

Interview with Issac Lanier, Tony DeVaughn, and Nolan Crawley
Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama
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[00:02:50] **Beth McGinnis** Hi this is Beth McGinnis. I'm at Samford University um for an interview together with Mr. Isaac Lanier, Dr. Tony DeVaughan, and Mr. Nolan Crawley. And with us today helping with the interview are Sarah Harbaugh and Samuel Robertson. So, um, we are so glad that you're here today. Could I get us started with one, um, question and then I'll turn it over to Samuel and Sarah. So, um, Mr. Lanier and Mr. DeVaughn, would you just tell us a little bit about how our partnership together got started and where it's gone from there?

[00:02:50] **Tony DeVaughn** I remember you reaching out to us last year and we didn't--we never had to reach out to you, you reached straight out to us and with open hands and just tried to help our program as much as possible. And when you get help like that you don't run the other way, when you get help like that you don't not appreciate that help, so you know, you go back to that help. And you know, you build that relationship. And so we built that relationship on, just based off the love that y'all have for the area that we're from and the students that we participate with.

[00:02:50] **Tony DeVaughn** I was an athlete at first. But at this age I'm six foot three two hundred fifty pounds I've always been a big guy but I've always been a little bit mean. I've always been in a band program even though I played sports. I kind of got looked down by my coaches from doing sports. They used to call me Big Flute out on the basketball court "What you doing big flute? Yeah yeah basketball practice when you're at band practice yeah you need to be at basketball practice." I'll be out with somebody on the field but I love the music. It was my first go to and after a while I kind of left sports alone and did, put all my eggs in one basket with the music. And it worked out for me.

[00:03:34] **Issac Lanier** I think with me not being from the south, band was kind of the last stop, to be honest. I played basketball, I played football in New York you know stuff was a lot different. I actually did boxing or wrestling you know that's way bigger than basketball and football, you know that's phenomenal up there. And so when I moved down relocated to the south, I actually saw someone that I just couldn't take my eyes off and she happened to be in a band. And I asked her, I said "whatchu play?" and she said "I play baritone," and I said "oh, well," *knocks on table* "I'm in!" The next morning I said "you got room for me in band?" He said "yeah." So guess I kind of just stuck with it, you know everybody kind of know what they wanted to do and what they wanted to be on the team and once I kind of figured that out not being from the area I say well let me just stick with this band thing, you know. I can get my shine on with this and I made a promise to myself that by the time I made it to college or graduated from high school everybody would know what the marching baritone was because it was not a popular instrument at all.

[00:04:44] **Tony DeVaughn** That we call. No we call it...

[00:04:47] **Issac Lanier** There's like a fourth trombone in there. Baritone didn't really have an identity.

[00:04:52] **Nolan Crawley** I mean I'm not involved in a music program, but I am involved in arts programs. Lanier and I are working together trying to get a lot more funding for our schools and a whole mess of artistic programs. I'm from New York too. I know I was kind

of artsy kid. I'm a Teach for America teacher. So that's why I'm down here in rural Alabama, if that matters to you or anything.

[00:05:12] **Samuel Robertson** Can you tell us about some of what you're doing to try to find funding or just talk about that situation?

[00:05:17] **Nolan Crawley** A number of artistic programs specifically out of Selma and other communities in the black belt but specifically Selma, the city of Selma that work with low income communities trying to get them funding for our programs to, for any number of reasons.

[00:05:31] **Samuel Robertson** But you're a history professor?

[00:05:33] **Nolan Crawley** English and history I teach both 9th through 12th English and history. So I mean but I love literature and I try to teach from an artistic standpoint at all times.

[00:05:40] **Samuel Robertson** How'd you end up in Alabama from New York?

[00:05:43] **Nolan Crawley** When I was applying for Teach for America I was like "sure, fill me anywhere," and here I am.

[00:05:50] **Samuel Robertson** Awesome.

[00:05:50] **Sarah Harbaugh** You mentioned funding and I know, Mr. DeVaughn you've recently had a lot of funding help for new instruments and your band has those new instruments...

[00:06:00] **Tony DeVaughn** Yes, they're blessed to...

[00:06:02] **Sarah Harbaugh** Has that increased the amount of students interested in the band?

[00:06:06] **Tony DeVaughn** Yes it's it's it's freed up a lot of instruments for people to be able to join. I had at one point I had more students that wanted to join the band than instruments that were there. So now, now that I have the instruments maybe I'll have more students that pour in as well.

[00:06:22] **Issac Lanier** And before we go on I had to make sure I say our principals and our superintendent is a major support because a lot of school systems they don't have the proper support for whatever reason. You know I'm not going to speculate on it but I can say it just this past year, of course our principals have to be on the same accord to allowed this program to have both our bands combine, but also our superintendent banded together to buy like 90 percent of Concordia College's instruments to be able to help them expand us and let us split them.

