

Sound Expertise – Season 2, Episode 7

Rebecca Black's Friday and Viral Music with Paula Harper

TRANSCRIPT prepared by Andrew Dell'Antonio

## **SPEAKERS**

Paula Harper, Will Robin

### **Paula Harper 00:00**

One of the reasons that I do the work that I do, which is writing about music and sound on the internet, is in part because I am fascinated and delighted by objects that are frequently obnoxious. So a lot of the things that I'm engaging with are things that occupy this weird, liminal or ambivalent space between something that gives people delight and something that makes people want to throw their computer off of a tall building. So just like right in the middle space between those two emotions, or having those two emotions at the same time, is how I've engaged with a lot of stuff on the internet, including, but certainly not limited to, the Rebecca Black Friday video.

[intro music]

### **Will Robin 01:05**

Welcome back to Sound Expertise. I'm your host, Will Robin, and I'm a musicologist. And this is a podcast where I talk with my fellow music scholars about their research and why it matters. You probably remember Rebecca Black's Friday, and if not, you almost certainly heard it. It was absolutely ubiquitous about a decade ago, a music video by an amateur teen musician, which went viral because it was widely trashed as one of the Worst Songs of All Time. Friday went from YouTube to Tosh.0 to parodies and covers on late night TV, racking up tens of millions of views in the process. It was 2011, it was a more innocent time, when our expectations for what kinds of internet content would go viral were not yet fully formed. And when Facebook and Twitter seemed like fun places for "Have you seen this" sharing and cutesy parodies, rather than platforms for spreading conspiracy theories, and undermining democracy. Everything about Friday would suggest that it is not traditional fodder for analysis by musicologists. Historically, music scholars have tended to study great music and how it has endured in the canon. Friday, however, is both very bad and very ephemeral, vanishing into the internet ether soon after it became a sensation. But those two traits are also what make Friday a potentially rich case study in contemporary musicological practices. Its ephemerality can help us understand what it means for music to go viral, the cultural expectations in 2011 and today for how music is created and consumed in a fast-paced internet culture. And its "badness", and in particular, how that badness was understood and framed in its time, revealed deep and entrenched anxieties about amateurism, girlhood, and technology that stretch back to the history of popular music in the United States. As far as I'm concerned, there is only one scholar to talk to about this topic. And that is Paula Harper, who is a postdoctoral Teaching Fellow at Washington University in St. Louis. Dr. Harper specializes in music and virality and has published some really fascinating work on the sound of internet culture, from Friday to Beyoncé to TikTok. I really hope you enjoy this fascinating conversation today on Sound Expertise.

03:32

[intro music]

**Will Robin** 03:39

So let's start with an infamously loathed viral music video that you've written about extensively, which is Rebecca Black's Friday:

03:50

[Music: excerpts from Rebecca Black, Friday]

**Will Robin** 03:54

You write in this great article that — which I hadn't realized — it was at one time the most disliked video on YouTube. How did you find yourself interested in Friday as an object of musicological analysis?

**Paula Harper** 04:08

Hmm, this is a great question. So this ... Friday came out back in 2011, which was before I was writing my dissertation. In fact, I wasn't even in my PhD program yet. I was in a master's program at the University of Washington in Seattle. And I was teaching a class.... I was teaching a class on writing about music. So I was helping undergraduate students develop strategies for writing about music, and kind of as a gag, I would begin each Friday's class with a different version of Friday. So I was on the internet, I was listening Rebecca Black's Friday, people kept sending it to me. And I was a netizen, I was hanging out on the internet and consuming viral internet culture. And so I was consuming a lot of these remixes and mashups of Rebecca Black's Friday as well. And I was making my students listen to them as I began each week's class. And so that trolling practice of mine as a teacher, stuck with me, the fact that I could go for an entire quarter of Fridays, and not run out of remixed material for this video, the fact that people were producing so much on so many different versions of this one object that, purportedly we all hated. And yet, there was such a proliferation of enthusiastic content production around this object. So it kind of stuck in my head. And I had already done some of the research in putting together this catalog of things with which to menace my Writing about Music students. So when I was putting together my dissertation, when I was thinking about virality, and musical production and musical circulation on the internet, there are a number of different reasons why Rebecca Black's Friday video fit neatly into the kinds of arguments that I was making. But one of the standout reasons, certainly, and one of the things that I wrote about, focused on in this article that I wrote in a special issue of the journal *American Music*, is the fact of these remixes, the fact of the massive amount of enthusiastic amateur production that went on around this supposedly loathsome, obnoxious internet object.

