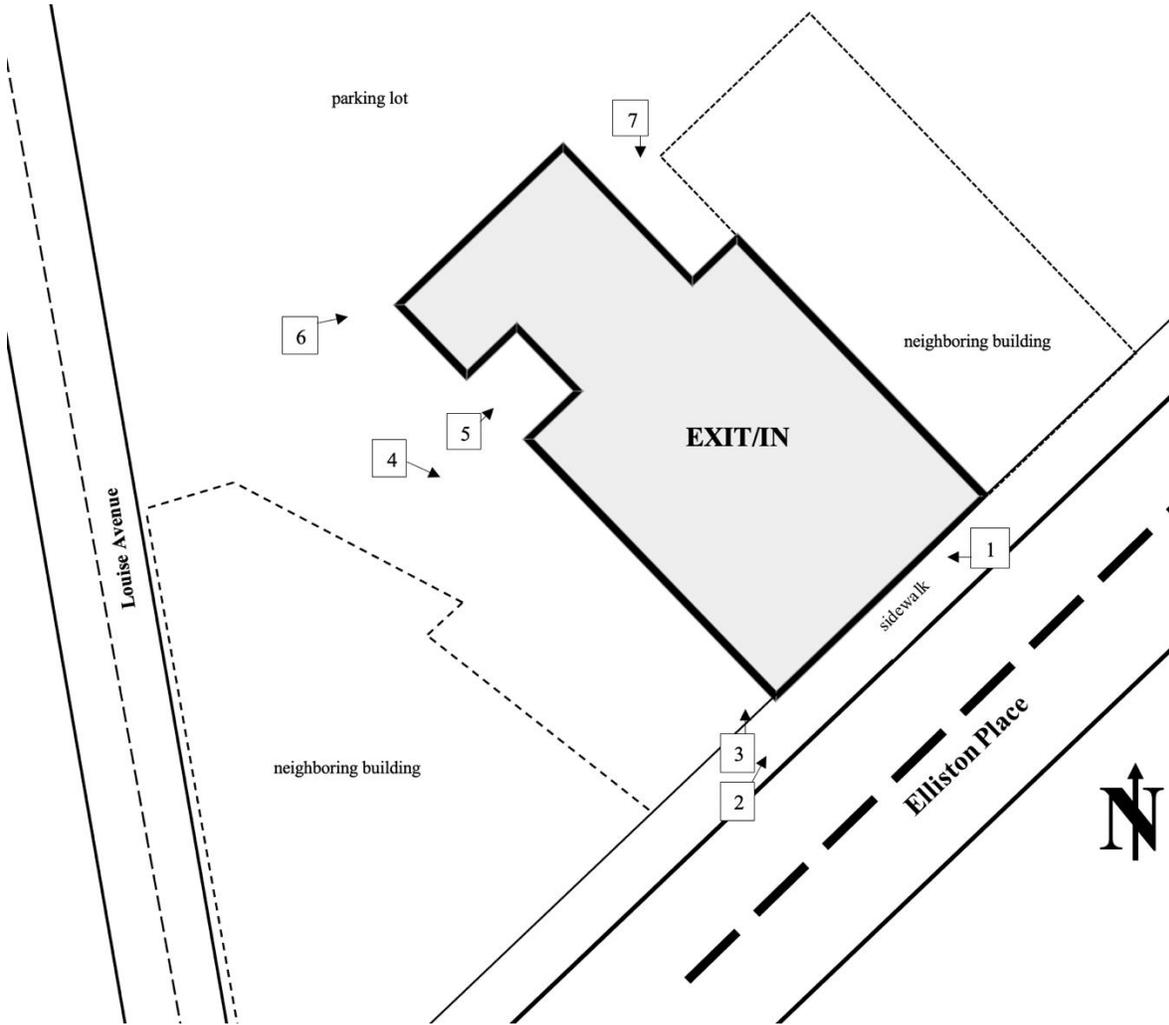
---

18 of 18 Interior. Backstage. Photographer facing north.

