



What makes the Elgin Music Festival unique is its setting. Music flows through Veterans Memorial Park, historic downtown venues, reimagined spaces, longtime BBQ joints, and neighborhood gathering spots. You might catch one style of music on the main stage, then wander down the street to discover something completely different, each performance adding another layer to Elgin's cultural identity.

We talked to the Elgin Music Festival Director, Quinn Walton to learn all about this stage for the Elgin music scene in the Spring.

The festival is intentionally aligned with Explore Elgin Arts & Culture and Music in the Park, creating a spring season where creativity takes center stage. Together, these events form a continuum: free community concerts, immersive arts experiences, and a full-scale

music festival that welcomes both long-term residents and first-time visitors.

WHEN YOU STAND IN DOWNTOWN ELGIN TODAY, WHAT DO YOU NOTICE THAT WASN'T HERE FIVE OR TEN YEARS AGO?

There's a sense of momentum now. More people walking, more doors open, more reasons to linger. You can feel the overlap happening; longtime businesses alongside newer spots, families bumping into musicians, artists, organizers. Five or ten years ago, downtown felt quieter and more compartmentalized. Now it feels like a place where things are actively being made, not just remembered.

IF ELGIN HAD A SOUNDTRACK, WHAT WOULD IT SOUND LIKE RIGHT NOW?

It'd be eclectic but grounded; blues roots, soul, Tejano, country, indie, a little grit, a little joy. Nothing overly polished, but honest. Music that feels lived-in. The kind of soundtrack that doesn't demand attention, but rewards you when you stop and listen.

ELGIN IS MADE UP OF MANY KINDS OF PEOPLE—FAMILIES WHO'VE BEEN HERE FOR GENERATIONS, NEWCOMERS FROM AUSTIN AND BEYOND. HOW DO YOU SEE THAT MIX SHOWING UP IN MUSIC?

You see it in the blending. Traditional styles meeting newer influences, older musicians mentoring younger ones, and younger artists bringing in sounds that feel familiar but refreshed. Music becomes the shared language, you don't have to agree on everything to tap your foot to the same beat.

WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT A TOWN WHERE PEOPLE LIVE IN ELGIN BUT WORK IN AUSTIN?

There's a dual perspective, right? People bring ideas, experiences, and exposure back home, but Elgin gives them space to breathe, create, and connect more deeply. It's less transactional here. People still wave. They still talk. That balance creates a really fertile creative environment.

HOW DO LONGTIME RESIDENTS AND NEWCOMERS INFLUENCE EACH OTHER CREATIVELY?

Longtime residents carry the stories and the roots. Newcomers bring curiosity and new tools. When it works well, there's mutual respect; one side offering depth, the other offering possibility. The best creative

moments happen when neither group feels like they're being erased.

DO YOU THINK MUSIC CAN BE A BRIDGE BETWEEN "OLD ELGIN" AND "NEW ELGIN"? HOW?

Absolutely. Music bypasses labels. You don't have to explain your background to enjoy a song together. When people stand shoulder to shoulder listening to live music, they're already halfway across the bridge.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BUILD A FESTIVAL IN A TOWN WHERE NOT EVERYONE SHARES THE SAME BACKGROUND, TASTES, OR STORY?

It means listening first. It means building something inclusive without trying to please everyone at once. The goal isn't uniformity, it's coexistence. A festival should feel like an invitation, not a statement.

WHY DOES MUSIC FEEL ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN A TOWN LIKE ELGIN?

Because it's connective tissue. In a growing town, music helps people slow down long enough to notice each other. It turns a place into a shared experience rather than just a location.

IN SMALL TOWNS, PEOPLE OFTEN CONNECT THROUGH CHURCHES, SCHOOLS, SPORTS, AND FESTIVALS. WHERE DOES MUSIC FIT INTO THAT?

Music weaves through all of it. It's at celebrations, fundraisers, parades, backyard gatherings. It's often the backdrop, but sometimes it becomes the main event, especially when people realize how much talent lives right next door.

HAVE YOU SEEN MUSIC BRING TOGETHER PEOPLE IN ELGIN WHO MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE CROSS PATHS?

Yes, regularly. Musicians, business owners, families, retirees, young creatives. Live music has a way of flattening social distance. For a few hours, everyone's just part of the same crowd.

WHAT DOES LIVE MUSIC OFFER THAT SOCIAL MEDIA AND STREAMING CAN'T?

