Sound Expertise Season 3:7 –

Philosophy and Vibes with Robin James

Transcribed by Andrew Dell'Antonio

Robin James 00:00
Part of the reason why vibes language grew popular on the internet in the early 2020s, is because it's a vernacularization of the practices of perception that the algorithms and the black boxes use to perceive us.

00:19
[Music]

Will Robin 00:36
I've come to realize, as you'll hear me admit in the opening of this interview, that I'm not much of a philosophical person. The more I understand what I like to do as a musicologist, and what I do well as a musicologist, and it's taken me a while to figure this out, the more I understand that I'm at my best as a thinker, when I'm super grounded in historical detail, fretting about the specificity of people's lives and music making. It would be easy then for me to dismiss very theoretical or philosophical scholarship about music as overly jargony or removed in some way from historical reality. But I'm not going to do that. Because even though it's not how I personally like to do music scholarship, it is hugely important and often revelatory. And that's definitely the case for the work of our guest today, Robin James, who is editor for Philosophy and Media Studies at the publisher Palgrave Macmillan. Many, many of the ideas that Dr. James has developed in her work have become totally lodged in my brain. And I end up thinking about them anytime I hear Taylor Swift or Beyonce or Adele. I wanted to dig into what led Dr. James to develop a philosophical approach towards understanding pop music and culture, and how that's different from so much philosophical work done on music, and how it's driven her current ongoing project focused on understanding the ideology of vibes today. This is a heady conversation, but also a very grounded one, and I think you'll enjoy it.

02:12
[Music]

Will Robin 02:24
So, I've been thinking a little bit about how to start this conversation. And, this might be a kind of long-winded question, but I would not consider myself to be a philosophy person, I don't like thinking very metaphysically or abstractly, even though I briefly considered philosophy in college. And I also occasionally check in on the world of music and philosophy as a subfield. And I'm often a little turned off by it, because it seems like a narrow conception of what music can be, and sometimes a narrow conception of what philosophy can be. And I don't think that's the case for your work. It seems like your work is, I think it's fair to say, not that at all. And I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about -- do you

see yourself as a music philosophy scholar in a different way than all the other kinds of music and philosophy scholars and what you see that meaning? If that makes sense?

Robin James 03:23
Yeah. And this has always, I mean, going back to graduate school, there's perennially been the question of -- what am I even doing? [laughs] And who is my audience? And who are my interlocutors? Because I came up... I mean, maybe ... as to the question, do I see myself? I think I'm definitely a sound studies scholar. I think that's pretty clear. And I think that's the case, because sound studies is so inherently interdisciplinary, that you don't have to be a thing. You just do sound and everybody's coming from different perspectives. And that's fine. So it's okay to have fuzzier boundaries, I think, in sound studies, if that makes sense.

Will Robin 04:09
Yes. I think so.

Robin James 04:13
But am I a philosopher? Well, only a very bad one, if you're taking mainstream academic philosophy as your gauge. Because I came up in philosophy through the continental feminist philosophy. So I always felt on the margins of the philosophy world because that's where I was. I knew that what I was doing was definitely not mainstream. And I approach music as someone working from that perspective, so I never engage philosophy of music. The only thing I've ever published in the aesthetics journal is a book review. That's just not my world. Those aren't my questions. Because mainstream Anglophone philosophy of music is interested primarily in ontology and emotions. And those are not the kinds of questions I'm interested in asking. I'm interested in the political questions and the social questions that it might be very unsurprising for a feminist philosopher to ask.

Will Robin 05:22
When I think of music and philosophy, I think of Nietzsche and Wagner or -- let's take a philosopher and understand how to apply their approach to a 19th century symphony's musical tones, or something like that. Which is not what you do.

