

How Rock N Roll Tore Down the Walls of Segregation

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"A rope ran right down the center of the seats," said Grammy winning music producer and musician, Steven Buckingham, as he recalled his first concert.

He went to see Sam Cooke and go to see two things that would always remember—the division of the audience into white and black and the power of Cooke's music to bring the groups together.

"By the end of the night, the rope was on the floor," Buckingham said with a smile.

His lecture, "How Rock N Roll Tore Down the Walls of Segregation," was arranged with the PSH office of Student Affairs and Campus Life for Black History month. His more than twenty years in the music industry gave him a unique insight into how Soul, R&B, and Rock and Roll music in the 1950's and 60's worked against segregation.

Buckingham began the evening with a DVD featuring music and

images of the era. He recalled the good and bad moments depicted.

"Unfortunately, I was a witness to this," he said about an image of the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross. "When we'd be traveling at night we'd see the Klan burning crosses in the field."

As a teenager, Buckingham was a guitarist for a VA band that earned a reputation for backing traveling artist. It gave him opportunity to back greats like Jackie Wilson, the Impressions and the Drifters to name a few. It also gave him opportunity to see racism at its worst.

"We were arrested for racial mixing," he said. "They never called it racial mixing but that was the bottom line."

In a later interview, he detailed the first brush with local law officials on the matter. When performing with the Showmen in Norfolk, the police claimed the groups were disturbing the peace. Buckingham added that in such moments, even if you were not arrested, you were hassled.

Buckingham's lecture cites the beginning of music's influence on

the Civil Rights Movement when Benny Goodman hired black musicians for famous swing orchestra.

"In 1935, Benny Goodman hiring a black musician was like Lady Gaga hiring someone from Mars," he emphasized.

He proceeded through the fifties and sixties, mentioning integrationists like Frank Sinatra and the King of Rock and Roll.

"You can't talk about this without talking about Elvis," Steve pointed out how Elvis mimicked black artist like Jackie Wilson in developing his own style.

Buckingham also discussed white disc jockeys like Allen Leeds and Stan Friedman who risked scorn and loss of advertising by playing music by black artists. He also mentioned influential record companies like Stax Records who, with two white owners, signed all black talent.

At the end of the lecture, Buckingham took questions from the audience about integration and the current record industry. Some asked about the influence of hip-hop in the eighties and nineties,

others about specific artists like Ray Charles.

Matthew Perry, 15, of Allentown PA joined the Q&A with an encyclopedic knowledge of music. His family drove him nearly two hours to catch the lecture. His excitement for the event was infectious, inviting Buckingham and listeners to test the young man's knowledge.

When it came to summarizing the information of the evening, Business Management Major, Clifton Johnson may have said it best.

"I never really looked at it as the music being made, or what they (the musicians) went through, or how it could lift the spirits of everyone listening to it," said Johnson.

"Music was the great equalizer of races at that time," added graduate student Curtis W Thompson. "Music should be emphasized more in the classrooms particularly with African American music."

As a music historian, Steve Buckingham teaches a course in Rock 'N' Roll at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of

Music. According to him, he created the course when he a student mentioned that she had no idea of the scope of racism in the sixties. Buckingham knew then that if it was recent enough to happen in his lifetime, he had to share his experiences with the next generation.

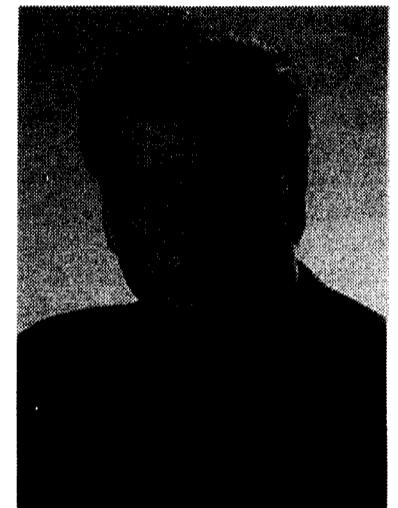


Photo courtesy of the Penn State Harrisburg's web site
Pictured above is Steven Buckingham

THON: Capital Campus helps lift spirits as records break

Continued from page 1

"We're beasts. We're all about the canning," Haney added, perk after only four hours.

When asked about their favorite part of THON, both dancers responded with the same answer: "The line dance."

The line dance is a pre-choreographed step dance set to a simple rhyming beat, summing up the events of the past year, both in the news and around Penn State, and the meaning of THON.

Other Penn State Harrisburg students showed up to cheer on Haney, Legel, and the 400 other dancers.

Members of The Blue and White Society as well as the Lion Ambassadors grouped together in the stands, wearing neon green shirts to notice our campus. Megan Brownley was amongst them, cheering on the dancers.

"They're doing really good." Brownly said, "We've been keeping an eye on them." Unlike the dancers however, Brownley knew when to leave. "We're heading out whenever we fall asleep."

The energy near the Capital Campus crowd never let down. Most never actually sat in their seats, deciding to dance with their fellow students.

Rachel Hanney, Rachel Ranney, a sophomore at PSU-Harrisburg, also showed up, expressing her thoughts on the cause of THON.

"This is an issue that really matters to me, personally." Ranney told the Capital Times. "I feel like I can relate to the families and being here is such a great feeling, that you're actually doing something that matters."

Asking Harrisburg or any other student why they came to THON can get redundant, as they all followed with the same answer:

"For The Kids!"

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