

Sound Expertise Season 3:11 –

Doing Public Musicology with Douglas Shadle

Transcription by Andrew Dell’Antonio

Douglas Shadle 00:00

Even though I've done historical work, I'm looking at a phenomenon that's still present and could make interventions in that. And so yeah, it was really exciting to have that kind of come at me randomly and that I just was inspired when people took the bait and I was really both proud and humbled to feel like I might have a voice in these larger conversations.

Douglas Shadle 00:17

Will Robin 00:38

Welcome back to Sound Expertise. I'm your host, Will Robin, this is a podcast where I talk to my fellow music scholars about their work and why it matters. So way back in 2011, when I started grad school, I had kind of an unusual dual track thing going. I had been writing concert reviews on my blog for a couple years and some journalistic stuff for the New York Times. As I began taking seminars and working on a thesis and then dissertation, I continued that work as a music writer / critic / journalist, I never really knew what to call myself or how to square those activities with my more traditionally musicological coursework. But then, at some point in the mid 2010s, I heard the phrase public Musicology, and it all clicked, I was a public musicologist. I could write a dissertation for 10 people to read, and a New Yorker article for hopefully many more people to read. And they were both theoretically part of the same thing. “Public” oriented work has been around in my field for a very, very long time, but only fairly recently has it been branded as public musicology. And right around the same time that I was thinking about myself through this lens, another scholar whose work I've known and admired since back then, was as well. Douglas Shadle, Associate Professor of musicology at Vanderbilt University. Professor Shadle is the author of some really brilliant and fascinating scholarship on American orchestral culture, Dvorak, and Florence Price, including two excellent books. But I wanted to talk to him for sound expertise about this idea of musicology for non-academic audiences, how he came to do it, how he came to understand it, and what impact it can have. We also talked a bit about the complicated Florence Price revival, and the potentially predatory publication model that's emerged around her work, which I should add will tee up next week's episode very nicely. So I hope you enjoy this great conversation with Doug Shadle.

[Music] 02:45

Will Robin 02:56

I've been thinking a little bit about like what we should talk about today, and you've done so much different work in so many different areas. And one of the things that I've been considering about maybe starting our conversation with is, I think you had — and I think we had a conversation about this at some point, a fairly typical scholarly trajectory through your first book, in terms of going to grad school,

we actually went to the same grad program, writing a dissertation, turning the dissertation into a great book about American music and American symphonies. And then when that book came out in 2015, beginning to pivot more in a direction towards more public oriented rather than academic oriented work. So is that accurate? And if it is, can you talk a little bit about how that pivot happened for you?

Douglas Shadle 03:43

Yeah, no, that's a great question. And quite a bit of it was unplanned in the sense that you're right that I had a standard trajectory toward a book after the dissertation, the book was based on the dissertation. But in terms of pivoting in any conscious way to public musicology, I was in the fortunate, the very fortunate and privileged stance of having my book come out two years onto the tenure track. And so I had been off the tenure track for four years, and then on the tenure track for two. And so my book came out in the second year, and so I was thinking about what could I possibly do toward a next book project or change directions and this sort of thing? Well, it just so happened that in 2018, very early in 2018, a lot of orchestras made their season announcements. And I had just been working on a pivot project on the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which was to edit some interviews and reviews by the renowned Chicago Sun Times critic Andrew Patner. I was doing this for University of Chicago Press with John Schmidt, a Chicago attorney who was one of Andrew Patner's friends. And I had been working on that for about a year at this point. This was 2017 and into 2018. And when the season announcements came out in 2018, many orchestras programmed entire years with no music by women at all. And it created a significant Twitter Firestorm back in the days when Twitter was a bit more vibrant than it is now. [Both laugh]

Will Robin 05:32

I want to return to the death of Twitter today.

Douglas Shadle 05:34

Yeah, of course. So in any case, these announcements came out, and many people were griping on Twitter. And so it was like one Wednesday afternoon, I sat down in my office, and I reflected on this issue of lack of diverse programming, not only in terms of race and ethnicity, but in terms of gender style, time period. Because my first book, *Orchestrating the Nation*, really interrogated these issues deeply. In terms of, why are these composers who are writing very good music? Why is their music not being performed? What motivations might organizations have for not performing this music? And so I tried to illuminate, in a Twitter thread of all places, some of these questions, and why it's just not only morally bad and disruptive to the entire musical ecosystem to have un-diverse programming, but also what can be done about it. When we talk about systemic discrimination, for example, how do we diagnose the various parts of the system so that we break the cycles that lead to these situations? And so I wrote the thread, I wasn't a big name on Twitter at that time or anything, but I wrote the thread. And then I went into a harp recital here, which I do sometimes on campus for the students. And when I came back, I had just a million notifications. And so apparently, this thread had had touched a nerve in a good way, in that people understood that it's that this issue of diversity isn't just a yes/no question, that there are several interlocking variables that can lead to this. And a lot of people responded positively to what I had to say.