[00:06:56] **Tony DeVaughn** We were on the news recently at Concordia from their liquidation sale that they did on their instruments. We got a chance to talk about how much it helped out our program as well.

[00:07:05] **Issac Lanier** So it's a blessing when you can just call your superintendent and say "hey, we're trying to build a band. You know we want to make a better program. You

know, can you get us these horns?" And he said "go get 'em." You don't you don't you don't get that often. And I mean these are sousaphones we're talking about. Brass instruments, things that cost six thousand dollars apiece. So you know we're blessed to have that as well.

[00:07:29] **Tony DeVaughn** On top of our technology packages that we have in Perry County, in Perry County we have every student has an iPad, every student, every teacher has a MacBook, Apple TV. Those are the things that they look for first and foremost priority wise is the technology, but for them to be able to look out look out for us as well with the music is a blessing. Because we look we get looked over so often.

[00:07:58] **Issac Lanier** Both of the basketball teams are area champs, returning area champs, let me say that. So yeah, Perry County has a lot of positive things going on in Perry County, despite what people are saying.

[00:08:09] **Tony DeVaughn** Best kept secret.

[00:08:10] **Beth McGinnis** Tell me a little bit, oh I'm sorry. I've talked with both of you a little bit. I'm sorry Mr. Crawley haven't talked with you as much. I've talked with both of you about the rivalry and competition between your two schools but also this great collaboration that you have. So could you tell me a little bit about how you balance that how you keep both of those energies going?

[00:08:35] **Issac Lanier** Well we don't really have to talk about the competitive part because I think that's inbred within the county you know like we're kind of just inherited,

[00:08:43] **Tony DeVaughan** to the area.

[00:08:45] **Issac Lanier** Yeah, we just inherited the rivalry. You know cuz we were brothers long before you know we didn't like we planned this is just maybe a God idea.

[00:08:56] **Tony DeVaughn** Yeah.

[00:08:57] **Issac Lanier** But balance it off, I think we just all put our best foot forward and make sure that we're all teaching our kids you know important values such as sportsmanship, musicianship, leadership, and academic attainment.

[00:09:10] **Beth McGinnis** Mhm.

[00:09:13] **Issac Lanier** You got anything to add to that?

[00:09:13] **Tony DeVaughn** I feel like when they see us connect, it makes them want to connect too. If they saw us put on and be negative towards each other it'll make them be negative towards each other. Once they see us vibe and be positive and don't throw shade they they have a better vibe between each other. They want to learn from each other's way.

[00:09:32] **Issac Lanier** We just keep it like that because it's getting to the point now where if we're together I don't have kids that's nervous saying "hey, Mr. DeVaughn I need help with," or "can you show me this," or you know everybody is fully accepted of our knowledge.

[00:09:45] **Tony DeVaughn** And, likewise, likewise my students respond to him just like they respond to me.

[00:09:52] **Beth McGinnis** Yeah, I can see that, I can see that when you're here. Sorry, you guys were about to ask something.

[00:09:56] **Samuel Robertson** Well, Mr. Lanier I was just a little curious about, have you noticed how things are, if anything's like different in the south have you, especially with music or band or...

[00:10:09] **Issac Lanier** Especially, I'm going to be honest, up north is more... I don't really have an adjective to describe it but, in the south you know marching band is very big, whereas if you go to a football game at Albany where I'm from, you don't see a band at all. You know if there's not an audience cheering people on, this game is quiet unless you hear the helmets and the shoulder pads clacking together. Other than that you know...

[00:10:31] **Tony DeVaughn** A loud speaker or a DJ

[00:10:32] **Issac Lanier** it's silence. When I first joined the band and came to decide, I mean, drumline was just coming out. So you know. Half times you know that wasn't the time to go get your hotdog you go get that within the last two minutes of playing because once the halftime show you know nobody's moving and all. That was weird to me. So. I knew there was something special about it. I just couldn't wrap my finger around it.

[00:10:53] **Tony DeVaughn** You brought up the movie drum line, drum line played such a huge role in our era of musicians becoming musicians. That movie came out in like 2001 2002. We would have been in the fourth and fifth grade. That's the start of you know when you would start to learn the instrument. I joined the band after watching that movie not to mention I had a band members all throughout my family but after watching that movie

[00:11:20] **Issac Lanier** Immediately after,

[00:11:20] **Tony DeVaughn** it made a lot of our era want to join the band.

[00:11:23] **Issac Lanier** Everybody wanted to play the drums, everybody wanted to be in the band you know, everybody wanted to faceoff. Have that competition so yeah.

[00:11:30] **Tony DeVaughn** I credit that movie a lot for you know just the

[00:11:34] **Issac Lanier** definitely an epidemic

[00:11:34] **Tony DeVaughn** for the upcome of musicians.

