

Sound Expertise Season 3:8 –

Appropriation and Indigenous Music with Dylan Robinson

Transcribed by Andrew Dell'Antonio

Dylan Robinson 00:00

One of the differences is the fact that our songs serve as other things, as things more than songs. They serve as medicine, they serve as legal orders, they serve as our family and community histories to the same extent that a book would serve as the documentation of such history. They are songs, they're still sung and they're still aesthetically beautiful. And we love them and love performing them, but they're also other things.

00:30

[Music]

Will Robin 00:52

This is Sound expertise. I'm Will Robin, and this is my podcast where I talk to my fellow music scholars about their research, and why it matters. An important part of musicology, and pretty much all scholarship for that matter, is critique. Taking a long hard look at established conventions, traditions, and ideas and -- well -- criticizing them. In our current online climate, it's easy to look askance at critique, like it's just a longer, more jargon laden version of a spicy Twitter takedown. But there is a kind of critique that offers a new lens through which to see the world. The 2020 book *Hungry Listening* by Dylan Robinson offers one such critique. It provides a deep, thoughtful and engrossing theory of listening and music making through an indigenous perspective. Dr. Robinson, who is Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia's School of Music, has been on my guest list for Sound Expertise for a long while now. And I'm really excited about this conversation, which I hope helps you understand a hugely important set of ideas, through understanding Dr. Robinson himself, and the traditions and communities from which his work arises. Dr. Robinson's work is incredibly specific in its activism. He talks in detail about the logistics of replacing a stolen indigenous song found in a major Canadian opera, and also broadly utopian in outlook, through imagining how indigenous thinking could -- and should -- serve as a model for our own. I think you will learn a lot from this conversation.

02:33

[music]

Will Robin 02:43

So your work hits on so many different really important topics. And it's hard to know where to begin a conversation about your work. And so I thought maybe we could begin with you, and what motivated you to become a scholar. Can you talk a little bit about how your experiences as an artist and a musician and a person shaped your desire to create scholarship and writing.

Dylan Robinson 03:10

Sure. So I did my undergraduate degree at Simon Fraser University, just outside of Vancouver, which is where I'm from. And I had a very rough time for my undergraduate degree. First generation, as an indigenous student as well, it was a rough go on different levels, and not very well prepared, either, from my high school to take part in conversations, actually just this very basic thing. And so I came very close to dropping out.

Will Robin 03:50

Were you studying music?

Dylan Robinson 03:53

I was studying composition, as well as humanities, but composition was one of the focuses I had -- one of the early focuses I had in my undergraduate degree. And in fact, it was a composition professor at Simon Fraser University who -- and I was doing very well in that class, but he could see right through it, apparently, and he looked at me said -- You really aren't enjoying this, are you? I said -- Well, I'm having some challenges. One of the things that was really hard for me in that context of composition was looking at a lot of exoticist works and having that approach of cultural material and use be promoted, sometimes, and it really didn't sit well with me at all, as an indigenous person. And so that was definitely present. And he might have been picking up on that. But I was...

Will Robin 04:51

Sorry, now I'm kind of curious because I assumed one's critique of that kind of thing comes after graduate school in some way. So what were at that point the kinds of things you were encountering, that you were feeling kind of yucky about and uncomfortable about that weren't -- that weren't uncomfortable to your fellow students or professors?

Dylan Robinson 05:11

We were looking at some Canadian works. As part of -- I don't even remember the specific works that were part of that course, I think, maybe even Louis Riel, the opera that I eventually wrote about that uses, in that instance, a different indigenous song that was recorded by an ethnographer in the 1920s, a Niska song that was used to represent an indigenous... to represent a Métis person, but I think it was more -- it's really hard to think back and pinpoint specific works that we were looking at. But it was a general feeling, I think, in that time. And so this would be the early 90s. And I think it was just still a feeling at least in Canada, maybe even because of the official multiculturalism act, that we should be using musics from many different peoples as aesthetic resources. And this is the way I'm articulating it now, I didn't -- I wouldn't articulate it the same way. But it made me very uncomfortable because I did understand that, at least from an indigenous perspective, from a Stó:lō xwélmexw perspective, that you don't just use music, you know, the ethics of that felt very off to me. And I was already aware of ways in which our arts and cultural practices had simply been lifted, used and taken from us and censored. We have over 100 years of that history. And so, just the feeling, the feeling of that, and the approach, even though that wasn't the exclusive approach, obviously, to the composition courses I took it was one of the ways that things took place, a kind of unmarked -- we should be doing this, and every day ubiquitous thing. And so that was part of my discomfort even at that early stage of my studies. But I was also working as a pianist, I had a small studio, I was teaching. And I was enjoying that less and less, as well. Because often the students that were taking classes were being pushed into it by their parents,