Will Robin 05:36

I've been thinking ... I was actually just talking to someone, a student at another university wanted to talk to me about some of my writing work yesterday, and we were speaking over the phone. And I was reflecting on that historical moment that now feels like it's past, the 2010s and early 2020s, in which music academics could go on Twitter and say things and people would care, because I don't know what happened to Twitter the last six months. I mean, I do know what happened. But, it seems like it's no longer a thing. And that's too bad. But, when you started doing that, and you felt like people cared, did that feel different from writing and publishing a well-regarded and interesting academic book? what was that response Like, and how did that help you re-understand what you wanted your role to be as a scholar?

Douglas Shadle 08:18

Oh, yeah. No, it was huge. Well, this was ... it was very validating. Even after this first thread, you're talking more about the next year or so if my work, but after that first Twitter thread, I got emails, I got people in the industry who wanted to talk to me on the phone and just kind of bat ideas around about, what do I see as the future for orchestras. And so, having people interested in my take on history informing future directions in the industry was hugely validating. And there was actually a review of my book by the composer Kyle Gann that also kind of articulated this for me, where I thought the book was narrating a story about the 19th century. And then in the epilogue, I talk about how I think it influenced composition in the early 20th century. But Kyle in his review wrote that even his students today greatly prefer European composers over American composers, which is one of the theses of my book, why there's this European bias. And he said that what I was capturing was a phenomenon that still exists, and for him to articulate that actually discerned for me that the stories I was researching had contemporary relevance. Even if the music I was talking about, say, William Henry Frey symphonies may not be the most interesting to resuscitate. I think that would be good, but it's not about the repertoire at this point. It's about ideologies and patterns of behavior, and larger organizational incentives and disincentives that shaped the industry that my research was getting at. And being able to articulate those relationships in a contemporary context, got people interested, and I thought, okay -- even though I've done historical work, I'm looking at a phenomenon that's still present, and could make interventions in that and so yeah, it was really exciting to have that come at me randomly. And then I just was inspired when people took the bait and I was really both proud and humbled to feel like I might have a voice in these larger conversations.

Will Robin 10:50

I want to come back to what you did next, and how you might have conceptualized that as public musicology, which is a word I spend too much time thinking about [Douglas laughs], I'm trying to stop thinking about. But maybe just talk a little bit about what some of the historical threads from your book that you see moving into the contemporary context, and that you saw then and maybe see now as relevant to this programming conversation?

Douglas Shadle 11:18

Yeah, one of the big ones is double standards, where aesthetic judgment is frequently used to cover for other kinds of bias. And this is a phenomenon that African American composers, women, other very large groups that have historically been disenfranchised, or even marginalized in the classical music industry have discussed. There's a famous article, for example, in 1950, by William Grant Still where he

says that the more an African American composer incorporates idioms of the African diaspora into classical music, the more they're seen as merely a racial composer. And then the more that they choose to write in abstract music, critics will say that they have betrayed somehow their racial identity, is the gist of his quotation. And so, that's an aesthetic judgment being used as cover for discrimination against a kind of human being. And that goes all the way back to the early 19th century, where composers were belittled for writing music that could be interpreted as uniquely American sounding, however we want to define that, but there are many cases. And so there was another really terrific article, much more recently by the composer Sarah Kirkland Snider about this very issue too, called "Candy Floss and Merry Go Round" that she wrote for New Music Box, where she explains how critics used very gendered expressions to describe, expressive, emotional... well say, conventionally expressive music with tonal motion and this sort of thing. How that was gendered feminine, and how that's bound up to her identity as a woman in a negative way in the criticism. And so this is the sort of thing that continues to inform programming choices. And in Sarah Kirkland Snider's case, how women are taught in music schools, because she experienced a lot of negative feedback on not being angular enough or modernist enough in training. And so, that's the main thread that I think emerged from the book is the notion of double standards, and that aesthetics are often used to shield other personal biases.