**Will Robin** 07:02

Yeah, I want to come back to the remix stuff. when you were — back in 2011, when you were watching this and consuming its virality., Were you self-reflective about how much it was hated? Or were you at the point of like everyone else just being like, this sucks. And like, How funny is it that this sucks? Or were you more like, oh, there's a reason why that people are saying this sucks, that's revealing of something.

**Paula Harper 07:25**

I certainly didn't have the argument that I formulate in the article, which is that there are genre and connectedly gendered implications to what was going on there in terms of the reviling of the original object and its rehabilitation in different kinds of viral remix productivity. But I was also... I mean, one of the reasons that I do the work that I do, which is writing about music and sound on the internet is in part because I am fascinated and delighted by objects that are frequently obnoxious. So a lot of the things that I'm engaging with are things that occupy this weird, liminal or ambivalent space between something that gives people delight, and something that makes people want to, like throw their computer off of a tall building. So just right in the middle space between those two emotions, or having those two emotions at the same time, is how I've engaged with a lot of stuff on the internet, including, but certainly not limited to, the Rebecca Black Friday video. And so I'm interested in thinking about recording and writing history of other people having those same shared reactions.

**Will Robin 08:51**

What before we kind of jump into, what about Friday was kind of so hateable? Can you talk a little bit about how Friday became a viral phenomenon, from this random YouTube video to... you talk about the aggregator website, The Daily What, that was the first kind of thing that jumped on it, and what are the pathways that it moved through to achieve that kind of viral status that it achieved?

**Paula Harper 09:15**

Yeah, so Rebecca Black's Friday video got big in March of 2011. So this was the moment where viral videos were the pathways for ... viral videos were taking kind of particular shape. So something going viral was a kind of known quantity by this point, but this is still kind of early on in what I track as like the reification of virality. So yeah, we start off with this kind of random YouTube video, although the randomness, the amount that this was a produced video is a huge part of the question... Like your second bit that we're going to get to. And this gets posted in a couple of places. So at this point in the history of internet virality, we start to have these secondary layers, these aggregators that what they're doing is trawling for content and then collecting them for easier viewing, consuming, by a broader internet public. So, earlier versions of this are things like Digg, which is the predecessor to Reddit. We've got aggregating websites, but this is a little bit before maybe the way in which truly like algorithmic cross platform social media ecosystem existed the way we might think of it in the late 2010s, 2020 era. So the originating one of these aggregators for the Rebecca Black Friday video is a Tumblr blog called The Daily What, which has a lot of fans. The Tumblr blog, The Daily What posts this video, and the caption just says, "Where is your God now of the day, I am no longer looking forward to the weekend." And all that it is, all that this post is, is the thumbnail of the video, which is just — it's innocuous. It's this young, white, brunette girl smiling on a lawn somewhere. So that juxtaposition between this totally innocuous screenshot, and this pretty hyperbolic caption, that's a point of entry. You might click through to find out what's so bad about this video. And then it gets picked up and recirculated by increasingly legacy or authoritative media over the next couple of weeks. So Tosh.0, a Comedy Central offshoot, picks it up, Reddit picks it up. But then also legacy media like Rolling Stone, like Time eventually, The New York Times a couple of weeks later, those places begin to pick it up and report on it. So there's an expanding out of audience, from people who are trolling the internet looking for humorous content to a broader maybe beyond the internet audience as it gets to more and more legacy

media coverage. And while all that is happening, you've got, too, people who are participating in this not just by watching the video, but they're participating by creating these remixed or response versions, that are also occupying the YouTube platform ecosystem as well. So that's providing additional feedback loops of viewership and enthusiasm around this video.