and I had some performance anxiety. So I wasn't enjoying that part of it. Even though I love the idea of ensemble, I never really felt like I could attain that sense of ensemble. So all of these things combined led to a really challenging experience and just the university environment in general. And so I said to him, I responded when he asked me that question, this professor, I said, Well, I'm actually preparing to audition for a performance program at UBC, University of British Columbia in piano. And he looked at me and he laughed, and he said -- You'll never get in. [laughs] It crushed me, because I was really focusing hard on doing that. And I credit him to this day to being so blunt, because it really pushed me into different areas. I had a couple of really important mentors, Donna Zapf, who became the director of Liberal Studies at Duke University, but she was a musicologist who said -- Oh, well, you're really enjoying writing about music, maybe you should explore more of that. And then a visual artist, Jin-Mi Yoon, in the SFU visual arts program said, Well, you know, you're really enjoying creating work from a multidisciplinary perspective, maybe you should do more of that. And so those are exactly the things that I did. And SFU was the best place to do that, because of the focus on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary arts practices. So I came out of the program with a degree in art and cultural studies. So a studies focused bachelor's degree, but within that I did two years of theater practice, I kind of snuck into one of the classes, and had another professor Penelope Stella, who was really encouraging in that, and then also a whole bunch of visual arts courses. And so I came out of the degree with a really good critical orientation through the Art and Cultural Studies program, to writing and thinking about music, and then also practice based approach to creating work.

Will Robin 09:46

And how did that lead to the specific areas you work on as a scholar and the kinds of stuff you want to engage with? One thing that's striking to me in your work is, a lot of your interventions have to do with the culture and systems of classical music or art music or whatever you want to call it. And I can imagine in some way you would prefer to just to leave that world behind entirely after some of these experiences.

Dylan Robinson 10:15

In a way I did, I came out of the program, and I started creating work with a number of different theater artists, devised work, that was really interdisciplinary. And I created a piece, for example, called the Pentland project, which was all about the work of serialist composer who was based in Vancouver, Barbara Pentland. And we spent months with her works, listening to them, talking about them, thinking about them from different artistic perspectives, and then staging that work across the arts, which is really, really amazing. And so I wanted to really integrate the different art forms I was engaged in, in collaborative practice, as a kind of -- what I eventually started calling public musicology, different than I think the term is used within musicology, but I understood that as a space for the public to engage with this music. How I was trying to frame this work was a kind of musicology, a kind of understanding what music is, through artistic practice and through different kinds of gathering with audiences, different kinds of dialogue. The work that Grant Kester did on dialogical aesthetics, and Claire Bishop and others in relational aesthetics, that was really influential to me at the time. So I was thinking about forms of gathering, artistic forms of gathering, where there would be opportunities for discussion amongst the public about how we heard whatever music it was. And at the time, I was really interested in a lot of Italian modernist composers: Franco Donatoni, Aldo Clementi -- I still am, still love those composers, I don't know why, I was just very, very taken by that kind of work. So I finished my PhD with a practice

based PhD, and then realized that there still weren't a lot of programs in Canada or the US at that time, that were moving in that direction. So I thought, well, I should probably do something else that is more recognizable from an academic perspective. So I went back to those questions I had in my undergraduate degree about appropriation, and the way that multiculturalism had influenced composition in Canada ... Official multiculturalism, as a government policy, and started that work basically after my PhD. And it was definitely more academic, it wasn't practice based at all, until I'd say, I don't know, several years in, where I got the itch again to do some practice-based work and then started thinking about creative writing forms, and then scores, that kind of work and how that might integrate the two parts of what I do in a book form.