Will Robin 14:09

But obviously, for the most part, in the context of the book, you were really talking about white American men versus white European men. So you see this double standard happening with Frey or something. But you see it also resonating... Frey as an American versus a European, but you also see it resonating with Still as African American, or Snider as a woman, resonating the same kinds of discourses.

Douglas Shadle 14:34

Right, exactly. And it's tough to boohoo over these very privileged white American men. Because I want to make this clear for listeners is that in the 19th century United States, the industry was so discriminatory against people of color and women, that these individuals were rarely, very rarely performed at all. I mean, I'm thinking about Amy Beach for instance, coming very late in the century, being one of the first women programmed by a major American orchestra, although there were a couple of other small exceptions. And so the point here is that there were strategies and tools for discrimination that emerged in the 19th century, that as white American men composers became more accepted into the fabric of the industry in the early 20th century, the same strategies were then applied to the emergent African American composers, other composers of color, and women. Because these tools were just there in the critics' toolbox. They were there in the organizational toolbox. And so just as these groups emerge into the realm of possibility, the rug is pulled out from under them with the same strategies. And so I think the story that begins in *Orchestrating the Nation* is really still unfolding as composers and organizations figure out how to be more inclusive.

Will Robin 16:13

So you lay out some of these ideas in that thread back in 2018. And you start to have conversations with people, and where does it go from there? What are the conversations that you saw then or see now bearing fruit? What are the other kinds of public oriented work you started embarking on?

Douglas Shadle 16:32

I think one of the big ones is the notion that women have only recently begun to compose, is -- I found to be a deeply ingrained falsehood in the industry, that musicologists of course have been addressing for decades and decades, but just hasn't quite percolated into the general mindset. There was this article in response to some of the Twitter discourse around women in 2018, there was an NPR article where the CEO of the League of American orchestras said -- Well, the canon is all male because there just weren't women composing. And I just think to myself -- Well, gosh, if the CEO of the League of American orchestras has this rather narrow view of what repertoire is out there, then that's a real problem, because even though he at the time obviously didn't represent all the collective knowledge in the industry, he crystallized in a symbolic of a kind of power structure. And if he doesn't know, then a thousand other people don't know. And so part of my work has been discerning how to pivot from historical knowledge about women or other composers whose work has been programmed less or lost, or wherever you want to think of it, how to pivot to getting that music on the actual concert stage. And, of course, some of that work aligned with my parallel work on Florence Price. And so 2018 was also the year when Florence Price entered into public discourse at a very high level with stories by Alex Ross in The New Yorker, and Michela Baranello in the New York Times, also in early 2018. And so the convergence of thinking about general systemic discrimination, and Price as, for lack of a better term, a kind of case study, in the historical discrimination as well as its residual after effects. I think change the conversation to not only -- Oh, this thing happened and it was bad, but -- Oh, this thing happened, it was bad and now what can be done to shift our thinking, and in my experience over the past five years, I think organizations have become more attuned to the fact that it's a historical problem. And to a certain extent, even a historiographical problem that needs to be solved as much as an internal organizational problem. You can do all the bias training in the world but then if you don't have access to the tools and resources to change your programming, so that it's not just commissioning a new artist but also finding older works that really truly diversify a portfolio, then you're not doing anything. All the bias training in the world is good on a certain level, but it doesn't quite turn that corner into what happens in the organization and what goes on stage. And so my work has informed that corner turning.

Will Robin 20:12

I think that's significant. It seems to me, and I am going to be... I am hopeful that orchestras programming Price's work and Still's work and Dawson's work and a handful of other composers --not more than a handful, unfortunately -- is not a two-year fad, and is something more enduring, in the way that every music director who does Beethoven and Mahler and Brahms also has their pet project, and if they're a white European music director, it's usually, I want to record Carl Nielsen or whatever. And so, if some of those composers can become the staples like the Niensens or the Sibeliuses where they're not... well Sibelius is more at the forefront, but they end up in every season in some capacity rather than just in these specific moments and specific, whatever programs about Black History Month. And yeah, it does seem to me like the musicologist has a significant role to play there. So at what point did you think of what you were doing as public musicology? And what did that phrase mean to you? Or does it mean to you?