Exit/In  
Name of Property

Davidson, Tennessee  
County and State

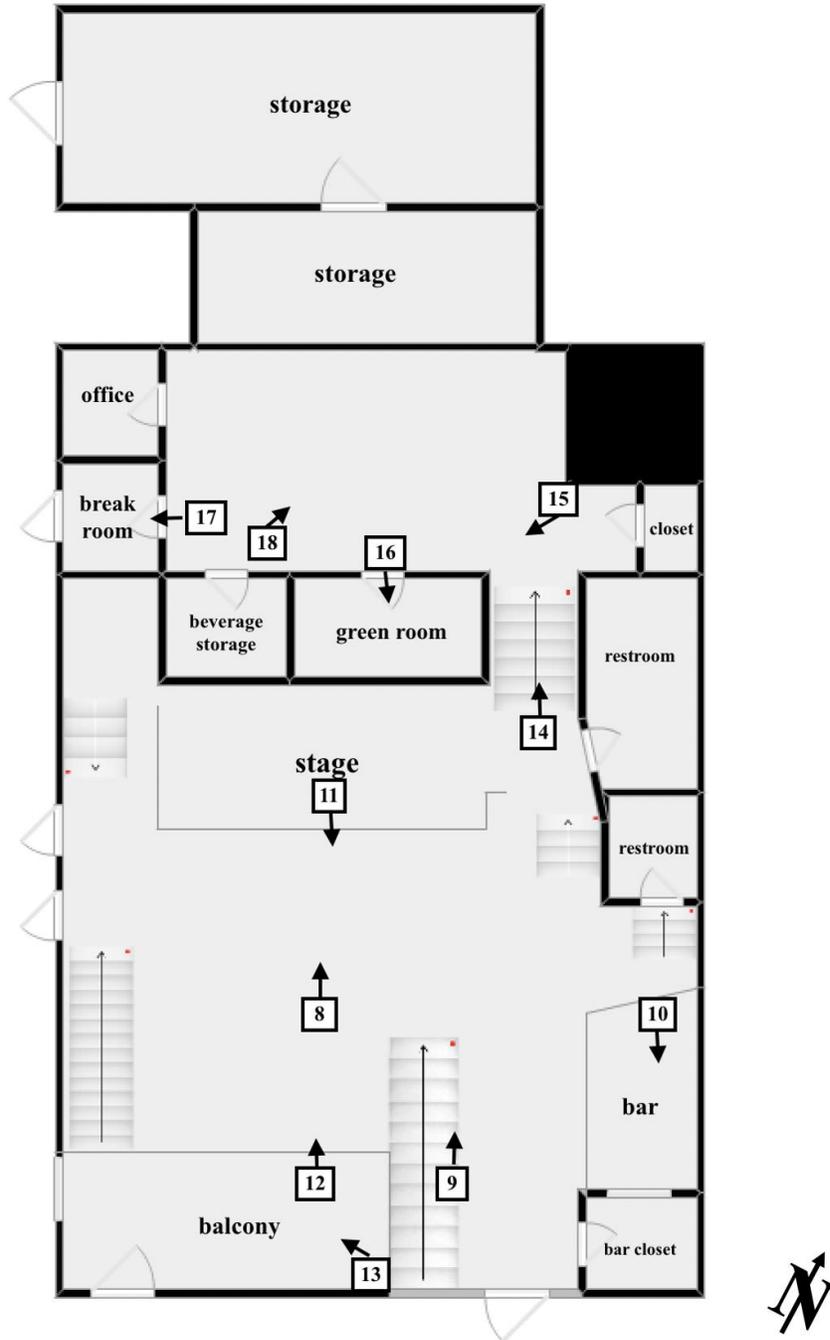
**Site Plan**  
**(keyed to photo log)**  
\*not to scale



Exit/In \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Property \_\_\_\_\_

Davidson, Tennessee \_\_\_\_\_  
County and State \_\_\_\_\_

**Floor Plan**  
**(keyed to photo log)**  
\*not to scale



# DRAFT

---

**Property Owner:**

(This information will not be submitted to the National Park Service, but will remain on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission)

---

Name	MVNTN Owner LLC, AJ Capital Partners (Attn: Pablo David)		
Street & Number	429 Chestnut Street	Telephone	773-219-9905
City or Town	Nashville	State/Zip	TN 37203

