

# HISTORY AND HERITAGE

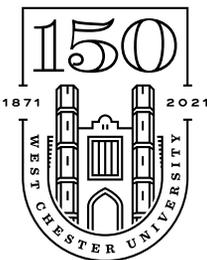
150 YEARS



## ✦ THE MUSIC TRADITION ✦

As West Chester University prepares to mark its 150th year, we will periodically feature a retrospective of some of the pillars on which our institution's foundation is built.

For this initial installment, the Wells School of Music and the music programs take center stage. Visit the WCU 150<sup>th</sup> website for a longer version of this feature.



**WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY**



## NORMAL SCHOOL ERA

The music program was part of the original curriculum when the West Chester Normal School opened in September 1871. Piano and melodeon lessons cost extra the first year but all elementary students were given vocal lessons free of charge.

Normal School student and faculty recitals drew public audiences. Student choruses and instrumental groups were regularly invited to perform at local social events.





## THE ROARING '20S

The department of music was established when two faculty members were hired in 1921 as the Normal School's director and assistant director of music, respectively: Claude Hausknecht and Gertrude Schmidt (for whom a residence hall is named). In September 1922, the first five students entered the brand-new music education program to become music teachers or supervisors.

In 1923, the Normal School established the state's first summer music school for both the Normal students and public school teachers.

School bands played at dances that were held weekly in the gymnasium. Larry Ginter '26 later became known as the father of The Criterions for forming the first campus jazz band, which was known in the 1930s as the Purple and Gold Criterions.

## BECOMING A SCHOOL OF MUSIC

A year after the school became West Chester State Teachers College, the music curriculum expanded in 1928 to include a four-year bachelor of science in music education degree.

Lloyd Mitchell chaired the department of music from 1951 to 1967. During his tenure, the programs achieved accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music in 1958; a graduate program in music education was added in 1959; a new music building — Swope Hall, now called 25 University Avenue — was completed in 1960; the Music Department introduced the bachelor of music and the bachelor of arts in music degrees, officially enabling the department to become the School of Music in 1967. Mitchell (for whom Mitchell Hall is named) became West Chester's first dean of the School of Music, serving in that role until 1971. Charles A. Sprenkle succeeded him as dean 1971-1979.

# THE MARCHING BAND GROWS

As early as 1889, WCSNS documents reference a “Normal Band” and photos of some of that group’s iterations are in the University’s older yearbooks.

The Marching Band benefitted from increased enrollment when the Normal School transitioned to the WC State Teachers College in 1927. In the 1930s, S. Powell Middleton assumed leadership. Following World War II, Mr. Paul Carson and Dr. Alexander Antonowich shared the directorship. The band gained exposure when the football team began playing college division sports. In the 1940s in particular, national audiences were treated to its performances when the band accompanied the football team to bowl games: 1947 Burley Bowl; 1948 Cigar Bowl; and later, the 1968 Tangerine Bowl.

In 1968, Dr. James Wells ’54 became the Director of the Marching Band, succeeding Mr. Richard Boerlin. Wells’ leadership corresponded with an era of significant change in marching style and drill design. In the summer of 1970, Wells founded the West Chester State College (later University) Marching Band and Band Front Conference for directors to develop effective teaching techniques. Soon, the band was regularly performing at Philadelphia Eagles home games each season. In the winter of 1970-71, the band shone at the American Football League Championships at Shea Stadium.

Perhaps the biggest change during this era occurred in 1974: The band admitted women for the first time.

Today’s Incomparable Golden Rams Marching Band numbers more than 300 students — more than half of whom are *not* music majors. The band has become the first Division II institution marching band to receive the Sudler Trophy since the first award was presented to the University of Michigan in 1982.



## CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP

In 1979 the position of dean of the School of Music was replaced by a coordinator of the School of Music. James D. Sullivan served in that role from 1979 to 1982. The title was later changed to director of the School of Music and then, assistant dean for music. Irving H. Cohen was acting director 1982-1983, and Sullivan returned as director of the School of Music and assistant dean for music, 1983-1987.

The position of dean of the School of Music was reinstated in 1987 and has remained the title for the head of the School of Music.

During the tenure of Timothy V. Blair, who was dean from 1997 to 2017, the designation All-Steinway School was given to West Chester in 2006 and, in 2007, music faculty, staff, and students moved into the new School of Music and the Performing Arts Center adjacent to E.O. Bull Center. At that time, Blair was overseeing not only the music departments but also the departments of Art + Design and Theatre & Dance as dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts.

