

The Social Infrastructure Supporting Citizens' Popular Music Performance in Hachinohe City, Aomori Prefecture, Japan

YAMADA Harumichi

Tokyo Keizai University

1-7-34 Minamicho, Kokubunji, Tokyo, 185-8502, Japan

E-mail: yamada@tku.ac.jp

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In Hachinohe City, Aomori Prefecture, the cultures of “folk jamborees” and “*narikiri*” (impersonation)—both of which originated as voluntary civic initiatives—appear to have been gradually institutionalized as municipally organized events (Yamada 2025). This article examines the social infrastructure and local resources that may have supported such developments, focusing on two dimensions: material apparatuses identifiable in physical form, and cultural resources that emerge through discourse.

Existing scholarship on the foundations and potential of regional music industries has tended to conceptualize live houses, rehearsal and recording studios, music shops, and broadcasting stations as components of the “cultural infrastructure of cities” and as sites that facilitate the circulation of information and knowledge. Even where a formalized industry has not materialized, the sustained practice of musical performance as amateur cultural activity appears to require a multiplicity of such “places.” Moreover, semi-public organizations—including municipal administrations, chambers of commerce, and junior chambers of commerce—often play important roles in sustaining these spaces.

In Hachinohe, live venues that support amateur activity generally seat fewer than 500 individuals, with many accommodating fewer than 50. Despite their small scale, such venues provide frequent opportunities for performance in everyday contexts. It may also be noted that the municipal government, within the framework of community development policy, has actively contributed to the provision of rehearsal and performance facilities and to the circulation of related information.

Smaller live houses, as well as bars and restaurants, often function as sites of interaction for enthusiasts, sometimes differentiated by generation or musical genre. These spaces are typically sustained by livelihood-oriented commercial operations. Beyond permanent venues, additional opportunities for performance arise in temporary contexts, including outdoor stages constructed for festivals, events, and other occasions.

Although the decline of physical music media has led to the disappearance of full-scale record stores, local instrument shops remain active. Their activities extend beyond retail to include the operation of music schools, support for school-based brass bands, and engagement in other educational and cultural enterprises.

Interviews with local practitioners point to several possible explanations for the vibrancy of amateur music-making in Hachinohe. These include the cultural atmosphere of a port town, historically associated with entertainment districts catering to fishermen; the presence of the U.S. military base in nearby Misawa, which once brought servicemen into the city; and the diffusion of brass band education in elementary and junior high schools. In addition, some interlocutors linked the city's musical practices to perceived distinctions between the temperaments of the Tsugaru and Nanbu regions within Aomori Prefecture, suggesting that a cultural orientation toward imitation and "impersonation" may be valued over originality.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the vitality of Hachinohe's amateur music culture is not attributable to a single institution but rather emerges from the interplay of physical venues, commercial and educational resources, municipal involvement, and historically embedded cultural discourses.