**Will Robin 13:13**

If you lived through it, you remember that Friday happened, you probably can't remember what had happened, or how it happened, you just remember the video or, the dress or any of these viral moments. Why is it important for you to understand the microhistory of the pathways through which something like this becomes viral?

**Paula Harper 13:34**

That's a good question. I think one of the things that I started off doing when I started off doing my dissertation, when I started off doing my work as a scholar of music and sound in the internet was, I was encountering a lot of scholarship around the internet, that was treating it as an ahistorical atemporal space — the internet is a ... just like, it's always the same, always digital, no ...

**Will Robin 14:06**

The internet in 1999 is the same as the internet in 2004 is the same as the internet in 2020, or whatever,

**Paula Harper 14:11**

Or just scholars writing about the internet now, there now, and reading that scholarship in, say, 2010 or 2015. And having it be just very, very clear that the internet that was “now” for that scholar was no longer the internet that was for me reading that scholarship. Even if it was just a couple of years later. So it was in response to doing that reading, that secondary reading and background reading for me as a scholar, I wanted to be really particular about putting a timestamp on the things that I was looking at on the internet, in part because I was tracking ways in which virality was changing across an internet history that was ... both felt very short, very recent, and very long. And also how things were staying the same, but also how things were changing, the ways that I could find coherences between a moment of virality in 1999 and 2013, but also the way in which, especially as I was seeing it, mechanisms for making virality happen, making it happen faster, making it happen in ways that were financially, economically beneficial for particular actors, that those things were changing and accelerating, and tracking particularities in platforms, tracking particularities in discourse, tracking particularities in practices like remix and response, that those were ways that could help me account for those bigger changes in the speed of virality. How virality is being encouraged and used and who it's being used to benefit.

**Will Robin 16:18**

So in terms of why this went viral, which has to do with how widely hated this video was, and the song was, you mentioned, genre and gender both playing into that, can you talk a little bit about what is happening in this video that creates such a discourse around it?

**Paula Harper 16:37**

Yeah, so, one of the things that I say in the article is, what is there to hate about the Friday video, what isn't there to hate, there's just a whole bunch of things, there's a laundry list, you can really take your pick, one place that I think is useful to start is confusion around what the video was and who it was for. So here again, it's important to think about the particular history of the YouTube platform, what was happening in the very early 2000s. And this is a time when YouTube and VEVO have relatively recently formed a partnership. This basically is a moment when music videos, official, industrially produced music videos are finding a home on the YouTube platform. And so YouTube is this space, where originally, it's this home for amateur production, maybe it's a home for piracy. But as we move into the early 2010s, it's a space where increasingly there are these kinds of frictions, these encounters, these ways in which viewers have to negotiate whether what they're seeing is an amateur production or professional one. And one of the big problems that I think ... one of the latent problems with the Rebecca Black Friday video is that it's an object, an audiovisual object that is confusing in that sense, it is in no way clear on which side of the dividing line — if there is a dividing line, it's in a gray space between something that is clearly an amateur production and something that's a professional one, and actually has a lot of markers of a professional music video, especially in terms of its... the high quality, the crispness of its visuals, of its visual editing, etc. But there are also a lot of things that don't quite meet the standards of say like a Lady Gaga video...

**Will Robin 18:46**

It's terrible! [laughs]

**Paula Harper 18:47**

Right, right. And it's because it is it's in no way operating with the same a budget as a Lady Gaga video would have been in 2011, certainly, but also that it's not... that it was not meant to be operating for at all the same audience, the same the same viewer scrutiny. So this was ultimately, certainly from Rebecca Black's perspective, an audiovisual object that was never meant to be seen by a huge swath of the public. This is something that she went to art music factory, which is this... get your foot in the door, record your first music, get your first music video produced, and show it to other better producers who can make you other better music videos. But this wasn't meant to be given the wide distribution that say, a Lady Gaga video would have had. So it's got really cheesy visual effects, the flipbook at the very beginning, the obvious green screen of the second verse and it's also got, again, that mix of high production and low quality, in terms of say, the lack of melody in places, the just truly terrible text setting that we've got