In the current arrangement, the Wells School of Music stands as one of WCU's two schools, the other being the Graduate School.

Christopher Hanning became dean in 2017.



Richard G. Wells '58 (left) and Dr. James R. Wells '54

## PRESENT DAY

Today, the school is known as the Wells School of Music (WSOM) after a gift of \$3 million, the largest in WCU's history, was presented by two brothers, Dr. James Wells '54 and Richard Wells '58, who were both music educators. James Wells led WCU's Marching Band from 1968 to 1992.

The Wells School of Music offers one of the largest music programs in Pennsylvania and is one of the most respected in the nation. As the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education's only music school, the Wells School of Music graduates more music teachers than any other Pennsylvania university.

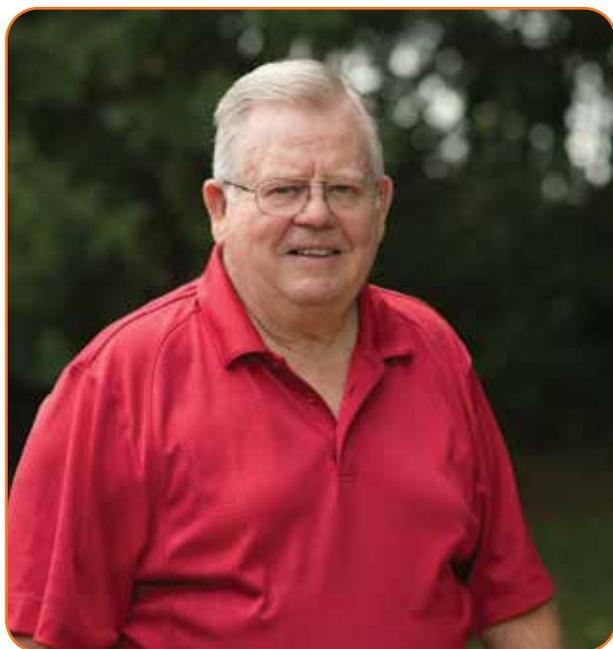
Approximately 425 undergrad and grad students are enrolled in

the WSOM's five departments: Ensembles and Conducting; Instrumental Music; Music Education and Music Therapy; Music Theory, History, and Composition; and Vocal and Keyboard Music. Master of music programs lead to graduate degrees in music education, performance, music history or music theory/composition, and piano pedagogy.

The newest program, a bachelor of music in music therapy, welcomed its first students this fall (2020). The program is designed to train students to work with clients through the entire life span, from neonatal through hospice care.



WELLS SCHOOL OF MUSIC ALUMNI AND RETIRED FACULTY REMEMBER



**Dick Merrell '60, B.S. Music Education**

Faculty: 1968-1991, Music Education  
Chair of Music Education Department: 1983-91

“**W**hen I was a student, I knew every faculty member because there were only 20 or 22. The instruction was excellent and we were always performing. My major instrument was piano, and I studied with Lloyd Mitchell, the dean of the School of Music, for whom Mitchell Hall was named.

“When I chaired the Music Education Department, rather than have student teachers start classroom observations in their senior year, we started sending them out into the public schools the second semester of their sophomore year and when they were juniors.

“Both the students and their supervising teachers out in the field said they were so much better prepared to actually teach.”



**H. Lee Southall '64, B.S. Music Education**

Faculty: 1967-2003, Instrumental Faculty,  
Trombone Studio, Jazz Coordinator  
Member, Wells School of Music Advisory Board

“**I** came to West Chester after playing in a U.S. Navy band for three years. The old Swope Hall [now 25 University Avenue] had just opened, and it was so new that the professors had no chalk boards and we sat on the floor because there were no chairs.

“In my senior year, I led the Criterions Jazz Ensemble which was student-led then, and while I was a professor, I became the faculty director of the Criterions, started the WCU Jazz Festival, the WCU Friends of Jazz, and the Annual Criterions Alumni Reunion Concert, which has become such a joyous experience. Regardless of our age differences, we just have a good time playing the music we love.

“Also, when I go back to West Chester today and hear the various student ensembles, I’m just amazed. The quality keeps getting better and better. I think the school is really solid. There’s a unity among the faculty and Chris Hanning, the dean, is really respected by students and faculty alike.”

## WELLS SCHOOL OF MUSIC ALUMNI AND RETIRED FACULTY REMEMBER



### Jim Sullivan '66, B.S. Music Education

Faculty: 1967-2003,  
Music Theory and Composition  
Coordinator, Director and Dean of the  
School of Music: 1979-88

“When I was a student my major instrument was the organ, and the emphasis then, as it is today, was on building the musician first, no matter which degree program. If your students see that you are also a good performer, you will endear yourself to them.