Will Robin 13:31

I want to talk about various aspects of the book, including how it is written and some of the more atypical and creative ways in which you're presenting different forms of analysis. But you weren't interested in this critique of indigenous ... indigenous critique of art music in this interim period, and then you returned to it post PhD, is that how you would summarize it? That's interesting.

Dylan Robinson 14:01

I think it was simmering, I think it was always there. And it's interesting, because the work that I did during that period for my Master's and PhD probably wouldn't be read as indigenous, but I think a lot of choices, a lot of the methodologies and values that underpin that work, even the basic focus around gathering and visiting, were really drawn from those same values that I hold as a hallmark. So it's interesting to me to hear someone characterize that work as much more formalist or less focused on indigenous history or issues. I would get that, but I would also say, there's a lot of ways in which that does connect -- the two sides do connect, but just maybe in less visible ways.

Will Robin 14:55

So what was the path towards that more visible or more overt approach? What kinds of things were you drawn towards that led you toward the main subjects of the book, the main themes of the book?

Dylan Robinson 15:11

I was at the end of my PhD, the PhD also was part of this research center, run by Nicholas Till at the University of Sussex. I can't remember what the full acronym for that was now, but the research center was focused on experimental opera and interdisciplinary creation. And I hadn't really had any focus on opera in my work, but I was really interested in that. So I started working with another scholar and friend, Pamela Karantonis, on what would eventually become the collection *Opera Indigene*, which is about indigenous representation in opera, and operas that indigenous people have participated in or written, composed. And that was one way in, thinking about that -- the other context of the research center I was part of, and then my interest in indigenous participation in opera. And I think that sort of blossomed back out into those ideas around appropriation that I stopped actively thinking about in my undergraduate degree and then started to ... that work just started to take more of a focus in the postdoctoral fellowships that I had. I kept joking with people -- I said, I'm not on the tenure track. I'm on the postdoc track. Three postdocs in a row, which is wild, right? They're these wonderful things, you get to focus on your research. But you also start to wonder, will I get a tenure track position by the end of

this. So they also gave me the time to focus on what would become Hungry Listening just through that. It was a six-year period of postdoctoral fellowships.

Will Robin 17:01

So let's talk a little bit about that lens of looking at appropriation, you talk about this idea of disciplinary redress in terms of addressing this history of violence that can be embedded into language and writing. You mentioned a couple of composers at the beginning, but can you talk about a couple examples of how these forms of violence might be seen in contemporary Canadian works that you've looked at? And then how you approach dealing with them?

Dylan Robinson 17:30

Sure. I think the most significant one for me was one that I addressed in the book, is an opera called Louis Riel, that I've already mentioned to you, and this is an opera about the Métis figure Louis Riel, the leader of a rebellion, the history of Louis Riel. But also written by a non-Indigenous composer, a non-Indigenous librettist with a lot of gaps in their knowledge of who this person was. And there was a point at which -- so this was also written for Canada's 100th anniversary originally, in 1967. And performed during that time, and then it was remounted in the next full staging. There were a lot of smaller stagings, university stagings of the opera but first full staging at Canada's 150th anniversary, so it was produced by the Canadian Opera Company and the National Art Center. And at that point, myself and a number of Nisga'a colleagues decided that we would approach these two producers and say -- Were you aware that the aria, Marguerite's aria, Louis Riel's wife's aria that's sung about two thirds of the way through the opera is quoting basically note for note a Nisga'a lim'ooy -- it's a Nisga'a song, not a Métis song at all. And were you aware that this song was collected by ethnographers in the 1920s, And contravenes Nisga'a law for its... it should not be presented by anyone, in any form? And they said -- Well, we were aware, but we weren't planning on dealing with that. But then they said something really surprising. They said -- we would like to learn from you how to deal with this. And so that I think was this very significant change. In my previous experience with the opera when it was produced here at UBC, about five years before that, prior to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there were folks that were responding to this appropriation by saying -- Well, it's just an opera, it doesn't matter, it's really insignificant. And the change five years after that -- maybe more like eight years after that, in 2017, the Canadian Opera Company and National Arts Center saying -- we absolutely should deal with this, and please, we would value your leadership as indigenous people in how we should address this. And so that was very, very significant. And we, myself and a number of Nisga'a colleagues and other indigenous artists, had a series of conversations. The opera was in production, but we saw this as a longer-term question, because... and then eventually worked with the Nisga'a Lisims government to figure out how they would like us to address this infraction. And so it became a very long process, a multi-year process that eventually led to the commissioning of a Métis composer to create a separate aria that would go in place of this Niska song. So sometimes people say, the aria was removed. [Laughs] And you could say that the original, the one with the Nisga'a melody was removed, but it's almost more like something was created and then placed in place of the original by a Métis composer, it was really, really wonderful. And in fact, using some of the original libretto that was proposed at first and then never used for the opera. So it's a really interesting instance, I think, of redressing appropriation through creative means.