Robin James 05:47
No. Because I think what I do is, I use music as a text to -- here's a concrete, or one way I have put it often is, I'm interested in society, and society is big and complicated. Pop Songs are three minutes long. And if you take pop songs -- if you understand pop songs as a product of society and reflecting some of the structures, the macro structures, like gender, or race, or political structures, if those are reflected in pop songs, and pop songs are a very digestible, understandable thing to analyze, to help get at these much more abstract, higher level political structures or social structures. So it's really... I'm theorizing bottom up from what's going on in music as a way to do philosophy, rather than saying, here's a canonical philosopher, and let's apply this top down and just sort of see what Philosopher X can tell us about romanticism, or...

Will Robin 06:59
Sure, sure.

Robin James 07:02
Because I'm really interested in, like I said, that bottom-up work, music reflects how people understand them and how they think the world works. And if we're interested in trying to unpack that philosophically, that's a helpful place to start.

Will Robin 07:18
I think traditionally, the three-minute pop song wouldn't be the purview of a philosopher because they wouldn't see it as "philosophical" in some way.

Robin James 07:26
Right. Yeah. And I think the two important texts I read as a philosopher early on, was Norma Coates's article, early article, on teenyboppers and feminist popular music studies.   This is the kind of scholarship that can be done about popular music. But then also, my music, undergrad music theory professor made me read Feminine Endings, she's like, You should read this. So this is like, 1997, I want to say -- 7, 8. So that book was still relatively new back then. And I was like, Oh, this is the kind of work that can be done with music. And I think, too, because I was already on the margins of philosophy anyway, as a feminist continental philosopher, I don't care if you don't take this seriously, pop song seriously, you don't take feminist philosophy seriously. So why should I bother getting trying to be taken seriously, I'll just do my own thing, because I think it's worth doing.

Will Robin 08:34
What is your trajectory to that in terms of -- you have a music background and a philosophy background? Was it, I liked classical music and Plato, and then I veered off in this other direction, or what's the trajectory?

Robin James 08:50
So I started off college as an oboe major. And I thought I wanted to be a conductor. And then, it was a mix of things. I discovered music theory, and I was like, Oh, this is this is way more interesting. This is how I want to engage music. I know, maybe that makes me weird. But I'm also a philosopher.

Will Robin 09:10
I was gonna say there are other reasons that you might be weird, but I think anyone I talk to on this podcast can characterize themselves as weird.

Robin James 09:16
Yeah. So I started college as an oboe major. And I took a philosophy class, also my first semester, just to fulfill requirements. And for a mix of reasons that included things like me realizing that what interested me about music was more of the sort of theoretical, philosophical, scholarly questions about it and less performance. And, oddly enough, me experiencing less misogyny in a philosophy department than a music department, led me to be doing work that was at the intersection of philosophy and music. But then when it was time to apply to grad schools, I was like — do I apply to philosophy programs, gender studies programs, music programs? And then I realized, in philosophy, you can do it all. Philosophy is the queen of the sciences. I didn't have to narrowly focus. Because I

could just be … as a philosopher, dip my toe in whatever. So I went to grad school in philosophy. This is 2000. And with the intention of … I did an undergraduate thesis on Schoenberg's Kantian notion of genius.

Will Robin 10:30
Okay, so that seems very traditionally philosophical.

Robin James 10:33
Yeah, yeah. But that was that emerged from an independent study I did where I was … the emancipation of dissonance, and the no gods no masters things, and existentialism seemed to have something to do with one another. What is it? So again, bigger picture philosophical questions. But then I think just my own interest. So this is early 2000s is when poptimism.... So 2004, the rap against rockism article gets published. So Zeitgeist, I see stuff happening in the music world, thinking about the boundaries of musical values, how they relate to gender and race, those were just in the atmosphere. And that also influenced my research. And that's how I ended up here I am today. For example, I had a dissertation chapter where I went through all of Adorno's writings on popular music, and something that's really interesting, he tends to mention women's body parts anytime he talks about commodity music or popular music. So again, that's a more traditional musicological approach, but looking for things that a feminist philosopher would look for.

Will Robin 11:55
I see, that's interesting. Okay.