Douglas Shadle 20:39

(Laughs) Yeah, the million-dollar question. I don't know that I conceived of what I was doing as different in kind from just musicology. And it was simply thinking about the applications of my research differently than having a pure scholarly application, we might say. And so public musicology for me would be about the audience for the work. And in this case, it wasn't necessarily just a sort of anonymous large scale general public, but it was — I wanted to reach the administrators of orchestras, these historical powerbrokers. And fortunately, I was able to do that. I was told that there were some orchestras, even major orchestras that circulated the article for icareifyoulisten.com that came out in the wake of the Twitter thread about systemic discrimination. And then it made the rounds among staffers, and they were asking themselves, oh, okay, maybe he's onto something about these incentive structures, the financial incentives that agents have with soloists and conductors to keep things on the conservative side, and not ruffle any feathers and all of this. And so they were able to, I don't know how deep it was, but do a little bit of introspection on their own involvement in these structures that lead to the inertia that I was trying to diagnose. And so in a sense that was a terrific consequence. And so, that's why I'm using the word application. So it's a different application of musicological thinking, rather than an all blast shift in how I'm approaching issues or who I'm trying to reach. Now, just by happenstance, this is another just lucky, very lucky, privileged thing that happened to me. In November, maybe late October, November of 2018, same year, I was working on a Dvorak New World Symphony project. And NPR released a story on Dvorak's New World Symphony that I thought was just completely wrong. (Laughs) And so I ended up making my first pitch to the New York Times saying — look, I've got all this research that shows the story is just wrong. And then I said that 2018 is the 125th anniversary of the New World Symphony. It's a timely moment to be thinking about this piece and its relationship to all these other issues that I had been discussing, like American composers and race and all this other stuff. Would your readers be interested in this kind of essay? And so Zachary Wolf, the Times approved the pitch, and that was still a different application of, (laughs) again, for lack of a better term, combating fake news that I think had had circulated for, as I argue in the piece, about 70 years. It goes back to Leonard Bernstein saying that American composers knew nothing, and Dvorak taught them all these things. And so that was a case where I was trying to reach a large, knowledgeable audience and trying to set the record straight without the kind of organizational ties of some of my other work. But I mean, 2018 was just a real lightning in a bottle situation, where things that were very related to the previous work I had done were percolating in the larger public discursive sphere, in classical music circles. And I was able to participate in those discussions and was welcomed as a participant, fortunately.

Will Robin 25:40

So let's talk about the Price work in terms of how it relates to some of the public work you were doing. The Price work comes out of your Dvorak research, is that right? How did you end up pivoting towards Florence Price in a time in which there seems to be an increasing momentum towards ... in looking at her music?

Douglas Shadle 26:03

Yeah, so the Price work really comes more out of the 19th century American work, in that she was a student of George Chadwick at the New England Conservatory. And I thought that stylistically her music, it fits in this vein of thinking about the orchestra as a vehicle of expression of national identity, and developing an American sound. And of course, she was active at one of several peaks of interest in defining an American sound. And so she had always been part of the next chapter, if you will, or the

next volume of *Orchestrating the Nation*, were such a thing to exist. But again, the wild and very lucky story behind Price is that, as I was mapping out the Dvorak book in 2015, right as *Orchestrating the Nation* came out. I was planning to visit the University of Arkansas, which holds the William Grant Still papers. And literally that summer, is when the recently recovered manuscripts of Price that had been found in 2009, the summer of 2015 is when they became available for scholarship. And so while I was planning a trip to visit the Still papers, literally the finding aid for the price papers came up on the Special Collections website. And I thought -- Oh, my God is am I seeing this properly? Is this music that we thought was lost and is now available for study? And so in addition to working on Still for the Dvorak book, I really reoriented my whole thinking about Price now that there was this tremendous amount of music and other biographical material. And so I thought -- gosh, I can't just relegate my work on Price to the third of a short chapter that was going to be in the Dvorak book, there was just way too much material that needed to be assimilated into ongoing historiography, not only of Price but of African American classical music making. And so I was just barely able to scratch the surface there. But because I had access to 19 plus giant boxes of archival material, including all these scores, I got to thinking about -- how do we make this music available? And the copyright status at that time was really fuzzy. Professor Rae Linda Brown, who was a preeminent Price scholar, through the year 2017, when she passed away, had been serving as a kind of intermediary agent for the Price estate and her granddaughter in California that had come about in the 90s. And so when Rae Linda died, there was really this very nebulous moment about, here's all this terrific music, how do we get it performed in a way that honors legal protections, but also the estate? And so on and so forth. Well, then Schirmer -- thinking about the year 2018 is a super nexus moment for me, in 2018 is also when G. Schirmer acquired the global rights to Price's music from Price's granddaughter in California. And so I had been working with the musicologist and pianist Samantha Ege for about two years by 2018. And we were a little bit suspicious of the Schirmer acquisition, like what's going on here and ...

