

Trenton Makes Music: the sound of a city

Teresa Marrin Nakra (nakra@tcnj.edu) and Kim Pearson (kpearson@tcnj.edu), The College of New Jersey (Departments of Music, Journalism, and Interactive Multimedia)

Background: Trenton, New Jersey, a city with many challenges, is also is the source of a **remarkable musical playlist** that has been heard around the world. The *Trenton Makes Music* project is a long-term partnership between TCNJ faculty, students, and our neighboring community to document the rich but largely understudied heritage of music making in our city. We have created a **digital archive at trentonmakesmusic.org** containing oral history interviews, podcasts, and extensive media artifacts to help us tell the stories of Trenton music professionals and to articulate the role of music as an important driver of cultural memory, identity, and economic development. As a result of this work, we have identified that **Trenton's music is characterized by considerable cross-fertilization between musicians working across genres, communities, and neighborhoods.** We have also documented the **substantial investment in music education** that the city made over the past 75 years, producing a series of successful music professionals over that period.

Research question: These observations have led us to pose a research question about whether **there might be a 'Trenton sound,'** the way that certain cities are described as having a unique 'sound.' (For example: Nashville, Philadelphia, or Detroit within certain time periods and genres.) **Given that Music Information Retrieval and Machine Learning tools are getting increasingly sophisticated at determining perceptually significant musical features, we hypothesize that it might now be possible to use software tools to determine the exact mix of characteristics that defines a regional 'sound' or stylistic signature.** We hope to discuss this idea with audio researchers to determine specific algorithms or approaches (i.e., a kind of musical genomic analysis linked to physical, educational, or cultural variables) to identify structural commonalities in the music produced by Trenton artists.