Robin James 11:56
Yeah, yeah. And then, over grad school, I think my focus shifted more towards popular music, because that was where I could ask … that was where some of the questions that I was interested in asking were being asked, like in the [???] article, and in some of the … Ann Powers, the extra-academic side of popular music studies,

Will Robin 12:23
At what point did you like say — There's an Adele song or a Taylor Swift song, and I want to write a 45 page book chapter about it. At what point did that click as a as a way to … these pop songs as a way to understand the philosophy of 2015 or something?

Robin James 12:46
Yeah, I think it was once I got out of grad school and didn't have to do primarily what other people wanted me to do. I didn't have the committee there saying, No, you should do it this way. I could just do what made sense to me. So I think my first published article was about peaches and chicks on speed and Judith Butler. As soon as I got out of grad school, and didn't have to do philosophy-philosophy, just for philosophers, I started, I guess, maybe doing … maybe it was always kind of emerging or latent, but I hadn't really had the … I had to be too narrowly in a philosophy box to do. So I did that. And that was published in Hypatia, which is a feminist philosophy journal. But then my next journal article was in JPMS, on Beyonce, and Rihanna, and Afrofuturism. I think this sort of interdisciplinary perspective is hard to have as a grad student, because grad programs tend to be pretty disciplinary and what they're

trying to do is train you to be a participant in that discipline. But then once I wasn't confined to that, I got to figure out my own identity as a scholar more and — who are my real interlocutors? And who's my real audience beyond my three dissertation committee members?

Will Robin 14:20
I'd love to talk a little bit about this currently in progress project you've been working on and putting out chunks of on your website and newsletter and in talks, which is about this philosophical understanding of the very contemporary phenomenon of vibes. How do you define vibes in terms of what they've meant to the online discourse of the last decade or so? And why is this a subject of inquiry for you?

Robin James 14:50
Yeah, yeah. Great question. So, if you look at how people on the internet today use the term vibe, it means something like an orientation or a profile. We can say, this person has a chill vibe, that means their relationship to or direction toward other things is chill. Or you would ascribe to them a profile. So it's not an identity. But when you think about profile in the sense of psychological profiling, what you're doing is you're taking a bunch of data points, and putting them together to think about what trajectory someone is on. When the FBI profiles a serial killer, what they're doing is they're trying to say, Okay, what has this person… What sort of tidbits of information has this person left to help us understand their state of mind or trajectory so that we can figure out what they're going to do next and catch them.

Will Robin 15:55
And that's their "vibe" — their profile?

Robin James 15:58
Yeah, yeah. And if you look at how Spotify, for example, understands users, that's exactly how they understand users. You leave behind these bread crumbs of data, Spotify creates a profile of you to figure out what you want to listen to next, what trajectory are you on. So my… the project argues that part of the reason why vibes language grew popular on the internet in the early 2020s, is because it's a vernacularization of the practices of perception that the algorithms and the black boxes use to perceive us. We've sort of learned how to think that way, by interacting with our various devices, training our TikTok algorithm, for example. I'm a rigorous TikTok algorithm trainer. I only want to see the kinds of things I want to see and I don't really want to veer off because I don't want to get random, boring content,

Will Robin 16:59
What are the kinds of things you want to see, just out of curiosity?

Robin James 17:03
Dogs and techno.

Will Robin 17:06
So that's your vibe?

Robin James 17:07

Yes, it's dogs and techno. Yeah. But I've trained the "for you" page to show me those things by giving them information. So we've learned how to interact with algorithms, so that they perceive us in ways that we want to be perceived. So it makes sense that we're starting to use that just to describe ourselves, generally.

Will Robin 17:31
So, that's one of the sentences: "Vibes are how we perceive ourselves the way AI and finance perceive us." So the idea is basically we now instead of talking about someone's personality, or some other frame of reference, we have adopted the language of how Spotify sees us, or how TikTok sees us, and say, their vibe is XYZ.

