BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Currently, the Music and Social Change Program at Penn works with the music programs at Lea Elementary and West Philadelphia High School. The younger students are focusing on more classical music while the older students are involved with more popular tunes. Working with the program sparked an interest in the history of music in West Philadelphia in order to contextualize the current situation.

There are very few studies looking as specifically at the change of music education in a particular urban area over a long period of time and none for West Philadelphia High School or Lea Elementary. Looking at the fluidity of the term urban music is important when defining terms for the music education in a community. Furthermore, the idea of formal and informal music has changed a lot over time and it is important to look at how this has reflected the social conditions of certain time periods. Finally, defining the reflection and influence of music education on identity and culture will help to determine the focus of the study of West Philadelphia’s vibrant sonic history. In addition, the shift of demographics in the 20th century with white flight and unstable funding for Philadelphia schools serves as a backdrop to explore the different aspects of each category.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How are larger social movements reflected in music education?
- How has music education in West Philadelphia schools reflected larger social movements?
- How has music education at West Philadelphia High School and Lea Elementary School Changed over the past century?
- How has music continued to influence the lives of musicians that graduated from West Philly High School?

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

WPH Yearbooks:

Ranging from 1918-1958, with several years missing, the yearbooks show that music programs changed a lot. The WPH orchestra was a big deal in Philadelphia at the time. The pictures below show some of the differences in racial integration throughout the years. The process of going from black face minstrel shows to completely integrated reflects a larger social shift.

Interviews:

Speaking with residents of West Philly helps to illuminate some gaps in the research. Joe Shapiro for example discussed his experience with the shifting demographics. He mentioned that in the 1950s-1960s Penn was still the backdrop for University City, but black residents were moving into the north. In the 1960s-70s, many of his neighbors left, but he said, “the folks who left were not missed, if they were that narrow minded you didn’t want to associate with them anyway.” He also showed us some Lea yearbooks from when he went there and a random one from 1976 where the students were mostly black and no music was really mentioned.

Generalizing the research regarding the sonic history of West Philadelphia can be challenging since it is mostly an ethnographic study of one area. The connections that we find between music education and the larger community changes will most likely mirror other urban situations. In the literature review, we focused on a few major arguments surrounding music education which are placed in the context of West Philly. Another example includes the effects of white flight, in particular we noticed a lot of Jewish community members, on the development and support of music in West Philadelphia. Overall, the research will benefit both the residents of Philadelphia and those looking at the larger question of music in daily life.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

- Review of Literature
- Historical Newspapers
- Archives
- West Philadelphia High School Yearbooks
- Lea Elementary Echo
- Compare Modern Philly Classrooms
- Look at Temple Settlement Music School Archives
- Interview More Community Members
- Ex. Current WPH music students below

LOOKING FORWARD

In the coming summer we plan to:

- Compare Modern Philly Classrooms
- Look at Temple Settlement Music School Archives
- Interview More Community Members
- Ex. Current WPH music students below