[Music: Opening of Rebecca Black's Friday]

**Paula Harper 20:34**

And one thing that people really focused on, which was the audible autotune, that Rebecca Black's voice was produced to an extent that it was audible, but not produced to an extent that people found it palatable in the way that highly produced pop music at the time was being produced. So this gets us into questions of gender, that I'm reading as one of the main targets for hate. If people are encountering this object, and they're having trouble figuring out what to do with it, how to respond to it, what it's supposed to be doing in this YouTube ecosystem, one thing that was easy to latch on to, and one thing that got a lot of hate directed towards it, is the quality of Rebecca Black's voice. So in this big soup of

possibilities of things to hate about this video, the central figure of an adolescent white girl's voice, that becomes something that people hugely, hugely, hugely latch on to. So this gets us into familiar narratives of trollish misogyny online. So a lot of this was circulating on Reddit and other places were certainly in 2011, the language around this was just deeply violent, deeply misogynistic, and all kinds of threats of violence, sexual violence, regular violence, coming from the fact that Rebecca Black's voice was understood to be displeasing and so all of this baggage of the ways in which this video wasn't working, gets dumped on to the idea that her voice is not pleasing to hear, that it's poorly autotuned, that it's overly autotuned. So this white, girlish voice is bearing the weight of all of this confusion and distaste. And so, one of the reasons that this blows up is because it becomes this moment of just everyone dogpiling on basically this girl's voice.

**Will Robin 22:46**

How do you see this critique... critique is a bad word, because it's not critique in the academic sense. It's just people shitting on her. This relationship to ... within a larger history of girls' voices in pop music being either criticized, silenced, marginalized...

**Paula Harper 23:12**

Yeah, so this is certainly ..., this is happening in 2011, and the particular situation of this virality within this nasty echo chamber of virulent online misogyny, so there's a media historical particularity here. But we can certainly also connect this to much longer very, very familiar histories and narratives, tropes within popular music more broadly. That girl voices, the figure of the girl as a performer, or as a fan, gets collapsed into denigrated ideas of the "popular," which gets, ..., it's inauthentic, it's commercialized, it's this long standing straw man for rock authenticity, or any authenticity. You can just bring up this specter, this Boogeyman of girlish pop music that's fake, that's empty, that's meaningless. So all of those histories too are the kind of baggage that prefigures Rebecca Black's Friday exploding in the way that they did, from a music-historical perspective. So that all of the kinds of things that you could have seen people lamenting about popular music from decades earlier, people are also saying about Rebecca Black, and they're also connecting her as a figure to other currently marginalized pop figures. So there's a bunch of connection that happens discursively in say, Reddit comment spaces, YouTube comment spaces, that links her to figures like Justin Bieber or Ke\$ha. Or Fergie and the Black Eyed Peas. So other figures that are understood to be occupying the same fake, empty, and here in this moment technologized through auto tune the way in which auto tune or pitch correction software gets pulled into this discursive network as well, that gets brought in alongside the pop inauthenticity and its genderedness there.

**Will Robin 25:41**

It seems like part of this early YouTube anxiety or whatever, that everyone thinks pop music is going to be suddenly dominated by 12 year olds who get discovered by platforms and have their careers managed by corporate professionals or whatever, this like Justin Bieber anxiety. And I guess also sound like young girls is part of that as well. Right?

**Paula Harper 26:02**

Yeah. Which is like it's, it is again, much like sounding much longer histories in the music industry. Much longer anxieties. Anytime there's a revelation that a music industry exists, and that it works in

ways, there like -- Oh, no, but we thought it was a meritocracy all along. And the YouTube platform is also a space that is hosting those anxieties, this paradox of the idea of meritocracy, the cream rising to the top. Like -- Oh, well, YouTube is this space, where if you're talented enough, and you work hard enough, you can get discovered. But then, that's nesting right alongside these anxieties of -- YouTube is a space where the people who are getting discovered are the wrong kind of people and the wrong kind of voices, not actually doing the work. And that YouTube discovery is a space where we can see into the inner workings of the music industry, and we don't like being reminded that it is there, and that it has inner workings.

