Tuning In: Key Players in the Music Scene at Brown
By: Emilia Ruzicka and Ivy Scott

[Title credits roll over footage of empty recording studio. “Canada Goose” by Kyle McCarthy (feat. Temma) plays. Faintly, two doors slam simultaneously. Ivy and Emilia both enter the frame from opposite sides, spinning charmingly on rolling swivel chairs. Chairs stop magically when both are center frame, co-hosts are smiling and slightly disoriented from the spinning, but otherwise perfectly coiffed.]

Emilia: Hello everybody and welcome back to a new episode of Tuning In: Key Players in the Rhode Island Music Scene. I’m your co-host Emilia Ruzicka--

Ivy: And I’m Ivy Scott. Today we’ll be venturing up a certain College Hill to bring you another special University Edition of Tuning In. So why don’t you guys join us as we take a closer look at some of the ‘key players’ (both laugh) in the music scene at Brown. [applause track plays]

[Cut to ground floor lobby of Brown’s Smith-Buonanno Hall, applause track replaced with real applause. Room is packed with students dancing and laughing. Cut to shot from side camera which is close-up on several members of Falling Walrus. Pan from drummer to trumpet to lead singer, all illuminated by the multicolored string lights that line the walls, before focusing on one particularly enthusiastic group of fans who are singing along cheerfully and waving their hands. Zoom in on one student waving a large cardboard cutout, it appears to be of the drummer. Cut back to main camera, which fades as band finishes their last song. Cut to field correspondent.]

Field Correspondent: Here we’ve got Kieran Pandey, drummer for the new band on campus, Falling Walrus. Hey, Kieran!

Kieran: [jogs into view, sweating and covered in glitter] Oh hey, what’s up!

FC: Kieran, that was a truly incredible concert you guys just played, honestly magnificent.

Kieran: Thanks so much, it means a lot.

FC: Just a couple quick questions-- firstly, why the name Falling Walrus?

Kieran: The story behind that is kind of strange and questionable. (laughing) Um, let me just start off saying that I’m happy with the band’s name, but uh, it kind of started in a weird place. So there’s a nature documentary by Netflix, “Our Planet” or something like that. The whole thing is about how climate change is affecting different animal populations, and there’s like a sequence
in the documentary about the walrus. And, of course, walrus rely on sea ice to like rest on and stuff. And because all the sea ice is melting earlier in the summer, this huge population of walrus are all forced to live on this little island that’s like the closest landmass by the Arctic. So there's like hundreds and thousands of walrus just packed onto this small piece of land.

So the whole thing is about how, because of overcrowding, these big like 5-ton walrus are forced to climb up these cliffs to escape the crowds. But they're not supposed to climb and they have really bad eyesight, like they have no depth perception. So these poor walrus jump off the cliff to get down to the water and it’s so sad, there are literally videos of walrus just like falling to their death. So that day, I guess, the band got together-- this was before we were really a band-- and I was just like [band member walks by in background, Kieran turns around and grabs him briefly], “Hey, you want to see something really fucked up?” [Band member, faintly: “Hell yeah!” Both laugh.] And I showed them this crazy video and they just couldn't believe it.

And then someone was like “Oh, we should call ourselves falling walrus!” [Hearing the name, fans begin cheering in background: “Falling Walrus! Eyyyyy!”] And I was like, “Wait, really? That’s not what I was expecting you to say after seeing this.” But they were like, “Yeah, it’s such a good name!” I was like “Well, okay...” And it kind of just started sticking 'cause it's like a funky name. So we kind of just refrained from saying why we're called Falling Walrus cause it's a little inappropriate... but now, our Instagram profile picture is actually a picture that we got of one of the walrus falling, but we put little wings on it, so it looks like he’s flying. My idea was going to be Flying Walrus, just to change it up, make it a little happier. But it stuck the way it is, and now the idea is definitely, once we start doing more gigs and stuff, to raise money to donate to some kind of animal protection program or environmental awareness program. Just cause, you know, we don't want that happening. We want to stop the walrus from falling. [Kieran and FC both laugh]

**FC:** Questionable and hilarious, what a combo! Well, name aside, you’ve certainly had a huge success tonight with all of those people movin’ and groovin’. It certainly seems like you guys try to put out danceable music, but for all the amateurs in the audience, tell us how exactly you’d describe your sound?

**Kieran:** Our roots are in funk, ‘cause primarily we’re a band that’s about playing live. We are all about trying to get people to get up on their feet and dance and have a good time and just like release some stress out of their hectic school lives. Um, so it's like funk, but funk fusion in the way that for one, we'll play any song that's gonna make people dance, people smile. And so a lot of songs that we enjoy just happen to be funk, but we also took “Don't Let Me Down” by the Beatles, which is like a pretty standard rock piece and then we funkified it.
**FC:** And how exactly do you funkify a song?