---



1 OF 18



2 OF 18



3 OF 18



4 OF 18



5 OF 18



6 OF 18



7 OF 18



8 OF 18



9 OF 18



10 OF 18



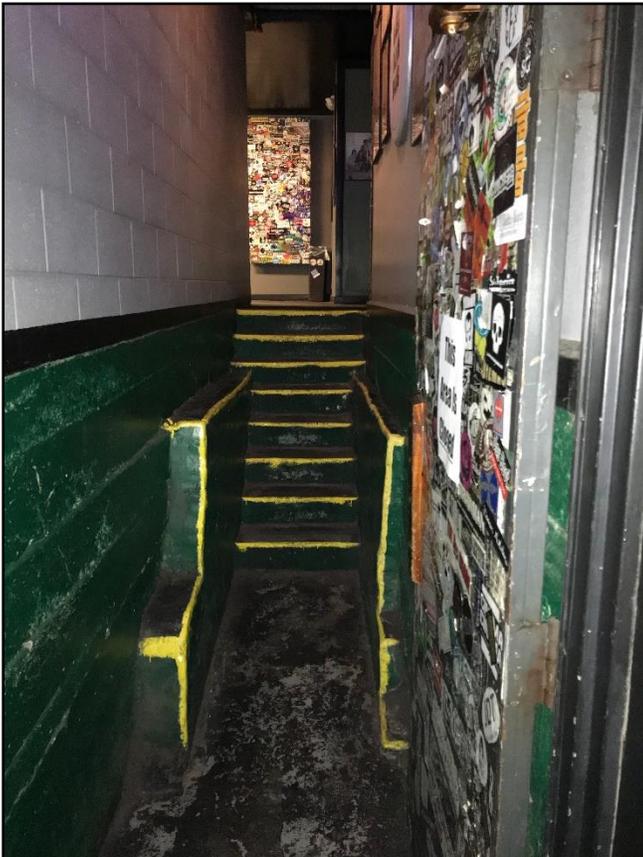
11 OF 18