**Will Robin 27:13**

So you also... you talked to Rebecca Black, how did that come about? What was that experience like? What did you learn from her?

**Paula Harper 27:21**

I did talk to Rebecca Black, and she is a delight. She's a lovely young woman. And I was just ... I was at work on the dissertation chapter. And I, I don't know, was probably procrastinating, let's be real. I was on social media. I dug around. And I found an email address for her publicist, and I reached out to say, I was writing a dissertation chapter, and would she be interested in talking to me, I'd love her perspective and didn't hear anything for a couple of weeks. And then the publicist reached out was like, yeah, let's set up a call. So yeah, Rebecca Black and I had a phone call, it was lovely. It was ... I came in with my enthusiasm for these remixes, these media objects that I had been consuming, and I maybe, like unfairly was eager to talk to her about those. And she was like,

**Will Robin 28:20**

About... , not Friday, about...

**Paula Harper 28:22**

Well, I mean, just the way the proliferation of content around the video, and she was like, Yeah, I did not consume any of that. I was not interested in participating in any way with what this thing became. And I was like, Oh, that makes sense. But I think it was having her perspective, hearing about her version of events was, honestly, harrowing, the way in which she had to reiterate across the immediate explosion of this video, that she was a 13 year old, who was the target of again, death threats, rape threats, just incredible amounts of violence, both in the, I guess, relatively innocuous removed spaces of say, online forum boards, but also people reaching out to her in real life, to communicate in humorous and deeply un--- or humorous to them, and deeply unhumorous ways these threats of violence, over a video she had made to try and advance her career towards being a performer of some kind. So, yeah, just the way in which her experience of needing to do a press tour to remind people on the internet and legacy media outlets of her humanity and identity as a child was just, yeah, really tough to grapple with. Yeah, and the way in which she has had at that point, and still continues to work to leverage her ... the infamy of this audiovisual object into positive outcomes, into charity work, into doing non bully ... anti-bullying work. And also her continued social media presence in which she uses this to continually, shine a light onto ways to be positive and uplifting rather than negative and bullying in social media spaces. She's currently got a flourishing TikTok presence, where she is enthusiastic,

positive, jokes around about Friday, but continually uses it to push anti-bullying and being a good person online messages.

**Will Robin 31:18**

I want to come back to TikTok...

**Paula Harper 31:21**

Always?

**Will Robin 31:22**

yeah. So tell me a little bit about these remixes. I mean, obviously, there's a bajillion of them. So it's not necessarily an easy thing to summarize, but what drew your attention to... I mean, besides that, there was a constant proliferation of good ones, what about this made it so remixable? What is interesting from a scholarly perspective about the remix culture, recomposition culture around this video?

**Paula Harper 31:48**

Yeah! So what I think -- one thing that I'll say ,what drew my attention to them as part of my larger ... my whole thing, which is, one of the things that drew my attention to them is that I was encountering this on the YouTube platform, where, when I watched the original Friday video, I couldn't help but see the other ones. So again, we're all probably familiar with this. But in 2010-2011, this was a relatively new feature, that YouTube was serving up algorithmically recommended videos. And so a lot of the responses to this video were being served up to me -- were being put in my face as I was watching this video. So I and other people consuming this, this is part of the viral moment being afforded by the YouTube platform who's serving up these other versions alongside the original. So: on the one hand, how am I engaging with these -- well, I'm being encouraged to --- 2011 me is being encouraged to -- by the YouTube platform, and in the ... in a similar way, or from a different perspective, YouTube is also encouraging other creators to make related videos because of the possibility of them being served up alongside this very, very popular highly circulated video in something that, again, is probably pretty familiar to us, but at that point, was a relatively novel mode of operation for an internet platform. So one of the ways in which ... Turning now to think about, well, what was so remixable about this. So remixes are certainly not the only thing that were happening ... like strictly musical remixes were not the only thing that were happening. So this was also the heyday of reaction videos, which have now come back around, they're having another moment in 2020. But the phenomenon of the genre of a YouTube aspirational celebrity reacting to this video, saying nasty or critical or amusing things about it, as they were watching it, or in response to watching it. So those are happening. But we also do have a lot of straight-ahead musical remixes. And I think one of the things that makes ... made this song so amenable to musical remixing is the way in which it did fall into this excessively boilerplate pop formula. It's got a very, very standard verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus structure; really basic, you might say boring, melodic structure; really basic harmonies, basic instrumentation as well. So a lot of ... ways in which familiarity, or recognizability, of this song as a text could be maintained, but that people could remix it or make it novel in ways that could clearly have a link back to the original video, but would be clearly audible as something else.