**Kieran:** Well there are lots of ways, by speeding up the tempo, and then what we found is that if you just change the drum beat, you can make the whole feeling of the song different. And so for example, when we were figuring out how we wanted to change up “Don't Let Me Down” by the Beatles and make it more danceable, that was the first thing we did. I basically had everyone play the song as written, and then I made the tempo a little bit faster. And then while they were playing the song, underneath it I just played around with different beats I knew just to see what sounded fluid, but also what sounded fun. From there, once I kinda got a new beat down that had, like, the correct character of the song that we were going for, from there we were able to expand to the other instruments, change up the vocals. Stuff like that happens afterwards, but, yeah, the drums have a really nice ability to give a song a different feel really fast, really easily.

**FC:** What an absolutely perfect how-to! A quick question though, you mentioned the “character” of a song-- could you tell us a little more about that?

**Kieran:** (pause) I dunno, it's um… it’s kind of like the character of a human being. Like you have your really fun and ecstatic and open friend, and you have that one friend who's a little reserved and it takes some time to listen to them to really get to know them. Like, you can have amazing conversations with them, but it takes time. And it's kind of the same thing with songs. You're going to have one song where you can just listen to it while you're multitasking, and it's just going to bring you some energy. And there's some songs you're gonna want to sit down to and listen to what the lyrics have to say.

So for example, with Don't Let Me Down, the actual song is kind of a slower tempo. It has a pretty classic rock beat, which basically sounds like this: “Boom, kah, boom, boom, kah.” That’s the base drum and the snare drum. And it's pretty relaxed, it's something that you could just sit down on the couch and listen to, and just talk with your friends and it's really chill. And I love the song on its own, but we didn't really want that character for the concert. We wanted a really energy filled song.

And so we were like, what's better to get people moving than a New Orleans style funk groove? Which is like… uh, how would I sing that, it's like: “Doom tch doom, kah! Doom tch doom, kah!” That groove, there's something about it that you really feel in your body. And so it immediately brought a different kind of character to the song, like you're filled with energy. It makes you feel good, and that’s what we’re going for.
**FC:** And you certainly succeeded! Alright Kieran Pandey, drummer of upcoming campus sensation Falling Walrus, final question: At the end of your first concert, how are you feeling?

**Kieran:** It’s probably one of my favorite nights of my freshman year at Brown, ‘cause there was so much pent up emotion leading up to the actual concert. We had been practicing since like the middle of first semester and it took us that long to actually get something together, we just put so much time and effort into it. And now it’s the middle of second semester, and we were really able to let loose and just see all our friends having so much fun and smiling. And it was just like, there’s nothing better than that.

It's so nice to go out to a place when it's late and you’re all like… like just imagine you're wandering around Brown late at night and you don't really know what to do. And then you show up to some random place and there's some live music and they start playing your song. And you know all the lyrics and everyone's singing it together… it can be the best feeling in the world. We want to provide that for people.

Music should create a safe space, and the band is definitely a safe space for me, we’re really like a family. Like the majority of the band is going to be living together next year. And we're not necessarily in each other's main friend groups, we have our own separate friends, but there's something really special about the community that the music forms. It's such a comforting place that we were all so immediately down to live with each other. I just have a really good feeling about the next year. Also, hopefully living in the same space together will breed a lot of creativity and new projects. That's the goal. That's the future right now.

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[Pan across main auditorium of Sayles Hall; chairs are set up in the center of the room and various instruments and music stands are standing on the stage. Audience members are bustling around the room before the performance begins.]

**FC:** We’re here at the culminating performance for the Brown University jazz combos. They’ve been honing their skills all semester for this performance, so we’re going to take a moment to chat with Brandon Stubbs, a trumpet player in one of the five combos. (pause) Tell us Brandon: what draws you to performing with a jazz combo?

**Brandon:** You know, I think the big appeal about jazz for me in general is the ability to improvise and make a voice for yourself in the tune. The fact that the tune is unique every time you play it. Even when you're playing the head of the tune, you can kind of noodle around with background lines and fill in here and there and take a lot of liberties and stuff, which I think is a really neat way to express your creativity and not just be playing notes on sheet music.
**FC:** Wow! What an incredible way to express yourself. Do you ever struggle to balance the unique sound of each member of the combo?

**Brandon:** I think one of the most challenging things is that everyone has their own tastes in jazz, and they can sometimes be on very different ends of the spectrum. Like, there's some people who just really love bebop. And people who are really into, like, contemporary new age jazz. I'm like completely on the opposite end of the spectrum, into the traditional stuff.

So when we all bring in tunes and we decide on the tunes, I think we all come in with an open mind, willing to try new stuff. But the challenge is stepping out of your comfort zone and trying to improvise, which is a very vulnerable thing to do: improvise in these styles that you're not very comfortable with.