Will Robin 21:53

I've got a bunch of related questions, and one is the question that was posed to you by someone who didn't care that much -- this is just an opera, why should we care? And then relatedly, can you explain why this is -- if it is, kind of fundamentally different from Copland quoting a Shaker song, or Bartok quoting a Romanian song. What is it about this specific Indigenous, not just cultural, but actually legal context that can help us understand why you felt the need, the very clear need, to do something about this.

Dylan Robinson 22:29

Yeah, and thanks for bringing in this context of folk music quotation, because that's something that comes up quite a bit when indigenous music, when indigenous songs are used in classical music compositions. And there are some very fundamental differences. One of the differences is the fact that our songs serve as other thing, as things more than songs, they serve as medicine, they serve as legal orders, they serve as our family and community histories to the same extent that a book would serve as the documentation of such history. They are songs, they're still sung and they're still aesthetically beautiful. And we love them, and love performing them. But they're also other things. And so for that reason, sometimes I feel that the word appropriation misses the mark a little bit, because people think of appropriation as maybe a copyright infringement from a Western perspective. But what often happens when Indigenous songs are used in classical music compositions is that something else is being used, whether that's family history, a personal family story that wouldn't be shared outside of that family context, or medicine. And from that perspective, we really do need to treat the use of our songs in a different way than we would follow through on copyright infringement. I think there's also a case for following a Western legal orientation if that's what Indigenous folks choose to do. But ontologically these songs are quite different than folk music. Even though one of the things that happened quite frequently, is ethnographers who collected our songs, and they collected them during a time of great precarity, during the Potlatch ban, where we were prohibited from singing our songs associated with Potlatch during the 100 years of residential schools where we were prohibited from speaking our languages, any aspect of our cultures. So our community leaders made some really tough decisions about sharing these songs. For instance a Nisga'a lim'ooy, like the one that was used in Louis Riel, is one of the most restricted songs that exists for Nisga'a people and other Tsimshian and other northern nations have similar songs, they can only be sung at the time of passing by someone from that house. And they have a lot of spiritual power, as well. So, in conversations with Nisga'a colleagues, my understanding of this is that every time that song is sung out of its context, there's a negative spiritual impact on the family who has hereditary rights to it, and on all listeners, in fact. So for all of these reasons, it's really important when we discuss the misuse of indigenous songs, and we can say other intangible cultural heritage from other people, we should be addressing these questions as well. Does this song serve another function? And if so, what is the appropriate form of redress for its misuse?

Will Robin 26:17

The example that you give, commissioning a replacement aria that's more culturally specific makes a lot of sense. But you use what I found a very interesting metaphor in the book, or maybe it's not a metaphor, actually, maybe metaphor is the wrong word for it, of songs being trapped or even incarcerated, because you can't change the score that is printed, and that is presumably in hundreds of music libraries in Canada and could be remounted at any time, or the many recordings of it.

Presumably, if I went to my university music library, there may be dozens of scores just sitting on the shelves that have trapped within them some kind of indigenous song, but also all of these other things. So how do you grapple with that? Is there a way to free this music? What is the path forward when it's not just about -- they're doing a new production, let's work with them to find something more culturally appropriate in some way?

