Creating and Using Argot at the Jayhawk Cafe: Communication, Ambience, and Identity

"Cherry pie, that was c-pie. Of course, if there was ice cream on it, it would be l-a," said Paul Sinclair. "And if it had two dips on it, which a lot of boys wanted, it was mode-mode. If you wanted two dips on there, it would be c-pie mode-mode."

For eighteen-and-a-half years Sinclair had owned the Jayhawk Cafe in Lawrence, Kansas. It was located just below the top of Mt. Oread, the site of the University of Kansas.

"What about a glass of ice?" I asked.
"Yeah, yeah. Bucket of hail. And bucket of hail in the air was a tall glass of ice."
"What if you wanted three glasses of ice?"
"If they were short glasses it'd be hail a crowd.
"What if they were tall?"
"It'd be hail a crowd in the air."
"What about a refill?"
"We'd call that riffle—shorten it down to riffle."

Having been a frequent customer at the Jayhawk Cafe much of the four years I was an undergraduate student at KU, I already know most of the terms. Also I had worked at the Jayhawk part time as a waiter. But I did not know the origins of some of the expressions or the rationale for their use.

"If you wanted five limeades . . . ?"
"That'd be squeeze a handful. And, uh, it could be to the right [i.e., the flavoring located to the right of the Coke dispenser]. A lot of them used cherry limeade, see, so if you had five limeades, two of them cherry, you'd call, Squeeze a handful, a pair to the right. That'd give you five limeades, two of them cherry. Squeeze a handful: that gives the bartender the designation of how many is his full order. Then if there's any deviations or additions to them, that comes later. You wouldn't want to say, Squeeze a crowd, and then, Squeeze a pair right. That's repeating yourself. So the first call would be Squeeze a handful. Then he knows that’s five limeades and you go from there—pair of them to the right."

"I see. Pretty complicated, isn't it?" I asked after we had discussed some other calls, such as Stretch a bridge in the air all through Georgia.

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“Actually, it’s complicated ‘til you put this sort of thing together and [then] it’s actually easier than trying to remember ‘four tall chocolate Cokes.’”

“Is that the reason you used these calls?”

“No, really, actually, no, the reason actually, of course was for the atmosphere—the college lingo, slang, or whatever you want to call it. But actually, as we went into it, over a period of years, all the boys readily agreed it made their ordering a lot easier to remember. Actually, it was a help, a big help.”

He said that he had never experienced such extensive use of argot as found at the Jayhawk. “It was unique.”

“How would you say, Two strawberry sundaes?”

“Drop a pair a patch,” said Sinclair, laughing. “It’s all coming back to me. Ain’t hardly thought about it for three years.”

He had sold the Jayhawk Cafe in early 1964, partly for health reasons. A year later, however, he bought a small cafe, The Call, on the other side of campus. I was interviewing him the evening of 16 June 1966 at the American Legion Club in Lawrence, where he was tending bar. It was early; only two people came in during the hour-long interview, one to buy a drink and the other to use the telephone.

“What did you say was the origin of the term 86?”

“Well, that of course didn’t originate at the Jayhawk but was taken over from the railroads years ago. When they were first getting their start, they had to send all their messages by code—wireless tap—and they’d shorten it to anything to save time. Say, somebody wanted five boxcars at Baltimore tomorrow morning at eight o’clock. If there’s no boxcars there or you couldn’t complete the order, then to make an easy explanation you’d tap out 86. That’s ‘out.’ And, uh, the help [a waiter or bartender at the Jayhawk Cafe], if he was out of anything, instead of stopping and telling somebody, ‘Oh, I’m sorry, we’re out of that,’ your ‘echo’ [reply] would be 86.”

Many of the terms already existed at the Jayhawk Cafe when Sinclair worked there for three-and-a-half years as a college student. After buying the cafe in 1946, and continuing the custom of employing students, he left it to employees to use and originate other terms.

Virtually all of the clientele in the early 1960s, and probably before, were students at the university. Customers used the argot almost as much as the employees did. Evenings were raucous. Through the din, only the argot could be understood clearly—“hood a High a handful” or “burn a crowd a van” cutting through the shouting of football scores, the laughter, the arguing over some political or philosophical issue.