**FC:** Sounds like an extremely collaborative process. We’re certainly excited to see the results of that hard work! How are you feeling about your joint efforts and ability to perform going into the showcase?

**Brandon:** I think that music, and especially jazz, is just inherently a social thing. You're improvising, you get energy that the other musicians are giving off and vice versa, and you're listening to cool musical ideas that other musicians are doing and building off of those.

It's very much a collaborative kind of thing that feels very rewarding. And even though you don't have to be like communicating verbally, it feels very social, and like you're making connections with people.

**FC:** And we’re very excited to participate in that energy as an audience! Good luck with the performance, Brandon!

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*[Cut to a grassy corner of Ruth Simmons quad. Temma Schaecter sits with her ukulele, warming up, while a small crowd begins to form behind her, spreading out t-shirts and picnic blankets.]*

**FC:** I’m here at Brown University’s Ruth Simmons Quadrangle for a quick chat on the meaning of music at Brown with the resident genre-defying singer-songwriter known simply as Temma.

**Temma:** Hello, lovely humans! Yeah, music at Brown, I guess it’s like… everything I do? Both outside of class as well as in some of my classes. And kind of how I escape the stress of academic work and the fast-paced-ness of college. I do acapella, a lot of theater-- you know, like
producing musicals, music directing, acting-- and I do my own songwriting, and then recently, I’ve been playing around with the idea of joining a hard rock band. And so each of those definitely takes up a very different part of my life, socially and emotionally. *(laughing)* A cappella is this lil family I have and it's just about sharing music that we all love together and being in the same, sort of relaxed, nonacademic space. Whereas theater-wise, it’s a lot more of a stressful, high-stakes thing, though also fun because the community is geared towards this really cool goal of creating the show. And then songwriting, I mostly do that by myself, so it’s less of a social community for me and more of an emotional experience when I sit down with my ukulele.

**FC:** As you’re getting ready to perform some of what I believe are your original songs this afternoon, can you talk a little bit about how you’ve seen your music evolve over time?

**Temma:** Yeah, it’s a good question ‘cause some of the songs that I’ll be performing are from when I first got to Brown or earlier, so it’s been fun finding a new sound in those songs that I didn’t have before. I was like discovering myself as a human freshman year, *(laughs)* so bringing in this somewhat more adult sound vocally, and in terms of expression, has been cool. And then in terms of the first song that I wrote at Brown, it was… *(laughing)* um, I'm not going to go into detail about it, but it was after an emotional night. I like word-vomited onto a page, basically as like a journal entry, and then whittled it down into a song. And since then, how I've grown is definitely the things that I write about. ‘Cause I feel like *that*, and before that, was truly only about love and crushes and like, boys I wanted but couldn’t get, and it was just very one-noted in that way. Even though I wrote them in different styles. Since then, I've obviously had a lot of different experiences, and found myself more as a human and not just as someone who wants a boyfriend. I've branched out and tried writing about different things. Platonic friendships, family, just other things. *[Temma opens her mouth to say more but is interrupted by the sound of cheering in the background. Over her shoulder, she waves to the small crowd.]*

**FC:** One final question before we release you to your adoring fans. As someone involved in so many aspects of music at Brown, what’s one thing you’d change about the campus music scene?

**Temma:** *(pause)* I feel like the songwriting community at Brown is very much underground. You only really make connections to the people in these bands if you like, have an “in” in the community. I’m a junior and I feel like until this year, I've never felt like I was able to break through, personally. ‘Cause I do my own stuff, and it's a lot about fans and collaboration and people that can play at parties and Findy. And I dunno, personally, I’ve found it a little exclusive. I think starting a band on campus is a very scary prospect for a lot of people. And a lot of people that could or might want to, don't do it because there's no platform to start. I think having open
rehearsals, or like open jams would be great. A space for people to take their instrument and just start playing if they want to, some kind of in-person community where people can meet each other and connect and see what genres they have in common and if their styles complement each other.

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[Cut to WBRU studio. FC sits next to mixer, obviously trying hard not to push the various buttons.]

**FC:** Broadcasting from a studio other than our own, I’m at WBRU with Ben Myers, COO of WBRU, and Zoe Boggs, co-head of the Editorial Board and former DJ. Thanks so much for joining me, Ben and Zoe. Could you start off by telling us what kind of music you broadcast?

**Ben:** We have two signals that we do. One is our alternative rock and indie signal. That is really geared towards kind of like punk rockers and people who had grown up with that in the 70s, 80s, 90s, and so on. It is pushed on the cutting edge, like we play a mix of national artists who are the well known ones, of course. and then also people who have just been kind of like not heard before. So regional bands—less of student bands—but definitely people in the New England area who wouldn't have had the chance to otherwise come out and have their moment in the limelight.

