

DeLashea Strawder Interview Transcript

Sara Nishikawa (she/her): Welcome to CultureSource's Music Moment

DeLashea Strawder(she/her): My name is DeLashea Strawder and I'm the Executive and Artistic Director at Mosaic Youth Theatre company where I participated as a young person in high school.

Sara Nishikawa: Where does music play a role in your life outside of your day job?

DeLashea Strawder: So I lean into music as sacred space for me, it's a way that, um, a healing tool and a reflection tool I write all the time and not necessarily for consumption of anyone not even necessarily myself but it's like journaling or diary for me In addition I homeschool I have four tiny humans and not so tiny humans and you know I learned very early that music was a way of helping them to explore and experience the world. So we create together both again for the purposes of exploring our world, but then also to reflect on our emotions, to just enjoy and to dance out and socks in our living room on our wooden floors and trying not to fall. So it's as though it's the way I move about the world and it feels in a lot of ways, like this, this cone of protection that allows me to be my most vulnerable and allows me to show up authentically and all spaces.

Sara Nishikawa: Is there someone that sort of directly influenced your passion for music, maybe a teacher or friends or...?

DeLashea Strawder: I had the privilege of having a music teacher in all of my schools, I went to Detroit public schools and every one of my music teachers were my favorite teacher's while I was in school. For miss rams from early elementary to Mr veteran in middle school showdown sign Catherine owens and sheila sites that dsa and but, in particular Mr veered in I was in the band and McMichael middle school, which no longer exists, and he had this way of pushing me to explore more like he wanted me to be first Chair clarinet and I when I didn't even know what first Chair was. But not in a way that was like you're going to do this or made it where there was this pressure that didn't need to be there, but just exploring music as a way to talk about life and how important it was for me to own my own experience and that through those conversations of wanting, wanting to bring my best musicianship I continue to reflect or wanting to bring my best self to all experiences. so.

Sara Nishikawa: Was there a musician or song that kind of made you say like this is what I want to do?

DeLashea Strawder: Not a musician or a song that that made me consider continuing to use music as a tool to help folks find their voice in and see acknowledge and then embrace their own power, and it was really more of an experience. I was 16 and my music director at mosaic Kenny Anderson at the time invited me to come and teach a class in Southwest Detroit that right to make our recreation Center and I again was 16 so they had to hire an adults to come and sit in the room, with me another mosaic alumni, Megan Lapeer Schloop, and I went through my my my class, if you will, we had a robust conversation we we make music together. There were tears there was lots of laughter, none of which I was expecting I was just planning to go in and teach some songs. And these were all young people that were around my age, some were older than me and, at the end of that first class they told me that it was the best music class that ever they ever been they'd ever been to and that you know it didn't feel like music class it felt

like therapy. And my first reaction was is that a good thing or not so good thing? And that's a good thing, because you know historically in black and brown communities therapy hasn't been something that we've all embraced and when I asked the question, they said no, it was great it's the first time that I felt like myself around kids my age.

And so as a person who grew up feeling like they couldn't be themselves all the time in in spaces that meant a lot to me, and so I went back and talk to the director and shared that with him and told him that you know I definitely wanted to continue doing it and so every opportunity that I got I wanted to be able to help co create those safe spaces with folks my age with folks older than me younger than me and it's probably the single reason why I refuse to give them teaching now even in my role.

Sara Nishikawa: Thank you so much DeLashea. Next up, we'll be hearing her playlist