Robin James 17:56
Yeah, exactly. And if you look at how social media users construct a vibe, they do so in very similar ways. So there's one of the newsletter posts, I compared Instagram and Tiktok posts that would put together a couple of different pictures or a couple of different objects in a picture, to the way that people explain collaborative filtering recommendations. Which is — you put together a bunch of data points, there's this one that shows a guy in… a brown-haired guy in a blue cycling kit, who just bought a pizza with mushrooms, and a salad, and one of them bought a coke next, and the next one's, well, what's he gonna buy next? Probably a coke. So there's this collection of images that point in a trajectory. And that's exactly how social media users visually construct a vibe on Tiktok and Instagram. So it was really fascinating to me that the visual representation of the vibe, and this technical explanation of how collaborative filtering algorithms work, is basically the same as how influencers are visually representing a vibe on social media.

Will Robin 19:11
An example of that would be if someone took a picture of their writing space and — hashtagged it writing vibes or something like that. Is that…?

Robin James 19:21
Yeah, or if you … say, I went on a picnic and I took a picture of some trees and then the picnic blanket and then maybe my friend eating some food, and I called it picnic vibes. I have these little data points that I'm collecting together to point to a profile — sunny, nature, sitting on the floor, sharing...

Will Robin 19:45
Right So what interests you about this, and what what do you think it says that we have chosen in some way to make ourselves like AI or see the world like AI sees us?

Robin James 20:01
I don't think it's a choice. I think it's just the way things evolve. But what's interesting to me philosophically about this is the way that vibes get presented as less oppressive and more inclusive, or somehow more progressive than old categories like gender or genre. So there's a whole … one of my favorite Tiktok influencers, Griffin Maxwell Brooks, non-binary thembo, has a video of them saying, "I'm not a boy or a girl, I'm a vibe." So there's… gender binary, bad — vibes, amorphous, good. And Spotify also talks about genre in this way. So if you think about genre, the music industry made genre to be

identity laden. If we go back to the early 20th century, at least in the industry genre has its roots in narrow identity categories.

Will Robin 20:21
So selling certain kinds of music to African American listeners, and that shapes the segregation of the industry over the 20th century.

Robin James 21:09
Yeah, so genre has this identity laden baggage. Pop is for girls, hip hop is for African Americans, that sort of thing. So what industry people now say is, oh, genre, you know, it's so tied up in these limiting, racist, sexist identity categories — vibes are all inclusive. So if you look at vibe playlists, there's one chill vibes playlist. I don't know if it's still around on Spotify, but this is some research I was doing around 2021. They had everyone from Taylor Swift to Dwight Yoakam to Ryuji Sakamoto, and these things otherwise don't go together [laughs]. But if you take the most toned-down version of all of these artists' catalogs, there's a similar profile, even though all of the other sociological associations with these artists would show no relation. Vibe gets presented as getting rid of limiting demographic categories like identity ones, and giving us a more progressive, inclusive form of categorization based on how people behave rather than who they are. But as I've shown in — this is a trajectory in a lot of my research, these things that get presented to us as more progressive than the old 20th century or modernist versions aren't necessarily so. So what I'm arguing then is that — vibe gets presented as more progressive than things like genre or gender, but what it's doing is it's just reconfiguring the way we categorize people and categorize music to be compatible with the way algorithms organize us. And there is a growing body of scholarly literature that says, well, these algorithms are only as progressive as the data that we train them on is — and that's not so progressive. So vibes language is a way of masking retrenchment as progress.

Will Robin 23:25
In the sense that we can never be "post racial," this is a post racial post gender curatorial approach to music making, but in fact, all of those categories are still part and parcel of it.

Robin James 23:41
Yeah, they're just being remade in different forms. So for example, Spotify has this flagship vibe playlist called pollen. Interesting. If you think about the name, supposedly identity-less. Pollen has its own gendered connotations, interestingly. But if you look at pollen and compare it…

Will Robin 24:04
What would you say are the gendered connotations of pollen?