Dylan Robinson 27:18

The application of the word incarcerated is something ... I think it's important to say that I'm not conflating this with the prison context, this is a way to think about, firstly, how our songs have life, in different ways, that is not equated with human life. And for that reason, how does that life live, continue to live when it is placed in these other carceral contexts, such as the museum, such as scores, when they are confined, when that life is confined, within a place that doesn't allow it to flourish? So this is a really, really important question. And it's something that a lot of indigenous folks are addressing from different perspectives right now, both in the museum studies context, and sometimes in the context of classical music. For example, I am the co-director of a Project that -- similar to this instance of Louis Riel, where a number of indigenous folks, it's basically called the indigenous Advisory Council of the Canadian Music Centre, we're discussing how to address many, many instances of this from different ... the use of different indigenous peoples' songs within various compositions, upwards of 100 compositions, actually, and how to move forward in redressing all of these different pieces. And sometimes when it's the use of a song by a nation that has ... where the song is restricted, we don't do that work. In fact, we say, what we're doing now is we are approaching that community and saying -- Were you aware that your song exists in this context? If not, 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, because lots of different communities have different capacities right now, and sometimes this isn't a priority. But it's really important to understand that this is not a unique instance of a single -- and in the US context, as well. So many songs, used without permission by indigenous communities, become trapped in compositions or in museums. And then how do we move forward from that is the question.

Will Robin 30:07

Have you moved to the next step with any of these conversations in terms of making any kinds of decisions after this kind of initial -- This song has been used inappropriately? What would you like to... How can we work together to do something about it?

Dylan Robinson 30:23

Yeah. So the work that we're doing right now is in a number of different phases. At the moment, we are creating a short documentary film about the process that we've taken as a collective -- that we'll discuss exactly the kinds of things that I'm talking with you about now. And it's really important for us to have this documentary as one of the first steps in the work that we're doing. So that we can disseminate some very basic information, there's still a lot of ignorance, I think, about what our songs... how our songs function, about the history of censorship of our songs. All of this is very basic information that doesn't make its way across to composers. And so we're hoping that by creating this documentary, we will provide that information that folks can then self-correct, perhaps, they might do that work themselves, because we're all overburdened, also [laughs]. It's a very small number of indigenous folks

who work in this area of song repatriation. So some of the folks involved like Robin Gray, who's Tsimshian, works at University of Toronto. Composer Melody McIver, we have about 10 folks, people working in the museum system, Nika Collison, who's Haida, but we're all very overburdened already with the work that we're doing. And so we're hoping that this piece becomes, as I said before, a point of information where others can say -- Oh, okay, well, now I understand, and maybe I need to make a choice about that composition that I have within the Canadian Music Center, and take that out of circulation or or do something. So that's the first part. And then we have various recommendations for different kinds of music, there's music that misrepresents indigenous people, that completely just gets it wrong [laughs], that perpetuates a kind of misinformation that needs to be addressed. There's the use of our languages. That is a different kind of misuse sometimes, especially when language revitalization is such a focus right now, we want to make sure that we are... I think it's an incredible opportunity, in fact, right now for composers to work with indigenous language holders to say -- Well, how do we strengthen our language revitalization work with your help as a composer...

Will Robin 30:26

Oh, that's interesting.

Dylan Robinson 30:51

So we want to have different approaches to this that don't ... unfortunately, sometimes people hear about this work, and they think -- Oh, well, this is just censorship, artistic censorship, or they don't understand why it's important. And it really is, for so many different reasons. So we have recommendations that we will be making eventually. And then we will also have this community-based work that will happen on the timeline of those communities who are impacted, that will be very long term work. So to give you an idea, the work that happened with Louis Riel, I think was about a four or five year period to figure out this one. So many different partners involved. I will also credit the Canadian Opera Company, and Alexander Neef, who was the director at the time, and the National Arts Center for their leadership and commissioning, arranging for the commission of this new aria by a Métis composer, Ian Cusson, a really beautiful work.

Will Robin 34:13

Is Caroline Shaw's Partita a part of this conversation at all? I know there have been indigenous critiques of it. I don't know if you've written about that -- I don't think I've seen you write about that piece.