Perhaps this is another reason the argot was perpetuated. It actually facilitated communication through the uniqueness of the terms and the structure in which they were ordered. But the existence and use of the argot also corresponded—and contributed—to the ambience of the Jayhawk Cafe. And it defined the cafe, the business establishment, the organization—and even became part of the identity of many of the customers and employees as well as the owner.

When I talked with Sinclair on that June evening in 1966, he sometimes waxed nostalgic about the Jayhawk Cafe that had been so much a part of his life, first as student-waiter and then as owner. He seemed to regret having sold the cafe. That
Well, actually, not everybody likes to feel that their—their place in the university is to do a little, help the students, but I still contend that... I don't believe you'll ever find another place in the world like it, actually, really. Cause I've talked to kids that's been to many many other universities... We've always went on the assumption of trying to make it as, as personal contact as you could to the students. Make 'em feel at home because they are away from home. If they've got some place where they can feel at home, I personally feel I've done something besides make money.

I wrote the article below in 1966 while in my second year as a graduate student in folklore at Indiana University. It appeared in American Speech (1967a). Although I had published two short pieces previously, this was my first analytical article. A few years later, Gerald E. Warshaver (1971) noted that my article, like others he examined, had a lexical focus: "However, more important than this linguistic aspect is the fact that it provides us with a context by means of which the phenomenon of dialect vocabulary can be studied, not atomistically as a series of isolated linguistic fragments, but as part of a total work situation." He continues: "Even though Jones was primarily interested in a long attachment to a single place, he could not help but collect other genres of occupational folklore as well as valuable data regarding the sociology and psychology of this type of occupation." Warshaver based his remarks on the published article but also on the interview transcript and introductory and concluding observations which were housed in the archive at IU.

In the last page of my notes I had written, "When asked why he did not continue the calls in his restaurant, The Call [already named that when he bought it], Sinclair said that they belonged to the Jayhawk and to his memory of eighteen-and-a-half years, and that's the way he wanted to remember it." I added that "the Jayhawk changed hands several times after Sinclair sold it [I counted five owners in two years, each of whom altered the decor and tried to generate a different ambience], but apparently none of the new owners has continued the calls."

I went on to suggest several factors that might account for this extinction of the argot. "First, the charismatic personality of Paul 'Buffie' Sinclair is gone. The subsequent owners, at least the ones I have met, have no outstanding personality traits and apparently no interest in creating a 'college atmosphere'. Secondly, under the management of the first two owners there were no student waiters; as Sinclair indicated in an earlier interview, the older people [residents of Lawrence who sometimes worked the kitchen] would have little or nothing to do with the calls. Third, to some extent, at least, the clientele changed right after Sinclair sold the Jayhawk." Few students frequented the cafe; most of the customers were local residents, a group who never seemed in evidence when Sinclair owned the Jayhawk. "Hence, the people who originated and continued the calls—the students—were no longer part of the clientele." That the argot was not prevalent at the business that Sinclair bought two years later may be in part because "there are no student waiters. Also, it is a restaurant rather than a tavern or combination of the two. As a result, the atmosphere is completely different from the Jayhawk."
The title of the article as it appears in American Speech is "Soda-Fountain, Restaurant, and Tavern Calls." On rereading it and the tape transcript and my notes, I realize that the essay concerns more specifically creating and using argot at the Jayhawk Cafe. The argot—or "calls"—pervaded the speech of student employees and customers as well as originated and persisted because of their value in communicating orders, generating a particular ambience, and establishing an identity for people, a business enterprise, an organization, and a place. Hence, I have retitled the article for this book.

The traditional calls reported in this article are now moribund, but once they were part and parcel of the Jayhawk Cafe in Lawrence, Kansas, an eating establishment that served its college clientele not only food but also soda-fountain drinks and beer. By selecting for the principal informant Paul Sinclair, who worked at the Hawk as a waiter during his student days at the University of Kansas before the Second World War and owned the cafe from 1946 until 1964, it is possible to establish the approximate date when each item was introduced, to indicate the structure of calls, and to discuss the origin and process of creating some of the expressions.