Robin James 24:07
Well, pollen comes from male plants.

Will Robin 24:10
Okay. Oh, I didn't even think about that. Right. Okay. So there you go.

Robin James 24:13

Yeah, pollen comes from male plants. So pollen is the forward-thinking cutting edge, very mumbly Hip Hop influenced playlist. So it's sort of chill but it's definitely in that space of Lo Fi hip hop, and that general universe but it's hip hop heavy. It has a sibling playlist called Lauren, which is Billy Eilish, various dream Poppy, sort of toned down, very much more oriented towards femme audiences, even if you look at the composition of the listeners. So it's interesting to see how the gendered breakdown persists, even though supposedly this is not about pop or rock or pop or hip hop, or masculine and feminine. It's about different vibes, but the vibes end up hashing out in the same old ways.

Will Robin 24:37

It's interesting you said femme, would these two playlists be masc and femme, which is more progressive identity than men listen to this, and women listen to this, or…

Robin James 25:37

Well, yeah, so for example, data studies scholar, John Cheney-Lippold has a paper out, it's probably 2009 I think, it's called New Algorithmic Identities. And it talks about how algorithms can basically feed user data back into how they define gender category or any category. So no category is essentialist anymore. Any category is adaptive and sort of fluid and fuzzy. So yeah, this is more fluid, and less essentialist than before. But again, the techniques of governance and power have also adapted to work in that way. So yes, it represents some degree of progress past that old form. But so have patriarchy and white supremacy progressed past their former iterations to take advantage of what for them are affordances of new technologies, new relations of production, new ideological formations.

Will Robin 26:49

In terms of racial exclusion or racial segregation that was part of the history of musical genre as conceived by the record industry, how do you see that playing into this new version of post genre vibes, in terms of how these playlists might be racialized, or involve some acts of exclusion of certain kinds of music, or musicians?

Robin James 27:12

So 24k Golden's hit from a couple of years ago, Mood, was explicitly designed to cross the hot alternative, hip hop, and pop charts. And in doing publicity for the song, the duo compares their own multiracial identity to the multi-genre-ism of the song. So that's presented in both cases as an advantage. But if you look at who counts, or who gets perceived as multiracial, there's a significant amount of anti-blackness in that as well. These are light-skinned, brown, racially ambiguous people, these are not super dark skinned, African diasporic people. And even in one of my older articles, "Is the post in post-identity the post in post-genre," it talks about how you're only seen as post if you're seen as overcoming old black-white binaries, and how Latin American artists, because race works different in Latin America, and the politics of race are different, someone like Pitbull, or even Bruno Mars, is not seen as overcoming past black-white binaries, because they're working in contexts where… in Latin America mestizaje is seen as … it's presented as progressive. So you're working in a context that already values mestizaje performing that isn't seen as progressing past… you have no old black-white binary to progress past. So artists that can be read as overcoming old binaries, they're seen as mixing, for example, black and white, rather than excluding one or the other. Whereas artists who would be

seen as working primarily within a hip hop tradition, for example, you see, the ongoing demonization of drill, both in primarily the UK, but also in the US context. Genres that are primarily associated with African-Americans still continue to be demonized and criminalized, because they're not… they're seen as just for this one narrow black community.

Will Robin 29:42
I see. So if you can't achieve this post-genre post-identity thing then you're being left behind, in some way, almost.

Robin James 29:52
Right. And this maps on to how mixed-race studies scholars talk about shifting post-racial norms. In the 19th and 20th century hypo descent or the one drop rule, it was about maintaining the purity of whiteness against everything else. Now we've sort of shifted — Jared Sexton writes about this in Amalgamation Schemes, he says, we've shifted to a context where there's mixed, and that's good. And then blackness is seen as pure and that's bad. So it's sort of a flip — we used to be about protecting the purity of whiteness. But now in neoliberal post-racialism, it's about constructing things that are perceived to be purely for or about Black communities, Black people, as inflexible, non-adaptive, non-resilient, basically unable to exhibit the flexibility that something like a multi genre, or a multiracial person supposedly represents or exhibits.