[00:11:37] **Beth McGinnis** Now I'm going to have to go watch the movie Drumline.

[00:11:41] **Issac Lanier** If you see me in Drumline 2, just shoot me a text message.

[00:11:42] **Beth McGinnis** Ok haha.

[00:11:48] **Samuel Robertson** So, obviously marching band is your focus. What do you guys do on the offseason when there's no football?

[00:11:52] **Tony DeVaughn** I try to definitely run through a lot of the basics that they don't go get to go over like that during the marching season because during the marching season after school like I never see all of my students during the day first of all.

[00:12:06] **Issac Lanier** I think both our situations are real similar with that which you know having a small rural area you only have so many students but we're not in a position really to be political and say hey you got to be in the band you can't play basketball because we don't know whether we're looking at the next symphonic director or we're looking at the next NBA star. So it's kind of hard to say what you can and can't do.

[00:12:27] **Tony DeVaughn** Or the next track star or the next chess champion because every student does every extracurricular when you have a 1A school like we are, the same students do everything. You got those students at the school that do you know that won't participate in anything but you got your set maybe 20 25 that's in every

[00:12:50] **Issac Lanier** honor society, they're in band, they do basketball, football, track, baseball you know whatever's available...

[00:12:54] **Tony DeVaughn** So it's almost impossible to share those students throughout the semester. So what I like to do in the concert season is take time and really, hey, sit down. This is this this is that. And by the time we put all the basics together for the next marching season they know the part.

[00:13:14] **Issac Lanier** Yeah, this is like things have to be done a little differently.

[00:13:16] **Tony DeVaughn** We have to rush it so bad during the final because it's got to be a show out there. Because if it's not a show out there...

[00:13:22] **Issac Lanier** Yeah, we gonna, we gonna hear about it.

[00:13:25] **Samuel Robertson** Do anything over the summer?

[00:13:28] **Tony DeVaughn** I usually start two maybe to one week before school starts with a small camp. I run a camp from one o'clock to six o'clock in the afternoon that works for my students because you've got cheerleaders that's in the back that all practice from 8 to 12. So I try to work out the time to where hey you here from my rehearsal but you also where you need to be as well to be able to manage your time. And that's one of my students' main, main rules of being in the band. If you're in anything else it's hard, I tell them this all the time it's hard serving two God's. It's hard. But if you're in two extracurriculars, manage your time.

[00:14:09] **Issac Lanier** I do a pre-camp because, this might sound lazy but it is what it is. I feel like I work very very hard during the year from the month of August to the last day of May. And I talk to Dr. McGinnis a lot you know sometimes even if it has nothing to do with Samford sometime I may ask her for advice because there's always been me you know respect your elders I was always really old fashioned so what I do is after spring break you know everybody go let their hair down and when they come back to school, by then I've already assessed who wants to be in the band because I only accept the best not the rest. You know I only want you to do it if you want to do it. I'm not going to force anything down your throat. I can do it and you will still be great. But imagine how great you will be if you actually wanted to be here.

[00:14:52] **Tony DeVaughn** Want it for yourself.

[00:14:53] **Issac Lanier** And you wanted to do it so what I do is I recruit, I find out wants to do it. You know you have to filter them out and after spring break I do after school rehearsals for maybe like an hour and I would do like upper brass one day I would do lower brass one day, one day working with percussion. Then I would have maybe like one day you know at the end of every two week period where I would take a combine because I would have like beginning literature that they will play you know little chorals and little stuff like that. And to be able to hear other things. It's a long process but I think it's worth it. So I do that pretty much at the end of the school year and there's kind of like my band camp because even after band camp you exercise every day with me. The things we do at band camp I'm doing them every day. So when we do them it's like it's almost like breathing. You know what's up.

[00:15:44] **Samuel Robertson** I remember we did an interview with Cathy Trimble last year and she talked about how it was kind of hard to get students to stay after school because their primary source of transportation was the school bus. Do you find that a problem in the summer and afterschool?

[00:15:59] **Tony DeVaughn** Most definitely. Like if this is I know we on podcast and I don't need to give a visual but if this is Marion and this is Union Town and the schools are in each city, you may have a student that stays right here and it takes an hour and a half to get to the house or you know or far ways to get to the house and that may be the only source of transportation so you know.

[00:16:23] **Issac Lanier** And you have other casualties that you just can't even account for such as car troubles or emergencies parents being at work anything.

[00:16:33] **Tony DeVaughn** Siblings having to take care of a sibling, you name it. They live response, well they have to be responsible once they leave school. Like live very grown lives once they leave school with the responsibilities that they have.

[00:16:50] **Samuel Robertson** Do you have the school buses running over the summer? Like I feel like it would be much harder to get them there.