Will Robin 30:00

Were you already planning a Price book with Ege at that point or you were just collaborating with her?

Douglas Shadle 30:06

No, no -- we met very early on because she was working... she was still working on her dissertation at the University of York in the UK, with Bill Brooks, who is a distinguished member of the Society for American music, American music historian and Bill introduced me to Samantha pretty early, I guess the timing was actually 2017. It was after the Rochester meeting of the American musicological society Bill and I met at the airport. And then Samantha and I were emailing a day later. And the rest is history, in that we just decided, oh, you know, you've seen this, you've seen this, I've seen this, I've seen that. So we just started sharing things. And we didn't start putting a book idea together until much, much later. We were just idea bouncers for several years, which was really incredible. And in any case, back to 2018. So that had been going on for about a year rather than two years, which I said earlier, but any case for about a year, we had been thinking about Price and different avenues for getting the music out there. And then when Schirmer entered the story, it was just a whole other ballgame because they were going to have an international marketing arm and distribution with this. So they took care of the access issue on a certain level. (Laughs) And maybe we can get a chance to discuss how that has shifted, in my humble opinion. But yeah, so to come back to the original question briefly. My work on Price

emerged as a more significant thread, just at precisely the time all of these other threads came together in 2018. And so that year is just the most pivotal, most memorable, exciting year for me as a scholar.

Will Robin 32:04

Let's talk about the Schirmer thing because it seems to represent ... I mean, I know you're interested in exploring this in your work and the problem of it, which is basically ... and I think it's a similar thing with Julius Eastman now, where basically you have a somewhat obscure composer who has been championed for a long time by certain folks in circles that are often marginalized, African American musicians HBCUs, or, in the case of Eastman, personal friends and folks in the world of new music, and then there's an explosion of interest in scholarship and in performance. And then a giant publisher comes along and says -- Oh, we're going to advocate for this composer. And everyone's like -- Oh, my God, this is an amazing moment. And then things in some ways get easier because major orchestras have relationships with these publishers. And then all the other people who are doing the work to begin with often get left in the dust, because suddenly they're being charged hundreds or thousands of dollars to do the things that they were able to do before. So can you talk a little bit about what's happened so far with Schirmer and Price and how you're navigating it?

Douglas Shadle 33:13

I just want to commend you for articulating that problem so well, and so accurately, because the publishers in this case are for profit. And the work that was being done previously, in the case of Eastman, and Price is all nonprofit, in the sense that it was often subsidized say, by universities, university faculty, often not for ticket sales, although it's not exactly true because say CD recordings, which have record sales, but in any case, yeah,

Will Robin 33:50

But those CDs were not being released on commercial labels.

Douglas Shadle 33:54

Exactly. It's that university and nonprofit sector of the recording industry, where these are coming out. So when the for profit publisher comes in their motivation is rather clear, which is to extract as much profit as they can from the situation. And so they therefore emphasize certain things like speed, efficiency, and expanse. And sometimes those values really fly in the face of musical and creative integrity. And I'll just cite one quick example there.

Will Robin 34:41

Cite a longer example too, I think it's worth explaining what's going on with the Price stuff.

Douglas Shadle 34:46

Yeah. So Schirmer, historically, and in the case with Price, has not produced the best editions for people to use. And one story that I tell to illustrate how long this is has been going on is that you can go to the John Alden Carpenter papers. at the Library of Congress, John Alden Carpenter was a composer who was a contemporary of Price, a very wealthy man who married an industry heiress of some kind. And was just able to compose freely, because he had all the time in the world to do this. Well, there's a folder that's his correspondence with Schirmer on his concertino for piano and orchestra, which anyone