A typology of calls would embody seven different categories of terms: 1) food, such as bowl of red (chili), c-pie (cherry pie), or filet (fudge cake); 2) beer, such as Blue (Pabst) or High (Miller); 3) soda-fountain orders, like burn (a malted milk shake), drop (a sundae), jerk (an ice-cream soda), or suds (root beer); 4) the number of identical items desired in each order, as in a crowd (three) or a handful (five); 5) the relative sizes of beverages, such as bullet (a one-quart bottle), hock (a 16-ounce can), hood (a 12-ounce bottle), or in the air (a 10-ounce tumbler); 6) special instructions or particular flavorings, like hold the hail (put no ice in the fountain drink) or patch (strawberry ice cream); and 7) a miscellaneous group comprising such items as echo (repeat the order), eighty-one (a customer desires service), eighty-six (we don't have the item ordered), and riffle (refill the order).

The structure of a call consists first of the basic item of food, beer, or soda-fountain order, then of the modifications of number and size, and last of the special instructions. For example, an order for three tall (10-ounce) glasses of Dr. Pepper, two of which have a cherry flavoring added, would be M.D.'s a crowd, in the air, a pair to the right. Considerations of brevity and clarity determine the way in which separate items are united into a complete call; thus, a small glass of Coca-Cola is shoot one and lemon flavor is to the left, but the actual call is shoot a left rather than shoot one to the left. In addition, unless otherwise indicated, it is always assumed that shakes and malts (malted milks) are chocolate flavored, Cokes are plain, coffee is with cream, and all orders of beer refer to Budweiser.
Another aspect of traditional calls that should be treated is their genesis. Most of the items are the result of a kind of wordplay based on association, such as *patch* for strawberry ice cream or *echo* to indicate that the order should be repeated. Almost as numerous are expressions that are descriptive of some physical characteristics of the food or drink or its container, as in *white one* (milk) or *bucket of mud* (a dish of chocolate ice cream). The location at the fountain accounts for the origin of *to the right* and *to the left*, that is, on either side of the Coke dispenser. The method of preparation gives rise to *shake, drop,* and *squeeze one* (a limeade); according to Sinclair *jerk* belongs in this group also, as it probably derives from observing the operator jerk the soda-fountain lever forward to make the carbonated water fizz for a soda. Abbreviations of words and phrases, such as *van* (vanilla) or *c-pie l-a* (*cherry pie à la mode*), account for other calls. A few terms are derivatives of longer brand names, such as *Blue,* which is a contraction for Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer. Finally, there are contractions or blend words like *riffle* and *filet.*

In specific instances it is possible to demonstrate the actual method of creating calls, including the process of selecting from various alternatives to comply with the basic pattern or other criteria, and the role of waiters, customers, and the owner in the entire process. In the first place, Sinclair attributes to the imagination of student waiters most of the calls that were introduced; the origin of *one of the best* (a bottle of Coca-Cola), dating from the time when Sinclair was a waiter at the Hawk, will serve as an example. About 1937, a football player nicknamed *Lobo* was working at the fountain. He was seldom consistent about making a Coke conform to the formula of an ounce of syrup in a 6-ounce glass: “He’d have about 4 ounces of syrup or he’d have about an ounce of syrup. So in a joking manner someone told him the best Coke he could make is a bottled Coke. So from then on, why, a bottled Coke was ‘one of the best.’” Under Sinclair’s management, too, waiters were the major source of the expressions: “I kinda left it up to them because they had to work with it. If we’d get a new item in, why that was the first thing we’d do—immediately try to determine some kind of a catcall for it that would fit in our pattern.”

But Sinclair also played a role in the creative process, first by permitting and encouraging the use of expressive language, and second by establishing injunctions against calls that might involve *double-entendres;* hence the use of *shoot a right* rather than *virgin Coke* (cherry Coke), and the fact that peach pie, unlike cherry or apple, did not have an expressive equivalent: “I think that being’s how you mention pie, that was one reason why we didn’t call peach pie *p-pie.*” The same prohibition operated in creating the terms for cold and hot tea. A cup of hot cocoa was called *hot cup,* “so we couldn’t figure out what else to call hot tea. You wouldn’t wanna say *hot bag.* So the nearest
we could come to it was calling it spot, so we designated it cold spot and hot spot.” No doubt the British expression a spot of tea was a contributing factor also.

