

Caitlin Heckman

(laughter) I'm Emily Robinson here with Caitlyn Heckman 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. Caitlyn, thank you for your willingness to speak with us. Can you please state your full name and date of birth?

CH: Caitlin Grace Heckman, May 4, 1990.

ER: Thank you. OK, so let's start from where everything began. How did you first become interested in music and playing?

CH: Well, I grew up in a household that really, you know, fostered a love of music, and I grew up Moravian, so I grew up in a church that has a lot of music involvement and a lot of music in worship. So music has always sort of been around. I started playing trombone in fourth grade not knowing, you know, [01:00] little nine-year-old me that I'd be teaching music and playing professionally, but played all through school, majored in music in college, and now here we are. (laughs)

ER: Who are your major musical or personal influences, like growing up?

CH: Well, my parents both instilled a love of music in both me and my brother. My brother's also a trombone player and

also plays with the band. Mostly them. There was always music on. We used to have, we called it pizza and loud music Fridays, so my dad would put on all the music he listened to as a kid and, you know, exposed us to things. I always loved listening to, like, big band music as a kid. We got to spend a lot of time with our grandparents, and my grandfather especially, because he was a drummer in a dance band at one point, he played a lot of, like Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman. So Glenn Miller was kind of this, like, person who I always kind of aspired [02:00] to be, because he gave up everything and joined the military and, you know, started this band, and like he was sort of a big musical influence. Not that I play a lot of jazz now, but he was always sort of this figure that I saw as an influence.

ER: So you said that you and your brother play trombone and mentioned Glenn Miller, a prominent trombone player. Was that how you came to that decision to play trombone?

CH: It was mostly growing up Moravian. The Bethlehem Moravian Trombone Choir is the oldest trombone choir in the world, I believe, since 1754, I think is the date. I don't know that for sure. So trombones are a big part of Moravian history, and they've always been in worship, and I saw them, and it's a very versatile instrument, so I saw it as

an opportunity to be in band and orchestra and jazz band, and its versatility and the sound of it, the fact that when I picked it up I got this huge sound out of it, I was like OK. I was hooked. [03:00]

ER: So how did you become involved in the Allentown Band?

CH: My trombone teacher in high school is a trombone player with the band, and his wife plays flute, so I had known about the band, and then when I was a senior in high school I did the Side-by-Side concert and got to play -- I believe Scott Shelsta was the trombone soloist that year. He was the guest soloist. And we did this trombone quintet arrangement of Lassus Trombones, and it was awesome. And the band had come to do a concert at -- I went to Moravian, and the band had come to do a concert there, and as luck would have it, my senior year I ended up sitting next to Ron Demkee in the orchestra for a choral performance, and he took my information and invited me to come that summer to fill in for rehearsals, and then it turned into coming to rehearsal all the time, filling in for jobs, finally becoming an official member of the band. I think that was [04:00] 2014 [2015] I officially got my letter that I was a member.

ER: Can you speak more to the Side-by-Side experience?

CH: It was great. I ended up doing it because I had intended on being in the pit orchestra for my high school's musical, and there was no trombone part in the pit orchestra. And it so happened that Side-by-Side was the same weekend, and I was like OK, if I can't be in the pit orchestra, I'll do the Side-by-Side concert. And it was so cool to be playing such high caliber music as a high school student and being with these people who it's not necessarily their job but something that they do on a regular basis and that they love doing.

ER: So as far as playing with the band, since you said you became an official member in 2014 have there been any extremely memorable moments as far as pieces or performances, locations?

CH: Well, the first thing that sticks out is we played at Carnegie Hall in 2016, [05:00] which was absolutely as incredible as everyone says it is. You walk in and it's just immaculate, and the sound is just everywhere, and we went out at the end and did Stars and Stripes, and the trumpets and trombones went out front, and we got like six standing ovations, and it was just amazing. I've actually done two solos with the band, which was really memorable. Both were Arthur Pryor pieces, and according to Ezra Wenner, who is the record-holder for longest years of

membership, he said he thinks I'm the first woman to perform a trombone solo with the band, which is kind of a cool milestone. And I'm actually playing another solo at our upcoming dinner concert, so looking forward to that.

ER: As far as the band changing over time, being the first female trombone player to do a solo, how do you see yourself fitting into [06:00] the band history and --

CH: Well, I mean, you know, breaking glass ceilings, but...

(laughs) It's just the band has been around for almost 200 years, and I think the community really gets what the band is trying to do. You know, we're trying to not only preserve the Sousa band tradition but also promote new music and commission works, and I think the audience for the band is kind of getting older. I've only been in the band for not as many years as most other people, but I've noticed the audience getting older, and these youth outreach concerts that we do and just trying to get the future generations involved and interested in what we're doing, I think that's a really, really great thing.

ER: How would you say that your experiences in the band have changed the trajectory of your music career [07:00] or your life, all these kinds of things?