who knows anything about Price knows that Margaret Bonds was the soloist for this concertino for piano and orchestra at the premiere of Price's First Symphony with the Chicago Symphony in 1933. So there's a Price connection, and this is why I was looking at it. But in any case, it's 20 years of correspondence with Schirmer about like how they just cannot get the score and the parts of the concertino right. And he's just going back with them, you know, like edits after edits. And so whatever their workflow is, at that time, this was not working for Carpenter. And I have all the love in the world for people who do the engraving of the scores. I know that working at a publisher is not the most prestigious or even lucrative job for an individual. But the values of the company are such that there is a payoff for the company to get things out as quickly as possible, which, of course, humans being humans, could lead to certain errors. And also, there are things like manuscript variants among the various manuscripts of Price's orchestral works, never mind the songs and other things, where, is it a B natural, is it a B flat, is an instrument missing? There's all sorts of stuff that if you're just doing a diplomatic transcription, meaning an exact transcription of one of Price's manuscripts, and you're not looking at the variants, and you're just trying to pump it out there... It might actually sound kind of bad. She was very much a binge composer and copyist and, I have a lot of evidence for this, she herself was working very rapidly. And so there are just things that some careful attention to her working methods, and the scores and the evidence that we have, might lead you in different directions from the Schirmer editions. And so I've spoken to many conductors, orchestra librarians, soloists who have complained about how the editions do a disservice ... can do a disservice to Price because performed as is just sound kind of bad. And if that is an audience's first exposure to Price's music, and it just doesn't sound good, will they walk away not liking Price? Will they say oh, what's all the hype? When say the album that won the Grammy had Nicole Jordan, the orchestra librarian for the Philadelphia Orchestra and Lita Gonzalez Granados, the prep conductor for that fix a ton of stuff in those scores and parts to get clean versions of these things for the album that won the Grammy and so if let's say an audience member knows that this music won a Grammy. And then they go hear it at their local orchestra. And that conductor has had maybe a week to rehearse, and it's done the best they can just to kind of fix what they hear on the fly. That can lead to some bad outcomes for Price and audience reception. So it's just a situation where when the people who are in the operation care about the entire operation soup to nuts, then the outcomes, I think, would tend to be better on an artistic level, social level. I mean, there are terrific benefits to having the international marketing and distribution infrastructure, don't get me wrong. That's huge. But there are the significant drawbacks of the bottom line driving the decision making and every other decision flowing from there,

Will Robin 39:37

It seems also -- and I don't know the details of this, so I'm curious, but it also removes this music from a lot of the worlds in which it's being performed because it's become prohibitively expensive. Is that the case? I mean, Price's music being a part since she was alive of HBCU performance, and I imagine that's not as much able to be possible. Is that true, is there a pricing issue that's kind of pricing people out of being able to perform her music?

Douglas Shadle 40:05

Oh, absolutely. I don't know how public the numbers are, but the per minute charge for some of the shorter pieces like Ethiopia, Shadow in America and the piano concerto, some of these nicer pieces that are short, it's just exorbitant. And University orchestras are going to have problems affording some

of that music, and university orchestras are training grounds for the next generation of professional performers. And if they cannot access this great diverse repertoire, at the university level, that's just yet another layer of inertia, that ripples out into the professional world.

Will Robin 40:56

It goes back to that thing, too, if this is a fad in the mainstream orchestral world, where it's two years of Price, and then they go back to Sibelius, then it's just been captured by this — then no one will be able to play it. If the only people who can afford to play it are the people who have the most money. than the colleges won't be able to play it, period.

Douglas Shadle 41:17

Exactly. And then when you look at the other side of that coin, Schirmer would look even worse, that's just as much extraction as possible in a very short period of time. And that they somehow timed the market extremely well. And then everything goes back to normal. And nothing has changed.

Lill Robin 41:35

Like speculation or something.

Douglas Shadle 41:37

Exactly. Then only Schirmer is sort of the Wall Street winner (laughs) at that point with no one else coming out transformed at all. I was just going to mention earlier that in the case of the orchestral music, say in HBCUs, my understanding at least is that the orchestral pieces are only available for rental, and then even creating a study score, an inexpensive study score, that could go say to an HBCU library, like Morgan State, or Fisk, or Tennessee State near me, Morgan State in Baltimore as one of the bigger music programs, let's say Howard too in Washington DC, they can't have it. And so even finding space in spaces that Price has historically occupied has been prohibitively expensive, if not just impossible, because of the way the publisher system is working right now. And so, in terms of access, yes, many access doors have been opened, but many, many access doors have been closed. And on the scholarly side, the amount of money it costs to reproduce even eight measures of music for a scholarly article is really expensive right now, and so it diminishes scholarly access. Because again, let's say you're an early career, or even a dissertating, musicologist. Where's that money going to come from? And so again, it's the rich feeding on the less privileged and all that money flowing upward.