Will Robin 31:08
So zooming out for a project like this, what would you hope that someone who hashtags the Instagram they took of their breakfast vibes, or enjoys listening to these playlists and thinks that they're much more compellingly curated for their identity than the top 10 hip hop songs playlist — what do you want them to think about as they as they embark on their online curation of their vibe?

Robin James 31:42
So I don't think vibe in itself is inherently bad — if you're just talking about brunch vibes, fine. But also think about how that makes you more legible to both the platform that you're on and everything tracking you, so just be aware of that. This practice makes you more … you're pre-packaging yourself as a data subject. Here, let me give you all this for you. So just be aware of that. But I would also just want people to be aware of the fact that vibes — we are being policed for our vibes. You see this quite literally, the TSA has a program where they have plainclothes officers in the airport, looking for how you're acting. It's literally a form of psychological profiling — is this person nervous? Do they look nervous? That's just a particularly explicit example of how we're being policed for our vibes. But there are workplace technologies that — for example, there's one workplace technology that requires you to — to work the copier, you have to smile. So it's doing facial recognition, to make sure ... So it's making sure that you're happy at work. And in order to just get basic tasks done, you have to do this sort of weird — not quite emotional labor, but you have to perform happiness or complacency or something like this. Plagiarism detection — video proctoring software definitely is another example of vibe policing. Are you paying attention? That's the kind of vibe policing that we're seeing these days. And this is just sort of in its infancy. So I want to think, what are the broader — how are the practices involved in seemingly innocuous vibe culture actually being put to use in things that are far from seemingly innocuous like surveilling workers, policing students taking tests, that sort of thing.

Will Robin 34:05

Yeah. I don't know if this relates, but I'm curious if it relates, which is — you've been posting for the last couple years about your Peloton experiences and how they relate — how music has been curated in your Peloton workouts. Can you talk a little bit about that, whether or not it relates to vibes?

Robin James 34:24

It sort of does. So I think the thing that's really interesting about Peloton as a platform, is it's right between the old and the new. It's this cusp case that helps I think the old and the new come in greater clarity. So on the one hand, Peloton works on a very traditional broadcast model. There's no personalization. You get … the classes are there, live streamed or pre-recorded, but it's one direction. There's no feedback that… my stream of classes doesn't change based on what classes I've taken in the past, which is how YouTube and Spotify work. So it's a more traditional broadcast model. But on the other hand, it does have aspects of what we call streaming platforms. You can like songs, then that feeds directly into your Spotify. There is personalization at the level of fitness data. So I have an Apple Watch. And that connects. And it tracks all my fitness data. So there is personalization there. And that level of personal monitoring and surveillance. So it's doing both the broadcast industry model and the platform data model. It treats music on the one hand as a format? So Eric Weisberg has this book, Top 40 Democracy, where he goes in detail on the difference between a format and a genre. And he says format is a radio industry term tied to demographics — who's your audience, and genre is an aesthetic system tied to the properties of the music that's broadcast. So on one hand, Peloton sticks pretty closely to format — it talks about pop rides, or they have yacht rock rides, I would love to see a grime ride someday. They finally have techno rides, and they treat individual instructors almost like formats. Ben Alldis is the EDM guy. And Hannah F is the British dance music person. But on the other hand, they do have mood rides. And they also…

Will Robin 36:52

A #chillride or something? What does it mean to have…

Robin James 36:56

They have like, happy or angry, so instead of just calling it a speed metal ride [laughs], it's angry. And they do treat … they're linked directly up with Spotify. So you can like individual songs in your workout, and that will appear in your Spotify, if you link Peloton and Spotify. So they're between formats and vibes.

Will Robin 37:32

So let's close out by talking briefly about your new project, the book coming out in May 2023, which is a history of the Cincinnati rock station, WOXY. I really enjoyed reading it, it's much more historical than philosophical compared to some of your other work. What led you to want to work on that project that seems, in many ways different from a lot of your other writings?