[00:16:54] **Tony DeVaughn** It would it would be almost impossible. Almost impossible to let the buses run over the summer. I've known schools that do it with the like even in Birmingham, Birmingham does a camp up here for a week every year at Carter High School, but they send those buses out but it's through the board. If the board approves of it, hey, we would live it but...

[00:17:19] **Issac Lanier** Yeah, I mean maybe you guys can take and give us some doc and help us out and maybe because like I say we have a supportive system I feel like if we came to them correct, you know numbers and residuals and processes as well as projected results, you know they would be likely to do things. We do things differently but we still come out the same way. He's really keen on concert, whereas where I came from I get a lot of marching. He has an excellent symphonic band and I have a superior rated marching band. But either way we still combine able to still do the same thing. So maybe that's something we could shoot for in the future.

[00:17:57] **Samuel Robertson** This is maybe more for Mr. Crawley but how do you see the other arts being implemented like visual art or dance or whatever it is?

[00:18:06] **Nolan Crawley** I am also teach a drama elective. So I mean obviously music and drama mix so well together and I think a lot of the issues that we face, I think you can attest to it, is just simply lack of money in our schools. We could like--the talent is there. The skills are there no matter what people say about our students. They're incredible. I can attest to that because I spend so much time with them.

[00:18:26] **Issac Lanier** Some of the band members and some of the people downstairs are beginners and you wouldn't even know it.

[00:18:30] **Nolan Crawley** Incredible stuff and the same thing with my students like right. Like you always hear about like rural test scores and how low they are. My students benchmark on ACT growth in the 9th grade. Like they if you if you put in the work they can produce the results that you need. Which is why we're working so hard to get funding. So I mean the possibilities of working with music and the visual arts, like I did sculpture, I was just a sculpture minor in my art school that I went to New York. So it's like we can put--I have tons of friends in the TFA program always working with musicians trying to set up like public shows and like garage bands or whatever. But down here you can apply that same sort of stuff down here and I'm sure we come to something fantastic like props for shows, you could do things for football or basketball because they're so huge down here. Something I can also atest to is a sense of community down here in the south that just doesn't exist up north. And I think if you give especially somebody these like kids who just lack the resources to express themselves artistically in a way that they can't because they just lack the resources, beautiful things will happen.

[00:19:23] **Issac Lanier** I don't think I could've said it no better. Now you see why we get along.

[00:19:28] **Beth McGinnis** Yeah I'm glad you came.

[00:19:29] **Tony DeVaughn** Me on the other hand at Frances, I am the only, the only fine art in the school so without coming to my class, without coming to see me for at least band or music theater which is my other class that I teach, you won't have a fine art credit to graduate. There's no choir, no strings, no visual art.

[00:19:51] **Issac Lanier** We are the music in fine arts in Perry County to say, to be honest

[00:19:57] **Beth McGinnis** And that's your music appreciation class, Mr. DeVaughn, the way that you've organized it, is it still two hours a day for a semester that every student takes?

[00:20:08] **Tony DeVaughn** Yes, close to two hours. The class starts around 9:20, yeah 9:20ish and that class lets out at 11:22. Yeah it's about two hours.

[00:20:16] **Beth McGinnis** And so everybody, that's one way that they get their fine arts credit or they're in band or their do music theatre?

[00:20:22] **Tony DeVaughn** Yes, and they've actually switched my curriculum since last year I was teaching music appreciation where I had a curriculum book but now I teach music theater and it's new to me, it's a new curriculum. Being a band director was kind of you know outside my comfort zone. But I kinda teach it as a sort of a movie quiz class. Where I have Broadway movies that I show them that I loved as a child and break it down,

interpret it to them, the dialogues, the songs, you name it and we test out on. We just did a Phantom of the Opera vs Phantom of The Opera comparison, there's so many different versions of that movie. We've done the Wizard of Oz versus The Wiz, we've done the Temptations versus the Five Heartbeats.

[00:21:12] **Issac Lanier** Oh that's a good one.

[00:21:13] **Tony DeVaughn** And right now we're on Dreamgirls studying the 1982 Dreamgirls versus the 2006 with Beyonce and Jennifer Hudson and Eddie Murphy all those other characters.

[00:21:24] **Issac Lanier** I think with my extra one, I do music technology. I know a lot of kids they talk about they want to rap, they want to sing, they want to do this ok well let's show you how to properly do it. Do you know what a hook is? Do you know what a chorus is, do you know what an adlib is, let's talk about percussion kids. You know this really get down to the technicality of it instead of you saying "I made a beat, I like the way it sounds." Let's talk about the tempo, wavelength, frequency, you know different stuff like that. I actually have a playlist where two semesters straight where they've made like an album you know. So this is let's say we make do with what we have.

[00:22:04] **Beth McGinnis** That's wonderful. I want to continue this conversation, we probably ought to transition because we're due on the stage at 1:45, in ten minutes so. But thank you so much for speaking with us today and we'll keep talking.