The customers, too, exerted an influence on the development of certain calls. First, the code was intended for use by the waiters, but any customers acclimatized to the cafe’s environment quickly adopted the calls, thus helping to perpetuate them. The use of some calls by the clientele, however, created a dichotomy between reality and what the owner (Sinclair) considered the ideal, which in turn suggests the way in which customers may attempt to refine or clarify certain expressions. According to Sinclair, the term eighty-one means ‘a glass of water’, and by extension it grew to include the customer himself. The owner meant it to be used among waiters to indicate that a customer in a certain area of the cafe had not been waited on, as in Eighty-one in the first section! Although Sinclair discouraged it, customers themselves shouted eighty-one! thus altering the original term to mean ‘Service, please.’ The expression then had three possible meanings. Among the customers, at least, the term clear one (a glass of water) developed to reduce some of the confusion. Although this term was rejected by Sinclair, who preferred the more widely used eighty-one, it is conceivable that had the calls continued at the Jayhawk, the customers might have successfully effected a complete change.

Why were these calls used at the Jayhawk Cafe for perhaps 30 years or more, and why were additions made to the code? Sinclair gives his own twofold reason for using the calls: "The reason, actually, of course, was for the atmosphere—the college lingo, slang, or whatever you wanna call it. But actually, as we went into it, over a period of years, all the boys readily agreed it made their ordering a lot easier to remember. Actually, it was a help, a big help." The clarity, brevity, and distinctiveness of each call, then, facilitated ordering, while the exclusive language—not shared by other cafes or taverns in Lawrence—provided the habitués with a sense of identity and group solidarity, at the same time that it established the uniqueness of the Jayhawk Cafe. In Sinclair’s words, “I don’t believe you’ll ever find another place in the world like it.”

Yet, when Sinclair sold the Jayhawk in 1964, these calls immediately died. Probably the moribund state of the calls can be attributed to a destruction of the interwoven relationship between the cafe, the owner, the waiters, and the customers. Drastic changes in décor, the absence of student waiters, and a different clientele may be partially responsible for the death of the calls. Certainly, when Sinclair left, the cafe lost the person who helped perpetuate this expressive language. Nor has it been transferred to another cafe which Sinclair bought in 1965. As he explained, the Jayhawk and its calls were one, and—as part of the past—they are to be remembered together. In addition,
there are no student waiters at the cafe to keep the terms alive, nor are most of the customers the active tradition-bearers who frequented the Jayhawk.

In compiling the glossary that follows, I have indicated the approximate date on which each term was introduced at the Jayhawk, given the circumstances surrounding the creation of a few calls, suggested their probable genesis, and supplied examples of usage when desirable. I used five sources in annotating the collection: the AT$S$; the DAS; the DSUE; H. L. Mencken, The American Language, Supplement II (1948—referred to hereafter as AL); and John Lancaster Riordan, “Soda Fountain Lingo,” California Folklore Quarterly, (1945)—referred to hereafter as CFQ.

**ALL THE WAY,** adv. pbr. (1940) Used when ordering fudge cake with chocolate ice cream. Compare this call with one in all the way “a chocolate soda with chocolate ice cream” in the AT$S$, 822.7.

**A-PIE,** n. (1940) Apple pie.

**BLUE,** n. (1945) Abbreviation for “Pabst Blue Ribbon beer”: Blue in the armor is one can of Pabst.

**BOWL OF RED,** n. pbr. (1939) A bowl of chili.

**A BRIDGE,** adj pbr. (before 1946) Four. Cf. CFQ, 53, 54; a bridge party.

**BUCKET (OF MUD, PATCH, etc.),** n. pbr. (1939) One large scoop of (chocolate, strawberry, etc.) ice cream.

**BUCKET OF HAIL,** n. pbr. (1940) One small glass (6 ounces) of ice. A large glass (10 ounces) of ice is a bucket of hail in the air; however, three large glasses of ice are hail a crowd in the air.

**BULLET,** n. (1945) A one-quart bottle of beer—Budweiser, unless otherwise designated, as in bullet of Blue. Term probably derives from the shape of the bottle.

**BURN,** n. (1940 or earlier) A malted milk shake—always chocolate, unless otherwise specified, as in burn a crowd of van ‘three vanilla malts’. Both the DAS and the AT$S$, 823.1 contain the expression burn one, but do not indicate the flavor. Cf. shake one and burn it in CFQ, 56.

