

DeVaughn Roberts

OK, so I'm Riley Cassidy? here with DeVaughn Roberts. We're going to talk about your life in the Allentown Band for our oral history project. It's part of the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium. So thank you, DeVaughn, for being willing to speak with me, and could you please state your full name and your date of birth?

DR: DeVaughn Roberts. I was born September 6, 1993.

RC: So I want to know what it was like the first time you played your instrument and how you got from there to deciding that that was something you wanted to pursue (inaudible).

DR: So I started playing trumpet when I was seven, and I was awful. Like, actually terrible. And I was terrible for kind of a lot of years, too. It wasn't until maybe sixth or seventh grade that I just kind of decided [02:00] I didn't want to be bad anymore, and so I took a lot of focus. Growing up I played a bunch of sports. My whole family is very sports-oriented. I took my focus a lot from that and put it into practicing and refining and finally wound up getting a private teacher, got a more advanced private teacher, decided I wanted to apply to music school, etc., etc., and just kind of built upon itself. And

nowadays, I kind of couldn't imagine my life without music. It's what I do to like keep myself sane from work. It's kind of my, like, hobby. I'm always listening to music, everything. It's kind of a part of everything I do now.

RC: And did you have any major influences while you were starting out that inspired you to keep playing music or to start?

DR: Yeah, I think a lot of it was very, like, personal. My friends were all kind of musicians in bands, orchestras, that kind of stuff. I had a few friends that were a couple years older than me, so they sort of turned into role models, too. They were applying to music schools. [03:00] They were in the all-state band and orchestra, and I thought that was cool. And then my family isn't full of musicians, but it's full of people that really appreciate music, so my entire life I was listening to music and going to concerts and all that kind of stuff. So I always wanted to be the guy up on stage, not the guy in the crowd.

RC: Yeah, I get that, too. So then how did you go from that to becoming a part of the Allentown Band? How did you get started here?

DR: So I always knew the band existed. I'm from Bethlehem, so you kind of can't avoid it. When I graduated college -- I'm a mechanical engineer -- I was worried about not having

a place to play, but knowing the band existed and having interacted with Ron a couple times, I just shot him an email and said, "Hey, can I stop by and play sometime?" He had me come to a few rehearsals, and within six months or so, I was subbing at a concert and kind of kept that up. So honestly I'm glad that I kind of [04:00] took a shot in the dark and sent him an email, and it turned into me being in the band for I guess a little over three years now.

RC: So the audition process, then, was like you coming to a rehearsal and just kind of integrating yourself in?

DR: Yeah, exactly. I think it was very just kind of see how I fit in with the culture of the band and the sound of the music, and it was a very hands-on audition, if you want. I never came in and just played a prepared piece for him or anything like that but just started kind of integrating myself in and found a little home.

M1: I just want to change something.

RC: Sure.

M1: Pardon me (inaudible).

RC: This is why we love editing, because it will be like this never happened. (laughter)

M1: No, this never did happen. You didn't hear it, you didn't see it.

RC: Nobody knows.

DR: I have no idea what you're talking about.

M1: I'm just changing the shot a little bit. I'm getting a little closer so that way you have a little (inaudible) you can play around with. (inaudible).

RC: All good? [05:00] So in the three plus years you said that you've been here, I just want to know if you have any, like, particular memories that stand out, like a favorite venue you've played at or like a favorite person you've met through the band?

DR: Geez, that's a hard one. I think my favorite venue -- this is going to be a weird one -- is West Park in Allentown. We play it all the time, but everyone who plays in the band just knows it. It's sort of just like oh, it's a West Park concert. OK, I'm comfortable there. I know exactly what I'm doing there. When you show up the first time, it's a little intimidating, because you're a newbie, and you have no idea how this whole thing works, but everyone else is like well, yeah, this is what we do. We play at West Park. But now I'm kind of in the comfort seat, which is really nice. You just kind of know how it works. Plus, it's a nice outdoor setting, and people can walk by and all that. So it's definitely still one of my favorite places to play. Favorite people that I've met -- [06:00] last year at the dinner concert, Frank Kaderabek played, who previously

played in the Philadelphia Orchestra as a trumpet player. That was just like a huge honor to meet him. He's kind of one of those names amongst trumpet player nerds that everybody knows, and hearing that he was coming to play at the concert it was just like wait, really? That's a thing? OK. So it was a cool opportunity.

RC: And then, so through the years that you've been here, have you noticed the band has changed at all since you've started or if it's the same as when you got here or if things are different at all?

DR: I'll say some of the biggest differences I've noticed has been just like the quality and difficulty of the music that we play nowadays. It's gotten significantly more complicated and harder, which I think is really impressive for a community band. I mean, it's not a band of, you know, 60 people with music performance degrees. So to be able to pull off some of the pieces we've done -- The Planets, the silent film things, [07:00] pieces that have been written specifically for the band, playing at Carnegie in a few months -- that kind of stuff, I think, is really impressive, and it's cool for someone who wanted, you know, high caliber music after I graduated school. Other than that, the band's been really consistent, which I don't think is a problem at all. Between the people, the

support, the community outreach, the education programs, all of that stuff has kind of stayed really static. I think that's great. I think that's something that the Valley needs.

RC: And then looking back at your time in the band or your time as a musician overall, is there anything you think you would have done differently if you had a chance to do it again?