The other brand is WBRU 360, which is focused on hip hop and R&B and gospel soul. That was formed in like the 1980s, I believe, with the recognition that WBRU was focusing very heavily on kind of like a white male audience and that there wasn't a recognition of the types of music that black and brown folks were listening to. And there wasn't a space for minority voices on radio. So WBRU 360 started up in the 80s as that voice for Brown students to listen to music they resonated with and that wasn't so stuck in this niche genre.

**FC:** What an interesting evolution! How do you pick the music to play on each stream?

**Zoe:** So basically we have the computer program that generates like most of the whole day of music and they just follow certain songs and based on their category and have me play them. And then the person who's like doing the programming just goes in and kind of fills those last couple of little gaps the computer can’t generate.

I think the decision making process there is interesting 'cause it's not always like, “What do we like the best?” Or like what new niche thing we found, but “Would the people in the greater Providence area who listen to our station be interested in hearing this?”

**FC:** And what people do you have in mind when making those decisions?
Zoe: Our audience is like not even just a lot of college students, but it's also a lot of people from like 18 to 35 who are just like in the workforce. You know, they listen at work or driving home from work. So it's an interesting balance of like, what do we think is high quality. But then also what is relatively familiar enough that people would like to listen to the radio. So we've talked a lot about our sound and our tone and what's our little niche that we fall into in terms of all radio stations.

FC: So you’re thinking a lot about your audience when you pick the music. How does that trickle into the show itself?

Zoe: What you do is every couple of songs you just talk on air for like 30 seconds. Basically we introduce the next song and then talk about something cool about that song, why you liked that song, the news, just like sort of something you did. The whole “radio DJ on the air” gives a more human experience to listening to the stream.

I think what interests people is it sort of enriches the listening experience a little bit and then it makes it like a slightly social thing or slightly human thing. It's more personable. And I think if you're listening to a radio station where it's fairly curated, you know, it's not like a top 40 that just has the same 40 songs play over and over again. We try to curate the music and I think people in the area generally know it's a sort of thoughtful radio station. You're taking music that's not quite the mainstream pop music.

So I think people just like that nice touch of seeing who's behind their music. It's a little entertaining and fun to hear about that side. And people get to know the DJs cause we have DJ handles and some people really get to know what the DJ is doing—they can send a request and stuff like that. So yeah, I think it’s just kind of a little personalized vibe.

FC: That’s a really neat way to connect with an audience. Are there other ways that WBRU tries to engage with the community?

Ben: WBRU 360 has two programs in particular, one of which is called the Gentle Touch, which I believe airs on Sundays, and is an opportunity for the DJs to take live requests from an audience. People have been listening to it for 30 or 40 years at this point in time.

The DJs also read out letters that have been sent to and from a local detention facility in Cranston. It's a mix of this community engagement in terms of giving people who wouldn't have a voice: giving inmates a voice when they wouldn't have had one before. And also providing a
space—where this music has such a strong significance—for these listeners to request songs and to gain ownership over that type of music.

It's an opportunity for WBRU 360 to maintain those connections and those roots because that was just something that was deemed so utterly necessary to maintain this connection to the community, especially because so many of our DJs who do that show come from the community. So it's not just students who are doing this now, but it's people who have grown up in Providence their entire lives and who are doing it, too.

**FC:** So by bringing in outside voices, you’re in some ways merging the Brown community with the rest of the greater Providence area. How do you strike that balance?

**Ben:** On one of our morning shows-- it's actually called “The Morning Show”-- some of our community DJ's very heavily feature guests and people who live in the area and who know what's going on with the city. And so they're able to come and just talk. And of course, it's a mix of like joking and just kind of talking, but it's also like, “okay, these are people from Providence.”

I feel like in that aspect, Brown students are a little bit—I don't want to say removed—but Brown students are more engaged in supporting community voices, especially on the 360 programming, than they are in inserting their own voice over the people who are already there. I think we are fully there to provide the technology and to provide direction and an idea that these are voices and perspectives that Brown students might not have.

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[Cut back to main studio, Emilia and Ivy are swiveling in their swivel chairs to the beat of the background music, once again “Canada Goose.” They are, of course, in synch.]

**Emilia:** Well, there you have it. Ben and Zoe with WBRU, working to engage the Providence community through a shared love of music.

**Ivy:** Temma Schaecter, the singer-songwriter dabbling in performance groups cross-campus,

**Emilia:** Brandon Stubbs, a jazz aficionado with a passion for unusual collabs and quirky combos

**Ivy:** And Falling Walrus, the fresh new band eager to get people dancing with some funky rhythms, and make everyone feel at home on the Brown campus. Thanks so much to all of these lovely student artists, and to our wonderful audience, we’ll be back soon with a look at more “key players,” this time from Rhode Island’s underground music scene. So make sure you…
Both: Tune in to “Tuning In” and we’ll see you next week!