**CHOC PIE,** n. pbr. (1940) Chocolate pie.

**CLEAR ONE,** n. pbr. One glass of water. Used by some customers and waiters, but the owner preferred EIGHTY-ONE.

**COKE PIE,** n. pbr. (1940) Coconut pie.

**COLD SPOT,** n. pbr. (after 1946) One glass of iced tea. Probably derives ultimately from a spot of tea. Call created during informant’s ownership and chosen in preference to cold [or hot] bag because of the latter’s sexual connotation. See also HOT SPOT.

**A CROWD,** adj pbr. (before 1946) (CFQ, 53, 54) Three. Derives from the saying, “Two’s company and three’s a crowd.”

**C-PIE,** n. pbr. (1940) Cherry pie.

**DROP,** n. (before 1940) A sundae. Term may come from the method of preparation (i.e., dropping scoops of ice cream into a dish).

**ECHO,** n. (1939) (AT$S$, 817.1; DAS; AL, 752) Repeat the order. Also used in a department store in Bloomington, Indiana, when a sales clerk asks the office secretary to call the manager over the public address system.

**EIGHTY-ONE,** n. (1939 or earlier) (AT$S$, AL, 772; CFQ, 53, 54) One glass of water. Term may also be yelled by a customer to indicate that he wants service or by one waiter to another to indicate that a certain customer has not been served. See also CLEAR ONE.

**EIGHTY-SIX,** n. (1939) (AT$S$, 817.2, 823.2; DAS; CFQ, 53, 55) We don’t have the item ordered. In the DAS and the CFQ it is also given the alternative meaning of “a glass of water.” According to
the informant, the term was borrowed from railroad jargon, where it was used in telegraphy to indicate that a yard was unable to fill an order for a specified number of cars.

FILET, n. (1940) Fudge cake à la mode. Sample calls include filet one ALL THE WAY "fudge cake with a scoop of chocolate ice cream" and filet one MODE MODE "fudge cake with two scoops of vanilla ice cream."

GLAMOTTLE, n. (about 1948) A 13-ounce glass of Budweiser draught beer. Contraction of glass that holds more than a bottle. The informant explained: "Sticks in the back of my mind that was an advertising promotion by Budweiser. It was right about 1948. I won't say for sure on that, but it sticks in my mind 'cause I remember a sign, and we never had any signs painted."

HAIL, n. (1940) Ice. See also HOLD THE HAIL.

HANDFUL, adj. (before 1946) Five. The DAS gives its meaning as "as a five-year prison sentence," and the DSUE says that it comes from racing slang.

HANDFUL PLUS (ONE, A PAIR, A CROWD, etc.), adj. phr. (before 1946) Six, seven, eight, and so forth. Cf. CFQ, 56, where the expression is on six, and so forth.

HIGH, n. (about 1945) An abbreviation of Miller High Life beer, as in HOOD a High "one 12-ounce bottle of Miller beer."

HOCK, v. (1945) One 16-ounce can of beer—understood to be Budweiser, unless otherwise stated, as in hock a pair of ROCKY "two 16-ounce cans of Coors." The DSUE gives the meaning of old hock as "stale beer."

HOLD THE HAIL, v. phr. (1940) (ATS, 823.1; CFQ, 51, 55) To put no ice in the fountain drink. See also HAIL.

HOOD, v. (about 1945) One 12-ounce bottle of beer—Budweiser (e.g., hood one), unless stated differently, as in hood a pair of HIGH.

HOT CUP, n. phr. (before 1940) One cup of hot cocoa.

HOT SPOT, n. phr. (after 1946) One cup of hot tea. See also COLD SPOT.

IN THE AIR, prep. phr. (about 1940) A large glass (10 ounces) of milk or a fountain drink, with the exception of Coca-Cola, which is STRETCH ONE. See also WHITE ONE; WHITE ONE THROUGH GEORGIA.

IN THE ARMOR, prep. phr. (1945) A 12-ounce can of beer—Budweiser, unless otherwise indicated. One can of Budweiser is simply in the armor or one in the armor, while a can of Coors is ROCKY in the armor.

JERK, n. (1940 or earlier) An ice cream soda. An order for four chocolate sodas is jerk a bridge THROUGH GEORGIA. Term derives from the method of preparation (i.e., jerking the soda-fountain lever forward to make the carbonated water spray).