CH: I would say it's nice to be on the other side of the baton. As a music teacher myself -- I teach elementary

instrumental music, so I always tell people I hear the good, the bad, and the ugly on a daily basis -- but knowing the frustrations that I feel and the victories that I feel as a player in an ensemble, my students are also experiencing those things, so I can kind of reflect on OK, this is how I felt, this is how the kids are feeling. How can we fix this? And just being a performing musician just enhances my ability to teach kids. And I use the band as an example all the time with my students. You know, I've had a whole bunch of kids lately ask me well, when I get to college I think I'm going to do this, or I'm going to do that. I'm like, you can still do music. Like, it doesn't have to be your job. You know, there's people in the band that are doctors and dentists and school counselors.

[08:00] It's not their job, but it's something that you can do for your entire life, which is something I try to instill in my students. I know that they're not all going to turn into the principal violin of the Philly Orchestra. But, you know, they're having a positive experience, and if I can give them something that they can take for the rest of their lives, that's a win for me.

ER: How would you say that the band kind of projects that sentiment into the greater community?

CH: Well, especially with our youth concerts. We have all of these elementary and middle school students and even some high school students, I think, coming in, and Ron does a great job of explaining, like, not everyone that is on stage is a musician by trade. Ezra is a great example. He's in his 90s and still playing trombone. Like, I hope I'm still breathing when I'm his age, let alone playing trombone the way he does. And really just getting different opportunities for the band. Like we've been doing a lot of church concerts lately, which really attracts a varied audience. Just [09:00] getting our name out there and getting as many different types of venues and different jobs as we can is going to help us in the future.

ER: So what do you see particularly for the future of the band moving forward as far as musicians in the band, community outreach?

CH: I see it staying at least the same, if not even more. I've noticed the average age is sort of going down, because there are some younger people that are starting to come in and fill in the ranks, especially as people are starting to move and pursue other opportunities. Just, you know, we've been around for 190 years, and here's hoping for another 190. (laughs) Or more.

ER: Do you have any message that you would want to give to young musicians, young band members? You know, you're a music teacher. Anything that you would want [10:00] recorded for time?

CH: Just keep at it. It's a struggle, and it's frustrating, and it's tough, but it gets better, and the more you play, the more fun you get to have with it, and just keep at it, because it's worth it.

ER: So I'd like to go back to something you said earlier about pizza and loud music Fridays. (laughter) Can you explain more about that?

CH: It just, you know, it was the end of the week, so neither of my parents felt like cooking, so it was always pizza or some kind of take-out, and my dad would just put on anything from the Beatles, Jethro Tull -- he was a huge Genesis fan, which I listened to so much Genesis that now I'm like, oof, no thank you. I'm done with Phil Collins. (laughs) But it was just kind of like a kick back and relax type thing. And, you know, my dad -- we had CDs, and he would pull out the leaf from the inside of the CD [11:00] and we'd, you know, sit there and sing the lyrics and it was just, you know, became a thing. (laughs)

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

CH: I don't think so. I mean, the band's awesome. It's just a bunch of great musicians playing great music, and it's both humbling and wonderful to be part of such a great organization.

ER: Thank you so much for speaking with me today.

CH: You're welcome.

F1: I have one question for you. And you can kind of zoom in a little bit. I'm directing here. If you were to think of something else that you do for youth -- I mean, I know you all are doing a lot of things for bringing awareness, involvement, but is there some other [12:00] youth program that you'd like to really see roll out? I mean, just in your fantasy world. (laughter)

CH: I don't know. I mean, I know the symphony does an instrument petting zoo, which is something that I actually did at the school I used to teach at. But, you know, we're both organizations in the area, and we don't want to step on each other's toes, but I think that's a great way for, like, kids just get to go, and they get to meet musicians and play instruments, so, you know, something like that is really great. I can't really think of anything off the top of my head other than that.

F1: We've had some suggestions about a master class or master trombone class or, you know, maybe some other outreach

program. I'm just tapping everyone asking this question just to see.

CH: One thing that I used to do, I used to work at a private school, and we had an auction every year, so the teachers could donate what they called the teacher treasure.

[13:00] And mine was always go to an Allentown Band concert and then go for ice cream afterwards, so something like that, or one idea I had was having some of my band kids maybe come to a rehearsal just to, like, see this is how adults rehearse versus, you know, what are similarities and differences between how we rehearse and how adults rehearse.

F1: That'd be fun. They'd fall asleep on the bus home.

CH: (laughs) Definitely.

F1: That's the way I felt Monday night. I was just like (laughing) -- I had to drive.

CH: I get home and I'm, like, totally wired. I can't fall asleep.

F1: Do you have questions, Emily, that had popped up? No?

ER: I don't think so.

F1: What we will be doing is having this oral history transcribed. [14:00] We have a vendor that transcribes it. And then we'll send you this transcription and a DVD of the oral history so you can take a look at it and say take this

out, I don't want it or it's fine, but get rid of all the
chit-chat, you know. So that'll happen in about 30 days.

Thank you so much.

CH: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

F1: Believe me, it's our pleasure. All righty. Thank you.

[14:24]

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