

Evan Schneider:

Hello, this is Evan Schneider, and welcome to Let's Talk About, produced by the Pace Center for Civic Engagement at Princeton University.

Evan Schneider:

In this season of Let's Talk About, we are featuring Princeton University students who are passionate about making service a part of their Princeton experience, and living lives of service after they graduate.

Speaker 2:

Katie Cappola is a rising sophomore from Haverford, Pennsylvania, who plans to concentrate in molecular biology or chemistry. In addition to serving as a private cello instructor through the Trenton Youth Orchestra Program, she's a cellist in the Princeton University Orchestra, and the publicity chair for La Vie en Cello, Princeton's student run cello ensemble. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, hiking, and taking long walks across campus.

Evan Schneider:

Hi Katie, how are you doing today?

Katie Cappola:

I'm good. How are you? Thank you for having me.

Evan Schneider:

I'm good. Yeah, thanks so much for coming on. I just wanted to start maybe by giving you an opportunity to talk a little bit about the Trenton Arts Project, or TAP. What is it, and why are you involved?

Katie Cappola:

Yeah. Trenton Arts at Princeton is the coordinator of arts outreach between Princeton faculty, staff, students and the greater Trenton community. This summer, I am working as an intern for Trenton Arts at Princeton. Since November, I've been working as a private cell teacher for the Trenton Youth Orchestra, which is one program that falls under the category of Trenton Arts at Princeton.

Evan Schneider:

I actually got to go to a concert by the Trenton Youth Orchestra in ... What is it, in Rocky? Is that where they normally have it?

Katie Cappola:

Yeah. Yeah, there was a concert in Rocky, I think in December.

Evan Schneider:

They just happened to be playing Harry Potter music, and I feel like that is Hogwarts, Rocky, in a lot of ways. The architecture and everything is just ... So, we went to Hogwarts. And it was Christmas time, so they were playing. It was pretty fun.

Katie Cappola:

Yeah, that's great.

Evan Schneider:

So why are you involved in TAP? What is that brought you, originally, as a volunteer?

Katie Cappola:

Yeah. Well, in high school I played cello for a long time. In my junior and senior year, I'd organized a music outreach event for lower schoolers at my school, introducing them to different instruments. I really enjoyed connecting with other people that way, through music. I decided I wanted to continue with music service in college, at a more individual level and more consistently.

Katie Cappola:

I'd heard about Trenton Youth Orchestra through some musicians I knew at Princeton early on. I'm in the Princeton University Orchestra, so there's a fair amount of volunteers who also play in that, and they had encouraged me to check it out. So I sent Lou an email, Lou Chen, the director of Trenton Youth Orchestra in September, asking to be a private teacher. There actually wasn't a spot available at that time. But then, in November there was, so that's when I first started to get to teach Brandon, my current student. I've been teaching there ever since.

Katie Cappola:

Now, my involvement with Trenton Youth Orchestra and Trenton Arts at Princeton has definitely deepened, because I'm working more on the management side of things this summer.

Evan Schneider:

Yeah. What does that look like? What are you doing as an intern for them?

Katie Cappola:

So my main role, I mainly work with the Trenton Youth Orchestra because that's where my strongest connection is. So I work with our faculty Fellow, Dr. Anna Lynn and Abby [inaudible 00:03:36], who's a violin coach and also an intern, to design programming for our summer camp, which is happening right now, every Saturday. Also, think about programming for the fall.

Katie Cappola:

So at the beginning, that meant making sure that all the students, and the coaches, and the teachers were available and coordinating that side of things. And then, we planned our various workshops that would take up the hour long group activity portion of the summer camp, before we moved into our hour long private lessons. We designed ear training workshops, Abby runs those. I do the little game portion at the beginning, so that the kids have a chance to interact with each other in a more casual way, like they would've at rehearsal if they were just chatting before rehearsal started. We're also preparing to have a recital, a pre-recorded recital, at the end of August.

Evan Schneider:

So we talked to Daniel, who was doing the Princeton Online Tutoring Network, or POTN, this summer. He talked a lot about some of the safety concerns around tutoring online. I know that you all faced

similar issues. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the POTN model, but I guess if you are, it would be helpful to know is it a similar challenge? And, how have you all solved those issues?

Katie Cappola:

So we all were trained, before we became teachers and coaches, to work with minors. I actually am also involved in the Princeton Online Tutoring Network program, so I can draw a bit of a parallel.

Katie Cappola:

One difference is the teachers, we are allowed to text our students, which is something I know that the tutors can't in Princeton Online Tutoring Network. Only for music related things. All of the calls start in a group Zoom, and then we split into breakout rooms, so we're never calling them on our own. Lou periodically drops in to check on us. It's the equivalent to us having our door open when we did private lessons in person. Yeah, those are the main restrictions.

Katie Cappola:

I think it's easier for us, because most of us have pre-established relationships with our students, so they're used to talking to us. Whereas with Online Tutoring Network, it can feel more difficult to get to know people, especially with the restrictions in place. You can't really reach out to them.