DR: Honestly, I may have reached out to Ron a little bit sooner. So I went to Lehigh, so it's in Bethlehem, so I probably could have started playing in the band a little bit sooner just to get the connection. But overall, not really. I'm pretty happy with how things have turned out.

RC: [08:00] That's always good. And then from the point it's at right now, I'm wondering how you see the band moving forward from this point.

DR: I think things are only going to keep getting better and more high-profile. The band very much, though, has its roots, you know, the older musicians that have been here for so long and kind of know the traditions and the traditional music and all of the old-style music stuff. But things are only going to keep getting more difficult and flashier and all that. I'm really looking forward to

the additional challenge. I'm hoping things just kind of keep going up.

RC: So I just wanted to go back really quick to something you said earlier. You were talking about how you weren't good at the trumpet at first, but you still stuck with it, and I'm wondering why that was.

DR: Part of that's personality. I'm really bad at being bad at things. It's just, like, frustrating to me. So it was sort of like a personal challenge. [09:00] And then, like I mentioned before, some of my closer friends, especially the ones who were a couple years older than me, were really good, and that just wasn't working for me. I kind of had to be on their level, and they turned into role models to some extent. And then eventually, once I got a private teacher, he started being the first person to, like, really push me forward, and everything just kind of fell into place from there.

RC: And then I think my last question -- it's probably going to be a little hard -- but my last question is why the trumpet specifically? Do you have a reason, or you just liked it?

DR: So ironically enough, I wanted to play a saxophone, and when I was five or six or seven, my mom was calling around asking different people about renting instruments. And the first person she called told her that the sax was too hard

to start out on, and I should try something like trumpet instead. And she said OK, and then she rented me a trumpet. And I stuck with it, so thanks, random mystery [10:00] music person.

RC: That's great. So is there anything else we haven't talked about that you want to touch on about the band, music in general?

DR: I think one of the coolest things about the band -- and quite honestly, it's something I still struggle with -- only being in the band for three and a half years, there's so many things that are, you know, traditional. They've been doing this for forever. And so I'll show up, for example, to a concert, and Ron will call some random march that I've never seen before, and I'm sight-reading and trying really hard to play along, and everyone else just knows how it goes. They know all the tricks. They know all the little not written things that you do, the special dynamics, where we slow down, how Ron's going to take it, all that stuff, because they've been doing it thirty, forty, fifty years, and here I am three and a half years in, trying to read the music and then trying to keep up with all of that stuff, too. So I'm looking forward to being around for thirty, forty, fifty years so then I can teach the new people all that stuff.

RC: So do you feel there is any kind of, like, generational gap between members who have been here for so long and people [11:00] like you who are relatively newer comparatively?

DR: I mean, there's always like a learning experience difference. It's not something that's going to go away. But I've never seen it as like an issue. I only see it as a learning thing. The older members, who have been sort of holding down the band for decades are just trying to set up the younger guys to do the same thing.

RC: Well, thank you so much for listening to me and answering my questions. That was really wonderful. Thank you.

DR: Of course. Thank you.

F1: Can I ask you one question?

DR: Of course.

F1: I'll just stand up here (inaudible). About the youth outreach program -- how do you see that going? Is there any kind of future for the outreach program expanding, growing?

DR: I can only hope that the outreach program continues to expand. I mean, I think the Valley in general is like a really musical place. There's lots of stuff around that, so the more you can expose that to kids that can like latch on to that and realize they want to do it themselves, [12:00] the better. I think the band does a lot of unique

things in that realm, too, on top of just like teaching music and instruments and, you know, time signatures, what instruments sound like, but also doing, like, The Planets, where we showed a video of this really cool space simulation kind of thing while really popular classical music was going on in the background. It's kind of a unique approach to the whole thing, so it keeps it from getting stale and boring, too.

RC: Thank you so much.

DR: Of course, a pleasure.

F1: Do you have a question, [Tony?]? I always ask everyone else.

M2: I know.

F1: (inaudible)

M2: I mean, it's fine. I feel a little called on the spot, too, when she does that. (laughter)

F2: If I would have known, I would have been thinking about that.

F1: Sorry.

M2: That's awesome. Thank you so much.

F1: That sounded good.

RC: That was great.

F1: Thank you.

M2: That wasn't too bad.

DR: Yeah, I've had worse.

M2: I could have put you on the hot lights. Then you'd be sweating.

DR: I appreciate that. Yeah, all things considered.

F1: These new lights are so much nicer.

DR: They're really not too bad.

M2: Sneak this out of your [13:00] way here.

F1: I think that's the best story in the world. My mom bought it for me, that's why I started. (laughter)

DR: I really didn't have much say in it. I was pretty disappointed that it wasn't a sax, but that was 18 years ago.

RC: It happened accidentally.

DR: It worked out pretty well, all things considered.

M2: Whatever was available was pretty much it.

F2: It's fun listening to everyone's stories how they got into it. I mean, like Sue's story with the piano, she didn't even know what a piano was, and find out that she goes over to I think it was one of her relative's houses and had this beautiful mahogany piano and, wow, I love this, and her parents ended up buying her a piano that she still owns. It's just kind of funny how you --

DR: And then some other people have like parents that are,
like, in the symphony orchestra or something. Like it's so
all over the place.

M2: Cool. All right.

F1: Thank you.

DR: Of course.

F1: Do you have a copy now of your --

DR: No, I just have the one that I signed.

RC: I have an extra one. [13:59]

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