Dylan Robinson 34:21

So yeah, that is part of the work with Roomful of Teeth that still needs to be done. This was identified by one of the members, an Inuk member of our committee, on the indigenous Advisory Council, as something that they felt -- and a number of Inuit folks also felt -- wasn't fully addressed as part of the back and forth that took place between Roomful of Teeth and Inuit composers and performers. But it's also very complicated in that instance, because you know, Roomful of Teeth -- as I understand it was very clear about, they pay the folks who come in to teach them these different vocal techniques. And this is done under the auspices of them using these techniques in the future, they explain this, that we will use these in our future performances and compositions. And one of the interesting things for me, one of the complexities of this specific instance, was the fact that, for those, as I understand it, for those

Inuit folks that got in touch with them, including really well-known folks like Tanya Tagaq, who's done a lot of collaboration with classical music composers, they were actually saying, you've used a specific song of ours. And as I understand it, Roomful of Teeth was saying -- no, we only ever are taught techniques. We're not using specific songs. But one of the confluences that has happened here the fact that Inuit songs are constituted by their techniques. [Laughs] So what you have here is a song that from a Western perspective is basically the techniques of mining a specific sound layered into throat singing. But for Inuit folks, that is what makes it the song. And for folks in a Western art music tradition, that's what makes it a technique. [Laughs]

Will Robin 36:42

So it's that kind of ontological difference.

Dylan Robinson 36:43

Absolutely.

Will Robin 36:44

These different cultures have just fundamentally different ways of seeing this basic thing.

Dylan Robinson 36:50

Yes. So in fact, both are true. But as far as I'm aware of it, at least from the Inuit perspective, it reached a sort of stalemate point. And I think one of the things that needs to happen is more of an understanding. So for example, as we're trying to do in this documentary, that this a point of difference in how we understand what a song is. And from that, hopefully, it then allows us all to do a different kind of work. Or at least have the awareness that there's this difference in understanding that hopefully, then, starts us in a different place for collaborative compositional practice.

Will Robin 37:42

I want to make sure we talk about the other part of your work, which is about Indigenous art making and not just non-Indigenous appropriations.

Dylan Robinson 37:52

Well, it feels so feels like we could go on and on. There's so much work of that kind to do that it's true. You could just go on and on and on.

Will Robin 37:59

When you write about ... some of your book is somewhat traditional musicological writing and then, you have a chapter of your book that's a poem accompanying... I don't know if you've described it... but it reads like a poem accompanying a score by Raven Chacón. How did his work fuel that way of analyzing that music? And also, what is it about that work that attracts you as music from an Indigenous composer rather than some of the other white composers you're talking about in the book? That was a five-pronged question, sorry! [laughs]

Dylan Robinson 38:47

It's OK! I've known Raven for a long time. And he's one of the few people I can talk about contemporary visual arts and inter arts practices as much as I can contemporary composition and indigenous culture, this is a very niche combination that we find -- we just have really amazing conversations along those lines. And so I've known him and his work for a while and there was -- that piece actually comes out of an invitation to respond to a piece of his at Colorado College, the University Art Gallery there at Colorado College that was showing a number of his works. So it was a solo show whose name I can't remember at the moment. But "Report," this piece for various calibers of guns was one of the video pieces. And I was really challenged by it and taken with it as a prompt to consider the relationship that non-human listeners might have to a performance in their space, so the trees, the fields, the land, all of these non-human entities that we can think of as listening in that moment of performance to different calibers of guns, and what happens in that moment? So it was a really, it was a very speculative question, because, of course, I can never know what is heard [laughs] by those non-human entities. And there's the risk always of centering anthropocentric forms of listening in working through that question. But I was also really excited to think through the sensory impact of that work on me as a listener. And so there were a lot of these questions and things going on in my engagement with Raven's work, which is called "Report," if I haven't mentioned that already. And the easiest way for me to work through those things was to keep the questions moving, in a way, through a different aesthetic form, through this poem -- It is really a poem actually, more than an event score or anything else. So I think you named it correctly there -- that didn't require the same kind of -- this is my argument, and this is how I'm going to support that argument, and then this is how I will conclude or persuade you that this is what's going on. I just wasn't invested in that. And I find myself more and more not invested in argument [laughs] among other forms, like traditional essay, or the form of the essay I think that we teach our students and that we still use. That doesn't mean that I dismissed that as an important form, it just means I'm not... I think I have different questions about what forms of writing can do, the violence they might unwittingly impose, sometimes, on music and different kinds of non-human life. So it was a moment for me of saying -- Can I play with these questions, can I think through this other form, this other way of naming sensory experience in a poetic way?

