

Kara Young

DAN BERG: Today's date is October 29.

DB: So I am Dan Berg. I'm here with Cara [01:00] Young to talk about your life as a member of the Allentown band for an oral history project, as part of the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium. So thank you for your willingness to speak with me.

M1: Pause for just a second. Excuse me. Sorry. I know, I know. I did it. This is a little too high for my liking. [I'm sure that's?] not in my shot. OK.

DB: Can I keep going?

M1: Yes, keep going.

DB: Can you please state your full name and birthdate?

CY: My name is Kara Elizabeth Young, and I was born on June 12, 1986.

DB: So to start off, would you be able to tell me about early life, how you got involved in music? And who your major influences were or are?

CY: Sure. I started on the piano when I was about 10 years old. Apparently, the story is I came home from church and learned one of the songs that we had just heard in church. And I said, "Mom, listen to me. I can play this." And so she thought, wow, we don't have any background in music but I think that this is something we

should look into for Kara. So I started with that. But there's no piano in band. So when I got to fourth grade and I wanted to be in the band, I started the flute and continued that into middle school. And I wanted to get more playing time in our jazz band, because I was playing piano at the time. And so I went to my band director and said, "I need to play more. What can I do?" And she needed a bass player. So she lugged out this big instrument, which was way taller than I am. And said, "Well, we need a bass player. Here you go." So I started to play the bass. And my dad would carry it to all the gigs. And I would audition for the district bands. So when I was in high school, my band director [03:00] kept saying, "You should go to school to study music. This is your thing. It's what you were meant to do. And go as a bass major." Except I thought I might want to go as a piano major. So I went to school at Mansfield University and started studying the piano, except I was playing the bass in the wind ensemble and the jazz band and the orchestra. And kind of the thoughts were going in my head, oh, yeah. My band director was right. So I changed and added an extra semester to my studies. But it's been a change that I am thankful for, because that's what I do now. I play freelance string bass for the Allentown Band, for Lehigh University and several other places throughout the Lehigh

Valley, too. My influences come from all over the place. My mom used to listen to a lot of Kenny G. And my brother and I would dance around the living room, listening to Disney on albums, which I have now. [04:00] But I take a lot of influence from jazz music and the blues. And I went through an alternative rock stage. I played in a rock band for a little while, tried that out. And then two years ago, I was playing with a folk band. So I think, since I am a music educator now, I need to take in everything that is what music is, all the different styles, all the influences, and make it my own. So I don't know that I have one or two particular musicians that I think, that is the one that is my favorite or my idol. But it's a little bit of everything.

DB: Cool. So next question, how did you become involved in the Allentown band?

CY: So I ended up going back to college for my master's in instrumental conducting. And I came back to the area, moved back with my parents, which was an interesting transition. And started my first [05:00] teaching job. And I really missed the ensemble aspect of performing, as well as the social networking, which is why I really needed to find a job, as well. And my middle school band director actually plays the bass clarinet in the band. And my high school band director plays trombone in the

band. So in order to get into the band or to start joining the rehearsals, you have to be recommended. So they recommended to Ron that she's talented. I don't really know how the conversation went. But I had an invitation to start rehearsing with the band. And that was about six years ago. And then, in order to get a membership in the band, you have to play with them for a certain amount of time. It's usually two or three years before you actually get an invitation to become a permanent member of the band. So I guess they liked what I put out there, because now I am a member. And I'm also the acting historian for the band. So I collect a lot of our articles, programming, and organize all the [06:00] historical information. So down the road, someone can look back and learn all about us, just like this video.

DB: Describe some of the more memorable moments with the band.