35:13

[Music: example of Friday remix]

**Paula Harper 35:25**

So people did a lot of genre resetting. So taking this very, very paradigmatic pop object and reformatting its genre in some way by adding signifiers of other genre-ness. So whether that's redoing the instrumentation in some way, but a lot of the times -- and I say this in the article -- it's redoing the vocals in some way. So one of the big ways in which people were repointing the genre of this were to readjust the vocal track. So one of the one of the big ones, one of the most well circulated versions of the song, was a death metal version which replaces the pop synth instrumentation with screaming metal guitars and unrelenting drum track, but also with these screaming death metal vocals as well.

**Paula Harper 36:30**

[Music: Death metal Friday remix]

**Paula Harper 36:39**

We also get a version that is not just an acoustic guitar cover, but like specifically a Bob Dylan folk cover.

**Will Robin 36:57**

[Music: Bob Dylan style Friday remix]

**Paula Harper 37:14**

in which somebody takes up Friday on an acoustic guitar, and imitates the sounds of Bob Dylan's voice in reperforming these lyrics. And so there's ... the recognizability of the pop formula of the original means that it's really easy to keep some of the components intact, but also radically reinterpret other aspects that make it point in these other genre directions. And one of my points in the piece, in the article is the way in which (A) these versions were frequently received much more enthusiastically than the original. And so if you read through the YouTube comments of these, there's a lot of people cheering on the creators saying, either ironically, or earnestly -- this is much better than the original. I love listening to this. I've listened to this a bunch of times. And oftentimes, the thing that is being changed is not necessarily the boring song structure, the boring chord progressions, the boring melody, but the thing that's being changed and the thing that's being lauded here is the voice. So we're changing Rebecca Black's white, girlish, over-autotuned voice to a masculine voice in some way. It's screamo. It's a detuned dubstep voice. It's a Bob Dylan voice. And suddenly, when we change the voice, even if we change nothing else, we change the voice. And suddenly, the song is worthy of praise and elevation. So there you get a playing out of this reality, that all of the hate coming together around this that's a terrible pop object can really be boiled down to...

**Will Robin 39:16**

gender and genre. Yeah.

**Paula Harper 39:17**

Yeah. Gender and genre. It's like, girl voice bad...

**Will Robin 39:20**

I literally just said I liked the Bob Dylan version. And I said 10 minutes ago that I didn't like the Rebecca Black version.

**Paula Harper 39:25**

Yeah, yeah!

**Will Robin 39:27**

Yeah. This is something that I was thinking about when I was reading -- which is -- and this maybe also can help us pivot to talk a little bit about your more recent work on TikTok -- I spend way too much time on the internet, but I'm also like a little bit of, I don't know, a fuddy duddy about, I'm not interested in TikTok. I'm not interested in watching a bunch of reaction videos, or I tend to -- whatever. I'm a white guy who probably falls into a lot of prejudiced views about some of this. But one thing that I've noticed in this piece and in our conversation and also in your other work is, it's not like you're trying to necessarily rehabilitate this as great art or something ... how do you figure out the balance between -- and I was thinking about this with regards to TikTok -- this is an expressive culture that needs to be understood, and you can still, there's also the cynical and I think still relevant take with something like TikTok -- and YouTube -- of, these are content delivery platforms that are designed to keep you on them and surveil you and make money, turn you into garbage data that makes money, and also maybe China is like, bad or something. [Both laugh] How do you balance all of that?