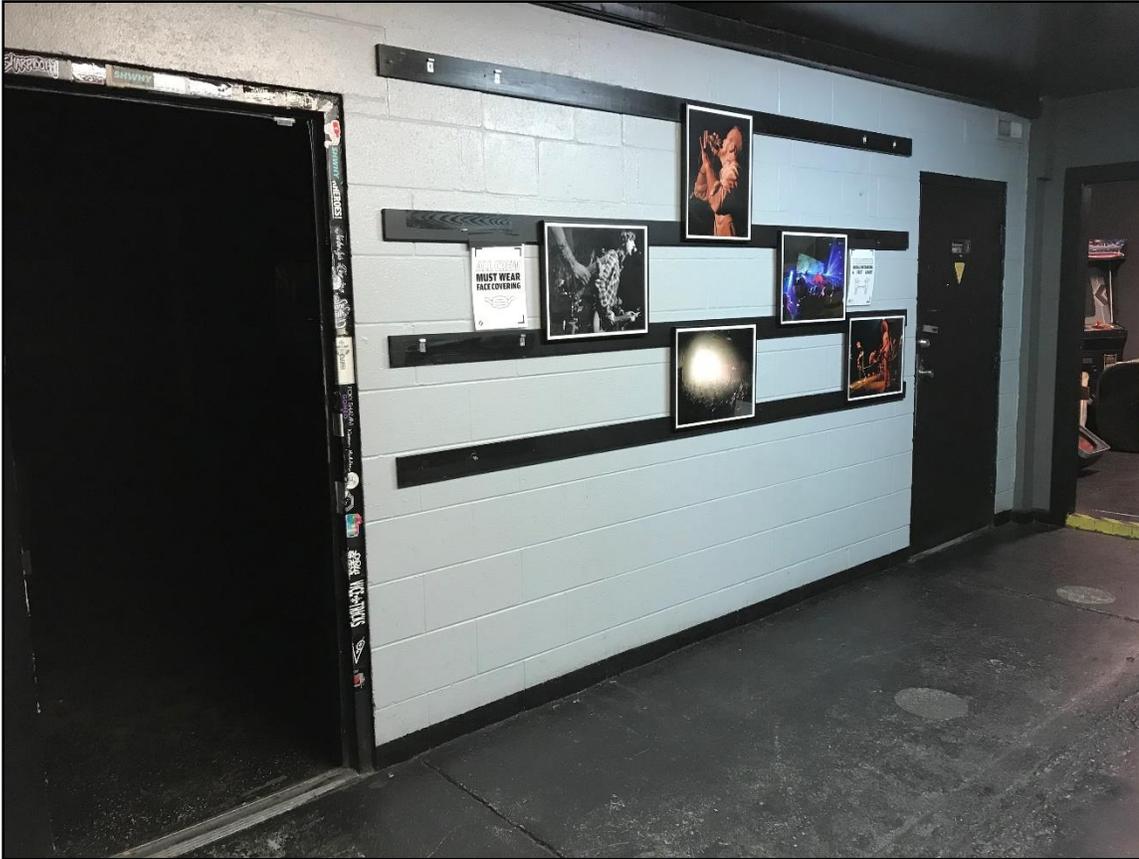
12 OF 18



13 OF 18



14 OF 18



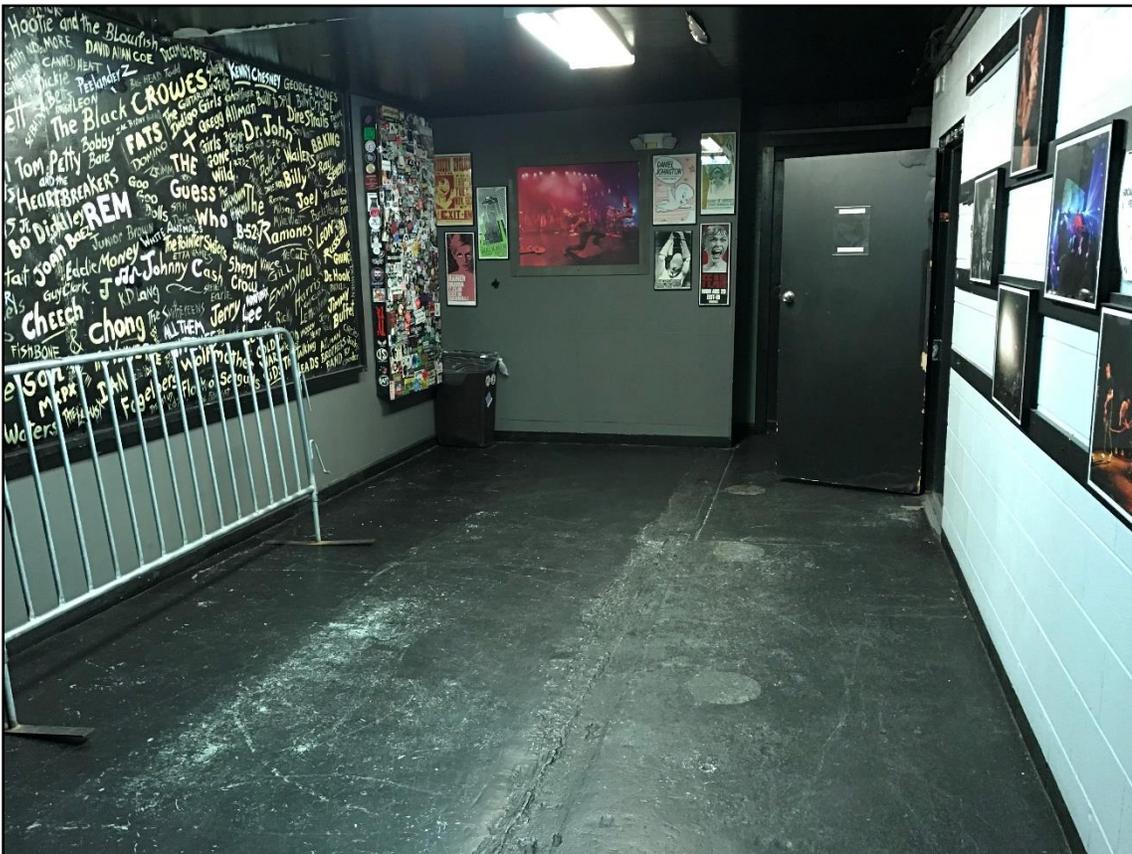
15 OF 18



16 OF 18



17 OF 18



18 OF 18