CY: Memorable moments. OK. Probably it would be playing in Carnegie Hall, just because it has such a prestigious name. It's where you want to play. The Beatles played on that stage, so I wanted to play on that stage, too. And so we were invited to perform. And we're going again this year, in 2019. And it was such a cool experience, to get to go there. It's a lot of hustle and bustle. It's not exactly what I expected backstage. It's more like, you're doing this. Then you do this. Then we move

here. And it's very regimented. But they have a very successful theatre there and program. So it was still neat to be a part of it, and I'm looking forward to going back. Plus, [07:00] my parents were there to support me. So go figure, the little girl that was playing piano at home by ear is now playing on stage at Carnegie Hall. And it's not a solo thing. I'm not famous, and I probably will never be, and that's OK. But music has been a huge influence in my life.

DB: How do you think the band has changed over the last 50 years, with membership, the type of music, the venues, the audiences, outreach, et cetera.

CY: Sure. From what I know of the band, the one major change is one, there's women in the band. When it was started, it was primarily male. We're still definitely male-oriented, but that's how the military band was run. That was who was in it at the time. So I'm still hoping for a female band director one day. That would be cool. As [08:00] far as how we've changed, I think that now, the band has become more of a staple for the area. The name is out there, and people want to see it.

M1: Take your time. If you need to start that over again, go right ahead.

CY: I think that the band's reputation has grown and also maintained a certain respect for what we do. A lot of people will refer to us as a community band, but it's

really not. There are a lot of expectations for the music and the musicians and the performances that we put out there and the quality of what we provide, historically as well as musically. So I think that [09:00] we're moving forward with that, too. We've had a lot of younger members joining, which, in the past, it was usually an older crowd. No offense, anyone. But I think that's what you need to keep the program growing, and new ideas and someone to carry on that tradition.

DB: So would you do things differently if you could start over? And do you have any regrets? Am I supposed to be asking this whole thing in one chunk? Because as soon as I started, I was like, should I keep...

M1: Just try it. Try it and see what happens.

DB: Would you do things differently if you could start over? Do you have any regrets? How have your experiences impacted the trajectory of your life? What do you see for the future of the band?

DB: [10:00] I'm going to say both.

CY: OK, gee, that's a tricky question. So as far as my personal life is concerned, I think I would have taken more, let me think. I would have challenged myself a little more. There were times when I would not push myself, and now I do. I'm almost to the opposite end, where I push myself too hard and it stresses you out, which, in addition to the all the adult life problems, is

a lot. But there's times that I missed out on things. There was one memorable experience that I went on a cruise with my grandparents and parents. And there was a day program for kids, and you had an opportunity to do a talent show. And they had a piano, but I didn't think I was good enough to present what I had. And I didn't do it. And then afterwards, everyone who presented got a little reward. And I felt like... That's just one [11:00] instance. But there's several times during my life that I should have just pushed myself, and I doubted what I had. I doubted my own gift. Regarding the band, the only thing that I would do differently, even now, is just establish more connections. It's difficult, because everyone is so cramped in this room, and you talk to who you're next to. And we only see each other once a week for a little bit of time. And we're doing so much work that there's people in the band that I still don't know their name. And I've been in the band for six years. And they might not know mine, either. So it's just kind of establishing a little bit more of the network in the band. Because yes, there's a business aspect of it, but there's also the social aspect, where I would like to get to know everyone I'm working with a little more.

DB: So when I was researching you... [12:00] I know that you're a music teacher, right?

CY: Yes.

DB: So is there any advice that you have for the younger folks who are getting involved in the music world?

CY: Sure. I tell my students... I teach middle school band, so I have fifth through eighth grade. So that's about 10 years old to 14. And I tell them every day to just keep playing. And even if it's only a few notes, it's a gift that you will have with you the rest of your life. It's a way to express yourself that you might not be able to find through other means. And just keep going. It's going to be hard. Some people think you pick up an instrument, and it just comes to you. It's just magic. But it takes a lot of hard work and dedication, but it's kind of a life lesson that you can take into other aspects of your life, as well. And just enjoy it. I love music, and I love playing music, and I'm a music nerd. And [13:00] I don't care what everybody else thinks about that. I wish everybody could feel that joy that I do with performing. It's just a big part of who I am, and I'm happy it is.