“Important developments since I was a student include the addition of many majors that previously didn’t exist, such as percussion, guitar, saxophone, jazz, theory, and composition. The teaching has become much more specialized, with professors — many of whom are nationally recognized — no longer splitting their time between their areas of expertise and other classes. The performing ensembles are some of the finest nationwide, no doubt.”



### Jane Pippart-Brown '69, Music Education

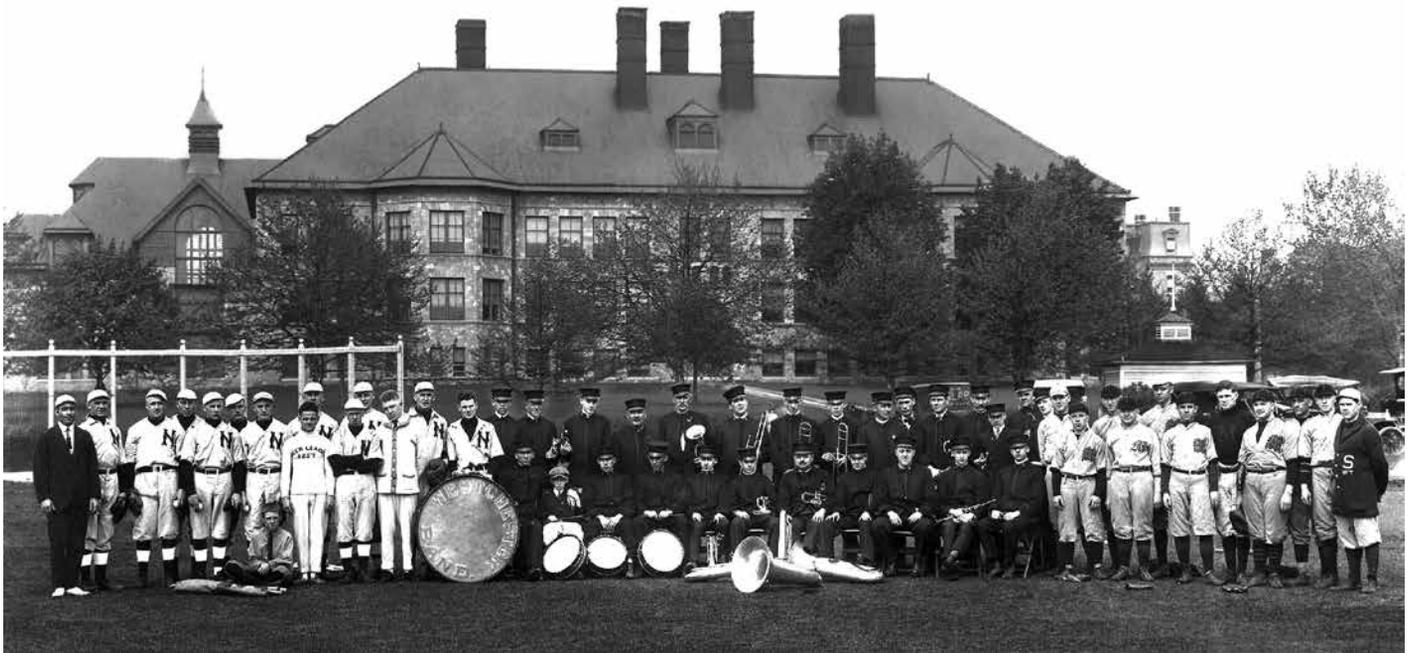
Adjunct Faculty: 1980-87  
Faculty: 1987-2004  
Chair of Music Education Department:  
2000-2004

“I felt all my School of Music teachers were fantastic. The atmosphere had more of a conservatory feel than that of an education school. When Dick Merrell arrived in 1968, he started to upgrade music education, as I and my music education colleagues did as well. It got to be as good on the educational practice side as the performance side, which, especially with the Criteria jazz band and the marching band, has always been a big deal at West Chester.

“There was a great collegiality between the music performance and education teachers, and I never felt more honored than when I was the chair of Music Education Department. I miss it. I loved it.”

Next issue's 150th anniversary history feature will focus on the College of Health Sciences and the College of the Sciences and Mathematics.

## IN THIS ISSUE



The West Chester Band posed with the West Chester State Normal baseball team and their opponents prior to a 1915-1916 game. Today's Incomparable Golden Rams Marching Band has grown to more than 300 students from a variety of academic majors.