Robin James 37:57

Yeah, it is really different. So I grew up outside of Cincinnati, listening to WOXY, from about sixth or seventh grade on until when the station closed in 2010. So in some ways WOXY was my first musical

education, I learned … so most people have a … oh, I learned about pop music from my dad. My dad didn't like music and his favorite artists is literally Rick Astley. So I…

Will Robin 38:31
Does he like being rick-rolled, or does he not like being rick-rolled? [both laugh]

Robin James 38:35
Sadly, he passed long before rick-rolling...

Will Robin 38:37
Oh, I'm sorry...

Robin James 38:40
No, that's fine. Yeah, so growing up, my dad wasn't into music, and the music he was into was Rick Astley, and not something I was interested in knowing more about as a kid. So my musical education was really what was on this station. And WOXY was what we think is the sixth modern rock station in North America, and they initially modeled their programming on KROK, which was one of the first. So I grew up listening to this station, and really cared about it. They are — perhaps we can't prove this, but they're what we think is the first FM station to move their broadcasts entirely online. And they did that for reasons I talk about in the book, and we can get into later. So I grew up with this station. It mattered a lot to me. It closed in 2010 when they ran out of money for the online station. And for the longest time I was like, I'm a pop music scholar. I know that there's a story here maybe I'm not the one to tell — or I can't figure out how to tell it, but somebody should write a book about this. This is an important piece of pop music and radio history. Rolling Stone called it the Last Great independent radio station in the early 2000s. So I always knew it was important, but I never quite figured out, am I the person to tell this story? And if so, what would that story be? So in 2019, I realized that we were coming up on the 40th anniversary of the first Modern Rock 500, which was their annual countdown of the most important or best modern rock songs ever. And so I wrote a story for Belt magazine about the modern rock 500s. And as I was writing that story, I realized the narrative of WOXY, or the story of WOXY, is actually the station's idea of independence. The idea that independence is something that can only be achieved if you practice it with and for other people. So it's an independence to rather than an independence from, So that's what made the station the station. And that's a philosophy, and who better to tell the story of a philosophy than me. So once I figured out the narrative hook for the story, it just kind of all came from there. And writing the book was actually — that was my pandemic project. And it was the perfect pandemic project because I got to meet and to interact with many members of the WOXY community. The station's former owner, Doug Balogh, mailed me bespoke archival finds from his extensive personal archive. And I talked to a lot of people over email, over zoom, it's been really… and that, again, reflects the philosophy, people in this community want to help people do cool and original stuff. And that's what I argue in the book is, this idea of independence to, where we all help each other do whatever weird thing that we want to do. That's the only way that any one of us and thus all of us can actually be independent.

Will Robin 42:13
Yeah, I think that's a perfect note to end things on. Thank you so much,

Robin James 42:17
Great. Yeah. Thanks. This was fun!

42:19
[Music]

Will Robin 42:27
Many thanks to Robin James for that great conversation. You can read more about her work over on our website, soundexpertise.org. Our inbox is open. If you have questions or thoughts about the show, email us at soundexpertise00 at gmail, or tag me on twitter or instagram @seatedovation. I'm grateful to D, Edward Davis for his production work, you can check out his music on SoundCloud at warmsilence. Many thanks to Andrew Dell'Antonio, for transcribing our episodes to make them more accessible. This episode of sound expertise was recorded at the National Foreign Language Center with support from University of Maryland School of Music. And next week on sound expertise, what we can learn about listening and music making from indigenous thought.

Unidentified Speaker 43:13
What we're doing now is we're approaching that community and saying, Were you aware that your song exists in this context? If not, what … how would you guide us? Are you able to guide us in redressing this from a cultural perspective? And that will unfold. I think this will probably be a Lifetime's work.

Will Robin 43:32
See you then.

43:51
[music]