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For a Well Played Life

Board Member Spotlight: Ebony Lee

December 2021...Ebony Lee, a current Board Member who also served a 4-year term as Board Chair through June 2021, was first introduced to Musicopia in 2010 through her participation in Leadership Philadelphia, a program that harnesses the talent of the private sector to serve the community. That introduction to Musicopia, however, was not her first introduction to the power of music. Because of her own positive experience with the impact that music had on her as a child, she knew that she wanted to serve on the Board of an organization that was committed to children and education.

Ebony was one of six children raised by a single mother. Her mom played the violin, and Ebony and her siblings all learned instruments as well (Ebony took piano lessons). "I didn't know at the time how hard that probably was for my mom, because we all had private instructors through the Community Music School in Springfield, Massachusetts. I later learned that the school subsidized our lessons over a period of time," said Ebony. "We all grew up with music in the house, so the importance of the arts was really pronounced. I truly believe that learning to play an instrument is not about becoming the best musician, but rather, it's about committing to something, being disciplined, and expressing yourself in a different way and giving yourself something to be proud of."

Ebony served as a Board Observer for a year before formally joining the Musicopia Board. "I remember being blown away by the work Musicopia was doing, and it reminded me of my experience at the Community Music School and the impact it had on me," Ebony said. "Because of the work that Musicopia was doing and because of Denise Kinney's leadership [executive director at the time], I thought 'this feel likes home. This feels like the right place to be.'"



Ebony (left) with her mom and siblings in a local Springfield, MA story from May, 1990 about the Community Music School

Before Ebony took on the role of Board Chair, she served on the Development Committee, and eventually co-chaired it. She was also on the Board in 2012 when Musicopia and Dancing Classrooms Philly (DCP) became partner organizations with a shared Board of Directors. “I think the work that Musicopia and Dancing Classrooms Philly do give children hope, confidence, and something to be excited about,” said Ebony. “We create opportunities for them – opportunities they may have never thought possible. That may be music and dance today, but they leave with the belief in what’s possible: that there are opportunities and experiences out there that they deserve to have just like anyone else. They have that moment of joy and pride when they successfully play that piece, or complete that dance, but it’s not just about the music and dance itself. It’s about instilling that confidence that they can do whatever they want to do. That, to me, is the impact that we have.”

Ebony brings her strong leadership skills to her work with Musicopia and DCP. Since 2019 she has been the Managing Director of Degree Programs at 2U Inc., a company that powers online degree programs for universities around the country. She oversees all of their online degree programs, manages the P & L (profit and loss), and rates new products to make sure that the company is delivering innovative solutions for their university partners. Prior to her work at 2U, Ebony was Senior Vice President of Strategic Development at Comcast.

“One thing I appreciate about serving on the Musicopia and DCP Board is the opportunity to test my leadership skills in a different way,” said Ebony. “In the private sector I’ve managed teams inside of corporations, and I’ve led major projects and huge transformations. I wanted to use those skills I’ve acquired and bring them to the nonprofit sector. I also want to bring back the skills I learn as a Board Member to my day job.” Some of the nonprofit experience that she has now been able to take back with her to the corporate world includes the art of listening and the art of influencing. “We’re all in it because we have a shared mission and a shared purpose, and so figuring out how to translate that passion to others, to get them excited and interested in this thing you care about, requires you to listen intently to other people’s needs and interests,” said Ebony. “If you’re trying to convince someone to make a donation or to come to a Musicopia or DCP activity, you have to listen to their needs and translate what *you* care about, into what *they* care about.” For Ebony, that also translates to her work in the corporate sector. “When I’m trying to create a new business or product idea, I might be passionate about it and believe it to my core, but if I can’t figure out what the other person cares about and translate it in a way that works for them, then you can’t do it.”

One of Ebony’s proudest accomplishments as Board Chair was making sure that all Board Members felt equally invested in the work of both Musicopia and DCP. “I tried to get the whole Board to feel like we are a Board for both organizations. That is one impact I hope I’ve had. I fundamentally believe in the power of the arts to help kids not just express themselves but to develop skills and capabilities that they need for the rest of their lives.”

By Talia Yellin Fisher