L-A, adj. (1945) A la Mode, as in C-pie l-a.

L-PIE, n. (1940) Lemon pie.

M.D., n. (1945) Dr. Pepper, as in M.D.'s a crowd in the air "three glasses of Dr. Pepper." A form of wordplay involving association of M.D. and doctor.

MODE MODE, adj. phr. (1945) Two scoops of vanilla ice cream on a piece of pie or cake.

MUD, n. (1939 or earlier) Chocolate ice cream, as in BUCKET OF MUD.

NATURAL, n. (1940) 7-Up. Derives from the combination of 5 and 2, a natural in the game of craps.

O.J., n. (1948) (ATS, 816.59; DAS; CFQ, 55) One small glass of orange juice. O.J., a pair in the air, bold the bail means "two large glasses of orange juice without ice."

ONE, adj. (1940 or earlier) (CFQ, 55) One, as in jerk one.

ONE OF THE BEST, n. phr. (1937) A bottle of Coca-Cola. A football player working as the fountain operator was unable to make a good fountain Coke. Someone told him that the best Coke he could make was a bottled Coke; hence, a bottled Coke was referred to as one of the best.
ON WHEELS, prep. pbr. (after 1946) (CFQ, 53, 56) An order to be taken out. Informant states that the term became popular after the cafe initiated a delivery service to the residence halls of the University of Kansas; although the service terminated after a brief period, the expression continued.

A PAIR, adj. pbr. (1937 or earlier) (DAS; CFQ, 53, 56) Two.

PATCH, n. (1940) Strawberry ice cream.

POUR BLACK, n. pbr. (1937 or earlier) One cup of black coffee.

POUR ONE, n. pbr. (1937 or earlier) One cup of coffee with cream. Cf. ATS, 817.2 draw one black.

RIFFLE, v. (1939) Refill the order, as in riffle black, riffle POUR ONE, or simply riffle “refill a beer glass with draught beer.”

ROCKY, n. (1945) Coors beer (“Brewed from pure Rocky Mountain spring water”).

SHAKE, n. (1937 or earlier) (ATS, 823.1) A milk shake—chocolate flavored, unless otherwise designated; shake a crowd of patch “three strawberry shakes.”

SHOT, n. (1937 or earlier) (AL, 772) A small (6-ounce) fountain Coca-Cola, as in shoot one. For analogues to the complete call, see the following: ATS, 823.1; DAS; and CFQ, 50, 56. At the Jayhawk Cafe, shoot a van meant “one small vanilla Coke,” but the same order in the ATS, 823.1 is shoot one van.

SQUEEZE ONE, n. pbr. (1939) One small limeade. Term derives from the method of preparation.

STRETCH ONE, n. pbr. (1939 or earlier) (ATS, 823.1 DAS) One large (10-ounce) glass of fountain Coca-Cola, Cf. CFQ, 56; shoot one and stretch it. Compare stretch a van “one large vanilla Coke” with shoot a sissy and stretch it in the CFQ, 52. See also IN THE AIR.

SUDS, n. (1937 or earlier) Root beer.

THROUGH GEORGIA, prep. pbr. (about 1946) (ATS, 823.1) Chocolate flavor added to milk or Coca-Cola. Compare shoot one through Georgia ‘one small chocolate Coke’ at the Jayhawk with drag one through Georgia in the ATS, 823.1. See also WHITE ONE THROUGH GEORGIA.

TO THE LEFT, prep. pbr. (before 1937) Lemon flavor, which was dispensed from the left of the Coke dispenser.

TO THE RIGHT, prep. pbr. (before 1937) Cherry flavor, which was dispensed from the right of the Coke dispenser.

VAN, n. (1937) (ATS, 91.23, 91.32, and 822.9) Vanilla ice cream or vanilla flavoring for malts, shakes, and Coca-Cola.

WHITE ONE THROUGH GEORGIA, n. pbr. (about 1946) A small (6-ounce) glass of chocolate milk—hence, white one THROUGH GEORGIA, IN THE AIR “a large glass of chocolate milk.” Note, however, the following: white A CROWD, IN THE AIR, all THROUGH GEORGIA “three large glasses of chocolate milk.”

Notes

1. This and subsequent quotations are from my taped interview with Paul Sinclair in June 1966. The tape has been deposited in the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University.