**Paula Harper 40:42**

Oh, man. Um, yeah, I mean, that's -- right? That's the whole... that's it, that's the whole thing. It's that on the one hand, these are spaces and sources for creativity, for delight, for collective positive affect. And then on the other hand, they're also maybe terrible, and they're ... the material by which these massive platforms have been able to grow and to dominate and to, I don't know, potentially just destroy democracy as we know it, and also the world. Yeah. So...

**Will Robin 41:32**

What do you think musicology gets out of understanding virality?

**Paula Harper 41:37**

Yeah, I think, on the one hand, I am ... Okay. I don't know if this is an answer to the question, but it is the answer that I'm gonna give, which is, on the one hand, I think that I'm interested in producing work that lives in that tension that is appreciating that this is a space for creativity, for meaningful amateur or nonprofessional musicality in the 21st century. And that that is a space that is valuable, and that is meaningful, and that is worthy of study. And also, I'm deeply technopessimist in that I think it's that creative labor is very much taken advantage of by these massive and deeply destructive platforms, and certainly in the latter part of the 2010s, and the 2020s. But I also don't think that ... what I \*don't\* think that my scholarship is doing is informing any of the participants in that, of that situation. I think that the people who are ... some of the people who are most savvy of this dynamic are the people whose creative labor is most being taken advantage of, the people who are working to eke out some ... a multifaceted musical and viral career from within these platforms within these ever-reifying structures of

virality. Maybe I'm thinking about speaking a little bit more to musicologists in that sense, doing some of this work that challenges the idea that is still so pervasive, that people like Will Cheng have talked about, that music is necessarily a positive force; and thinking about the ways in which ... you know, I'm not necessarily saying -- actually, music is bad. Actually, music on the internet is bad. But being part of the conversation that's bringing nuance to those questions. And so, I'm trying to help make space for other musicologists to enter into that nuanced conversation as well. I mean, certainly, I think I would like to... I would like for my ... I don't know what I want my work to do, Will. [Laughs]

**Will Robin 44:23**

I don't think any of us really know...

**Paula Harper 44:25**

Yeah. Right. I mean, be a part of creating some kind of space where we can all make ephemeral but delightful music together. But that it's not necessarily for the purpose of more specifically selling me shoes or cast iron skillet, or whatever.

**Will Robin 44:53**

Yes - the delight in expressive cultures? It's The Kids Are All Right, but the corporations that exploit them are not, or something, I don't know.

**Paula Harper 45:03**

Yeah, precisely right. And I think one of the realities of living in this moment is that we're all ... we're all navigating that space. We're all navigating the -- there's no ethical consumption under capitalism, but we're not going to stop making music.

**Will Robin 45:22**

[Laughs] Well, that's a great place to end it. Thank you so much.

**Paula Harper 45:24**

Thank you for having me, Will, it has been a delight.

**Will Robin 45:33**

I'm super grateful to Paula Harper, who is a postdoctoral Teaching Fellow at Washington University in St. Louis, for that great talk. Dr. Harper will also be joining the faculty of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln this fall as an assistant professor of musicology. So many congrats to Paula. Please visit our website, [soundexpertise.org](http://soundexpertise.org), to learn more about her work. She's also got a great Twitter presence, so follow her @pch9857. I would be very, very grateful to you if you took a minute to give us a review. Ideally, five stars -- I'll settle for four, three stars if you really really don't like the podcast. I don't know why you'd be listening right now if you don't like the podcast, but whatever. Give us that review on Apple podcasts, or wherever you listen to our show. It really helps boost our audience and makes me feel good when I'm scrolling through Apple podcasts in the morning. If you like our editing and music, please check out the work of our great producer D Edward Davis on Soundcloud at warm silence. Thanks as always to Andrew Dell'Antonio for transcribing our episodes to make them more accessible. You can follow me on twitter @seatedovation. Finally, I'm super excited for next week's conversation

with the music librarian David Hunter about his fascinating research and important research on Handel and his role in investing in the slave trade. See you next Tuesday.

46:50

[Outro music mixed with Rebecca Black's Friday]