Will Robin 43:25

So beyond just yelling at Schirmer, how are you starting to conceive of a potential solution to this, both in terms of this specific issue, and more broadly, in terms of this larger question?

Douglas Shadle 43:37

I see a lot of possibility in in digital spaces. And, I'm very loath to say that tech is the solution to any problem these days, there's so many problems with big tech that I'm not going in that direction, it's rather in more low-tech directions. In the fall of 2019, my colleague, Joy Calico, and the librarian at Tufts named Anna Kijas led a music and coding initiative boot camp and workshop at Vanderbilt — and the music and coding Initiative is a largely European effort, but also has some adherence elsewhere — to develop machine readable music notation, using basic XML. And what this means is that if it's

machine readable, it's essentially all text, text descriptions of a score, to make five lines with a G on this space in the staff and for this duration. So it's text instructions on how to generate notation. And this approach to notation, I thought was super interesting because we had a student who did a senior honors thesis on some manuscript versions of an opera that the conductor had changed. And he put these into the music encoding. And you could kind of toggle between the various versions and visualize all of these changes in the manuscripts from manuscript to performance. And the pandemic hit. And this was always lingering in the background, and I thought — ah, this digital edition would be an incredible thing to create, once Price's music enters into the public domain, because a giant paper Critical Edition is also prohibitively expensive, especially if we're thinking about access in, say, places like all of Africa, where there could be issues either with universities, but also computing resources can be limited. And so developing an accessible digital edition seemed like an interesting problem to dive into. And so I had that on the back burner, because I was focusing on the Dvorak book, and then developing the Price book with Samantha. But then, last December, my music library and Holling Smith-Bourne said, Have you ever thought about doing a Florence Price thematic catalog? And I thought - Well, oh, no, I haven't. But then in about a week, another lightning bolt hit, which was oh, what if I tried to do a digital thematic catalog, as a proof of concept for a larger critical edition of Price's music. And so I met with Anna Kijas, again, at Tufts. And we talked about how to use GitHub as a repository for storing data to go into a thematic catalog, and then how to develop the web infrastructure through GitHub to host the thematic catalog and an open access format. And so it's all open source, it's all open access. And what's incredible is that the data storage is all markdown programming language, which is essentially a .txt file. And therefore it takes up a tiny amount of space. And so the thematic incipits are all rendered through MEI, that XML based notation, so that when you go to an entry, you can pop up the theme, and it uses practically no computing resources. The information pages for each entry are all text based. But it looks really nice, because there are some skins that web developers have put together for this sort of thing. And so my current project, to complement the book with an E — complement with an E — is this thematic catalog that has all sorts of information about where the manuscripts live. It's got thematic incipits, for the songs. It's got things like lyricist and the source. And if Price's source differs from the original source, I've got that information in there, about what book was she reading to find this poem. So it's got all sorts of information there that you would find in a traditional research and information guide, as well as a thematic catalog. And so that's a proof of concept for how to make good information, good musical information available for scholars, performers, and anyone interested in Price in the general public even, that doesn't have these two barriers of price with a lowercase p (laughs), OK, expense cost, that's not a barrier. And then also, computing resources and bandwidth, and physical space are not barriers either.

Will Robin 49:06

Cool. Well, that sounds very exciting. I'm curious to see how that turns out. And thank you so much for speaking with me.

Douglas Shadle 49:13

Yeah, thanks so much, Will, it's my pleasure to chat with you.

[Music] 49:16

Will Robin 49:23

Many thanks to Douglas Shadle for that fascinating conversation. You can read more about his work over on our website, soundexpertise.org. Our inbox is open. If you have questions or thoughts about the show, email us at soundexpertise00@gmail.com, or tag me on twitter or instagram @seatedovation. Many thanks as always to D. Edward Davis for his production work, you can catch his music on Soundcloud at [warm silence](https://www.soundcloud.com/warm-silence). I'm grateful to Andrew Dell'Antonio for transcribing our episodes to make them more accessible. And this episode of sound expertise was recorded at the National Foreign Language Center with support from University of Maryland School of Music. Next week on sound expertise, the complicated revival of Julius Eastman.

Unidentified Speaker 50:09

One of the things that they did was — I had brought up some of his new CDs and the book. They took all of that off the table. So, they weren't... if you're so interested in Julius Eastman and upholding his vision, why are you first of all not programming his music, and then taking away people's chance to hear his music or read about him?

Will Robin 50:41

See you then.

[Music] 50:45