Will Robin 42:29

You lay out, it might be towards the end of this book, but I actually didn't write down where it is in the book. But at one point in the book, you lay out this bolder question of, beyond simply just presenting performances, Western or classical music institutions presenting indigenous musicians, I'm just gonna read this series of questions, and now I'm curious for your way of thinking about it -- "What if classical music performance was presented using indigenous logics? What if we were to consider the potential of concert music to serve one of the many functions that indigenous songs do, as law, medicine, or primary historical documentation?" What does that idea mean for you? How can you imagine it coming into existence?

Dylan Robinson 43:14

[laughs] I think a lot of the book, as we're talking now, a lot of the book for me contains prompts and provocations for future imagination. Really, I think one of the most limiting factors in structural change of music programs, departments, organizations, and institutions is a lack of imagination. [laughs] Just so simply. To imagine otherwise, and different forms of -- like I say in the book, how indigenous structural logics might change the foundations of those things we do, because so much work is being

done right now -- well, depending, I guess, on where you are, I think there's a difference here, maybe between Canada and the US. But in a broader sense, I think we're all engaged with this question around structural change. What are we doing in our curriculum, in our pedagogy, in our teaching spaces, that might be ableist, or white supremacist, or anti-Black? How do we understand those things and then work otherwise? These are the questions I think that that most folks... at least they're on the radar for most folks, if we're not actively working through them in music departments yet. And so similarly, for me, I think it's really important to consider those foundations first, rather than or maybe in concert with changing curriculum. Because often, I think what has happened, at least in Canada is the curricular approach has been -- let's add in more. Let's just add in more indigenous content, let's add in more Black musical practice, whatever it might be. And we may, again, be doing a sort of violence when we add those things in without considering the containers that they sit within. The way that we're sharing them, the way that we're teaching them, the rooms that they're played, in the contextualization - - all these sorts of more foundational questions about how we spend time with this work, what it is ontologically. And so those questions that you read are all prompts to saying, let's think differently about the foundations of our performance practices and our institutions alongside just... alongside playing other kinds of work, or making other kinds of work. Again, because I think if we're ... I don't want to be too dismissive, but I feel very disconcerted sometimes when there's new Indigenous work performed, and we're simply just sitting inside the darkened auditorium again. So what are we doing? Why are we drawing that line there? Why are we saying we want a new work, but we don't want a new place? Or a new way of listening?

Will Robin 46:41

Yeah. Well, thank you so much. This was really enlightening.

Dylan Robinson 46:45

Thank you. Yeah, it's been lovely to have a conversation and think through some of these ideas again.

46:51

[Music]

Will Robin 47:01

Thank you to Dylan Robinson for that deep conversation. You can read more about his work over on our website, soundexpertise.org. As always, my inbox is open. If you have questions or thoughts about the show, email us at soundexpertise00@gmail.com, or tag us on Twitter or Instagram @seatedovation. Many thanks to D. Edward Davis for his production work, you can check out his music on SoundCloud at [warmsilence](https://www.soundcloud.com/warmsilence). I'm also grateful to Andrew Dell'Antonio for transcribing our episodes to make them more accessible. Next week on Sound Expertise, why bossa nova matters.

Unidentified Speaker 47:38

I will say to people Oh yeah, I wrote a book about Brazilian music and American and British media cultures. And they'll say, that's a very niche topic. And I'm like, yeah, the reason why I wrote it is because you know this music and you just don't know that that's what it is.

Will Robin 47:53

See you then.

47:54

[Music]