DB: Is there anything we haven't spoken about that you would like to talk about?

CY: Geez. That's a good question. Just the only other thing would be, even with the Allentown band, there's lots of ways that you can connect with other people to perform. I know some of our trombone players have a quartet they play with around the holidays. And one of our

clarinetists performs with some of his students around the holidays, as well. And so there's a lot of outreach type of groups you can do through the band itself. Networking is how I got involved with a lot of performances. That's how I got involved with Lehigh University. It's a great way to connect with other musicians in the Lehigh Valley, professionally. And it's provided me a lot of opportunities, which I'm thankful for.

DB: Cool. Well, that's everything. OK, well thank you for speaking with me today. (inaudible)

F1: So I have one question for you, and you can just respond to Dan, [as well?]. When you think about trying to reach children, youth, if you will, do you have any ideas about what you would like to see happening? And how the outreach to youth could, [15:00] what possible channels or avenues or tasks that can be done?

CY: As a band?

F1: Yes.

CY: Right now, we have the youth concerts, which we present every fall. And my students do attend it, as well. It's one or two presentations during the day for students to get to see us. And then we have a side by side, as well, that the high school students come from the area to sit alongside and perform with the band. But I think it would also be interesting to try some master class type

of opportunities. We have a lot of music teachers in the band themselves, that you work with your same students. And you have to work under that curriculum and schedule all the time. But it would be fun to do a bass master class. Because I know there's a lot of bass students in the Lehigh Valley, but not necessarily are they connected. So it's a way to start them in a network as they grow, as well, so they can experience that kind of outreach. You're welcome.

F2: I have questions about your [16:00] work as a historian for the band, but we can take that offline.

M1: Why take it offline?

F1: Here's the thing, though. We have several students who are very interested in continuing this project next semester. And you said you're a historian. I'm just like, whoo. And you're a music educator. I'm like, whoo.

CY: Sure, go right ahead.

M1: So with all this, just once again, right towards the end. So we retain (inaudible)

F2: So I'm curious about what you save, where you save it, and the work that we've been doing. I mean, I have four boxes of programs and letters and materials that I took, that we took, and our students are working on processing that archival material from upstairs in [Wenner?] Hall. What do you do, what active measures are you taking, what

are you collecting, where? What would be your dream project with this material?

CY: OK. Well, long story short, I was thrown into this. The last gentleman who had done it [17:00] left the band, moved on to other things. And so when I took over at Wenner Hall, it was a lot of filing cabinets, which you have seen, of just mismatched everything. Photos, newspaper articles, programs. And we try to keep everything that we can about the band. We collect it all. And it's all categorized in chronological order. So I was really just told here, please organize this. This is important to us. Because they do go back and reference a lot of things, look at past programs. And I spend a lot of hours in that room. And it's still not done. I have two boxes at home right now of just mismatched things. And things come up, too. For instance, some of our members will move away, or they find something hidden in their own offices, send it to us. So then I have to go back and find out if we have duplicates of that. I try to [18:00] not keep too much, just because we're out of space, which is why we rehearse at the PPL Walbert now, just because there's so much about the band. And it is a rich part of our heritage and culture, so we want to keep that. But the organizational part is a daunting task sometimes.

F2: Yes, we definitely need to talk more. I feel like I've invaded your space now. I never knew, yes. So yes. I want to hear all about --

F1: Susan's the archivist here at (inaudible). Thank you very much.

CY: Thank you. Yes, I hope it was helpful.

M1: Fantastic, thank you.

F1: DeVaughn's been immensely helpful. We have a few oral histories of some of the older, including Mr Wenner. And then [19:00] we definitely want to get younger ones in. So we're now going to start moving in from different directions. Thank you so very much.

M1: Watch the cables on your way out here.

(inaudible)

END OF AUDIO FILE