Presence. Imperfection. Shared memory. You remember who you were standing next to, how the night felt, not just the song. That kind of connection doesn't come through a screen.

WHEN YOU WERE SHAPING THE FESTIVAL LINEUP, WHAT KIND OF STORY DID YOU WANT IT TO TELL ABOUT ELGIN?

That Elgin is diverse, talented, welcoming, and not afraid



of nuance. The lineup isn't about a single genre or scene, it's about showing the range of voices that already exist here.

HOW INTENTIONAL WERE YOU ABOUT REPRESENTING DIFFERENT GENRES, BACKGROUNDS, AND VOICES? Very intentional. Representation matters, but it has to feel organic. The goal was to reflect the real musical ecosystem around us, not a curated stereotype.

WHAT DOES A THREE-DAY FESTIVAL SAY ABOUT WHERE ELGIN IS HEADED? That it's confident enough to think long-term. A multi-day festival signals trust in the community, in partnerships, and in the idea that people want to spend time here, not just pass through.

IF SOMEONE FROM OUT OF TOWN ATTENDED THE FESTIVAL, WHAT WOULD THEY LEARN ABOUT ELGIN WITHOUT ANYONE EXPLAINING IT TO THEM? That it's friendly, creative, and deeply human. They'd notice how artists are treated, how businesses participate, how locals show up for each other.

SMALL TOWNS ARE OFTEN SEEN AS QUIET OR SLEEPY—BUT CREATIVES KNOW THAT'S NOT ALWAYS TRUE. WHAT DO PEOPLE MISUNDERSTAND ABOUT TOWNS LIKE ELGIN? They confuse calmness with a lack of energy. Elgin has plenty happen-

ing, it just doesn't always shout about it. Creativity here is less performative and more sincere.

WHY DO YOU THINK ARTISTS ARE DRAWN HERE? Affordability helps, but it's more than that. There's room to experiment without pressure. People actually listen. There's less noise and more signal.

HOW DOES ELGIN GIVE CREATIVES SOMETHING THEY MIGHT NOT FIND IN AUSTIN? Time. Space. Community that notices you. In Austin, it's easy to get lost in the crowd. In Elgin, people remember your name and that changes how you create.

WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DO FESTIVALS AND EVENTS HAVE TO NURTURE LOCAL TALENT, NOT JUST SHOWCASE IT? A big one. Showcasing is the easy part. Nurturing means building relationships, paying artists fairly, creating repeat opportunities, and helping them grow beyond a single weekend.

WHAT DOES PARTNERING WITH THE CITY AND DOWNTOWN STAKEHOLDERS MAKE POSSIBLE? Scale and sustainability. It turns a good idea into a shared effort, and a one-time event into something that can grow responsibly year after year.

HOW DO YOU SEE THIS FESTIVAL IMPACTING LOCAL BUSINESSES AND THE DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE? More foot traffic, longer visits, and hopefully new relationships. The festival encourages people to explore downtown as a destination, not just a stop.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE—NOT JUST FOR THE FESTIVAL, BUT FOR THE COMMUNITY? Success, to me at least, is when people feel proud of something. When artists want to come back, businesses feel supported, and residents feel like the festival reflects them.

At its core, the Elgin Music Festival is an act of love. I've spent most of my life around music; playing it, building spaces for it, watching how it brings people together when nothing else quite does. What I've learned is that music isn't just entertainment; it's a way communities check in with themselves. In a town that's growing and changing, that matters.

Elgin isn't trying to become something else. It's learning how to grow without losing its voice. Music gives us a shared place to stand while that happens, a space where longtime residents and newcomers don't have to agree on everything to belong to the same moment.

This festival isn't built to chase trends or outside validation. It's built to reflect what's already here: the talent, the generosity, the history, and the curiosity. It's about supporting artists in real ways, strengthening downtown, and inviting people not just to attend, but to participate.

If the festival works the way we hope, people won't just leave saying they heard great music. They'll leave feeling that Elgin is a place that values creativity, connection and showing up for one another. The feeling that they were part of that story, even if only for a weekend.

At its core, the Elgin Music Festival is about belonging, about creating space for local artists to be heard, for cultures to be celebrated, and for the community to come together in meaningful ways. It reflects Elgin's commitment to inclusion, growth, and the belief that music has the power to connect us all.