Evan Schneider:

That makes sense, especially in terms of the texting and things like that. I'm not that surprised to hear that because, you said, you've been working ... Sorry. Your 2T's name is Brandon?

Katie Cappola:

Yeah, my cello student, he's a member of the Trenton Youth Orchestra. Yeah, Brandon.

Evan Schneider:

You've been working with him since November?

Katie Cappola:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Evan Schneider:

And this is a similar issue, or a similar situation, for all of the TAP volunteers, that they have this relationship already established, and they're just continuing it in a remote setting. Is that correct?

Katie Cappola:

Yeah, at least for Trenton Youth Orchestra. I would say it's generally the case across programs, too.

Evan Schneider:

So can you talk a little bit about the Saturday morning arts program? And how that has evolved or changed, for a virtual structure?

Katie Cappola:

Yes. The Saturday morning arts program is one component of Trenton Arts at Princeton, which we made sure that I would say also includes the Trenton Arts Fellowship, and there's collaborative projects with the Trenton community. We have a brand new, fresh website detailing those components of Trenton Arts at Princeton as well.

Evan Schneider:

What are the details, what's the URL?

Katie Cappola:

Oh, it's trentonarts.princeton.edu. And it looks fabulous, so I'm very excited about it.

Evan Schneider:

I'll have to check it out.

Katie Cappola:

Yes. So, Saturday morning arts includes the Trenton Youth Orchestra, the Trenton Youth Singers, and the Trenton Youth Dancers. They're all similarly structured. It's various members from Trenton area schools, and well, they used to come in person on Saturdays for some group programming. I know Trenton Youth Orchestra also did the private lessons, on top of that.

Katie Cappola:

Trenton Youth Singers is working to design a virtual structure for the fall. I don't have many connections with Trenton Youth Dancers, but they're probably trying to continue some kind of connection as well.

Evan Schneider:

It's pretty challenging to imagine any of that in an online setting. So cello tutoring, or cell training online, what does that look like? I can't even picture it.

Katie Cappola:

So what it looks like is I stick my computer on the table and try to get my full cello in view, and my student does the same.

Evan Schneider:

This has to be pretty far away from the computer.

Katie Cappola:

Yeah, not ridiculously far. Sometimes, he tilts it down so I can look at where the bow is, and tilt it up so I can look specifically at his fingers. But, usually I can see the full cello, if not the full cello and his face, so that's the visual component of it.

Katie Cappola:

The biggest issue with it, from a technical standpoint, is definitely the audio. We use Zoom, it works fairly well. Sometimes things get smoothed over, or skipped over, there's a delay. We just try to work around that. Another thing that's pretty different is it's harder to look at positioning. So one thing I've

been doing more often is, after he does something, I ask him how it felt from a physical perspective, in terms of tension and things like that.

Katie Cappola:

But, apart from that, we go through the same routine as we did during our lessons in person. Warmups, and scales, and repertoire, and focusing in on different aspects of technique, and phrases, and things like that.

Evan Schneider:

So it sounds like you're doing a pretty good job of replicating an in-person experience, but it's definitely not the same. I guess I would just ask, why bother trying to do it remotely?

Katie Cappola:

I think there are a couple reasons. Some are social, and some are more music oriented.

Katie Cappola:

One reason is quarantine can be lonely, and this was a group activity that wasn't for school, you're not getting graded, we joke around a lot. People, the volunteers, the students, they're friends, so we miss seeing each other in that setting. So that's one reason to continue it, even if the quality of music education might be somewhat different. Though, I think I'd like to say we're holding it to a high standard, given the circumstances especially.

Katie Cappola:

Also, I actually sent out a survey asking members of TYO what do they miss most about in-person gatherings, and what do they enjoy most about the online gatherings we had through the spring. A lot of them said social reasons, seeing people. Others said it gives them a reason to practice their instrument, it gives them goals since they're no longer playing. The school orchestra concerts were canceled. Yeah, it's a lot easier to keep doing something you love if you have a goal, so I think that's why.

Evan Schneider:

Have you all done any fun videos or something like that, where everyone's playing the same song but everyone records it separately and then all together, it sounds like an orchestra?

Katie Cappola:

The coaches, I believe, actually put together a video for the graduating senior members of Trenton Youth Orchestra, to Pomp and Circumstance, which was just exactly that. We haven't done something stitching together all the members yet I think our recital in August is going to be primarily consisting of solos and duets. But, it's something we're definitely thinking about, and we've seen some videos out there that are really cool. We'll see, we'll see.

Evan Schneider:

Yeah, it seems like it would be a difficult thing to plan and execute, but pretty fun to watch if possible.

Evan Schneider:

All right, well in terms of the continued programming, I think it makes sense, especially with this program in particular, to try to make it work if you can, because the relationships that you're building. And I'm not surprised to hear you say it's not just a reason to practice their instrument. It is, but it's really more the social aspect of getting to hang out with somebody who's developed a relationship with them. That's a very meaningful thing for anyone, but especially someone middle school, high school age, who doesn't necessarily have contact with a college age student, someone who can act as a mentor, someone who can be a positive influence in their lives.

Evan Schneider:

I know that Lou spent so much time, when they set up the orchestra several years ago, building that trust, building those relationships, being there consistently, that if this had falling through the cracks, you'd have to start over from ground zero. That's daunting, and tough.

Evan Schneider:

So do you have any success stories, or favorite memories from the summer, of being with the students, or being with your tutee, Brandon, that you'd like to share that come to mind?

Katie Cappola:

Yeah, I have a couple.

Katie Cappola:

One of them is related to a surprising benefit we discovered to virtual programming. We were doing a movement workshop, and it involves moving around in ways that require you to put yourself out there. But, since we were doing it over Zoom, people could just turn off their cameras. I think Lou spotlighted someone, so that it was only focused on that person and everyone else could just do it on their own, without worrying about embarrassing themselves in front of their peers or anything like that. I was participating in this, and I turned off my camera and moved around to the music. So that's one benefit, I think, because we weren't really expecting to find something on Zoom that was better, in any way, than the in-person experience. It's cool to discover that.

Evan Schneider:

Yeah. When we meet as a staff ... Well, not as a whole staff, but our team at the Pace Center, there's a group of five of us that are on a team together. Lou's on that team, and his thing is he likes to do the potato head.

Katie Cappola:

That's very on brand.

Evan Schneider:

It's just so weird. The fact that it's wavy. Why is it wavy? It's supposed to be a potato. It's very strange. But, it always makes me laugh, it's good stuff.

Katie Cappola:

Yeah, so Zoom can be fun.

Katie Cappola:

In a private lesson, a success story there is trying to work out ... Brandon had a question about positioning. Brandon's great, he always speaks up when something feels wrong. He's very observant of his own playing. So we were trying to rotate the camera, and trying to figure out what height to make the end pin on the cello, and we eventually got it to work. It felt like a moment of great success.

Katie Cappola:

A third success story is when, before summer TYO had even started, and I sent out this survey to the members of TYO, all them seemed really excited about the prospect of coming back, which is just great to hear. Because I know when you're stuck at home, the prospect of doing anything structured can just feel tedious. There was one particular response from a girl named Perla, she wrote this long response about why she loves TYO, and an idea she had for a game we could play. I don't know, it was very heartwarming to read.

Evan Schneider:

That's sweet. I run programming, and it's always fun to read the evaluations because, just in life, people don't say thank you very often. They may feel thankful, but they just don't express it a lot. Reading evaluations, or getting notes like that, is a great way to see where someone's coming from, and be able to understand them a little bit better. And also, see the results of the work that you're doing. It's really cool to get those notes.

Evan Schneider:

We ask everyone the same last two questions, Katie. We do it because we want to give you an opportunity to talk about what you're feeling really passionate about. But then, that can be, often, something not so great going on in the world that you feel not necessarily positive things about. So then, we ask about hope as well. I guess, the first one is what are you feeling passionate about right now?

Katie Cappola:

I'm personally feeling passionate about being less passive and speaking up, and communication in general. I think during quarantine especially, it's really easy to sit in a room and think to yourself that a particular issue doesn't involve you. Even reaching out to check in on someone could take a conscious effort. Reading the news, staying connected, things like that, it does take an effort. It's really motivating to see the ways people are uniting, despite those barriers.

Katie Cappola:

I guess, I'm passionate about that in the sense that it gives me energy to do the same thing. Yeah, I'm passionate about speaking up.

Evan Schneider:

Do you have anything you want to say to your peers who may hear this, about speaking up?

Katie Cappola:

Don't be afraid to ask questions, and don't be afraid to get it wrong. That's what I'd say.

Evan Schneider:

Cool, thanks. What are you feeling hopeful about right now?

Katie Cappola:

I said this before, but the fact that people are doing this, and showing solidarity, and I'm seeing even on social media, people are using their personal accounts to post links to resources, telling people to call various numbers for Black Lives Matter, call various numbers, make sure people are voting this fall. That gives me hope that people have decided they're going to take this effort to try to push for change.

Evan Schneider:

Well, I want to ask you about voting. I think the perspective of most young people from older generations is that young people don't vote, they're not politically engaged, or they may say a lot but they don't follow through in the voting piece. Obviously, that's not 100% true, ever. But, do you feel like there is more of an interest in voting, among your peers?

Katie Cappola:

The peers I've seen, I would say yes. I can't speak for the population as a whole, but I'm hopeful that might be the case for the population as a whole, as well.

Evan Schneider:

Well, here's hoping.

Katie Cappola:

Yeah.

Evan Schneider:

We need a politically engaged populous. Whatever your political leanings are, we need people who are at least paying attention, and care enough to show up and vote for someone.

Evan Schneider:

Well thank you, Katie, so much for joining us. Thank you for the work that you're doing on TAP, both as an intern and a volunteer. I hope to see you more this year, and hear more about the program.

Katie Cappola:

Thank you.

Evan Schneider:

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