SOUND EXPERTISE – EPISODE 1 – TRANSCRIPT
Prepared by Andrew Dell'Antonio

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 0:00
What you hear -- it depends on who you are. And I think that's the thing we sometimes lose, because we sort of imagine these sort of ... "The Listener" in the 16th century ... and there was no "The Listener" back then.

<i>Will Robin</i> 0:09
So this is identity.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 0:11
It really is. I think so i think, you know, I want to resist the idea of this, these sort of monolithic interpretation that holds true for everyone.

MUSIC 0:21

<i>Will Robin</i> 0:41
Every once in a while, I'll be sitting next to someone on a plane or on a train, and they'll ask me what I do. I typically say that I'm a professor. And then they'll usually ask what I teach, and I tell them I teach music history. The next question is almost always the same. They'll ask, "Do you play an instrument." And I tell them, I play saxophone. And we'll talk about that for a bit. And then I put in my earbuds or I open a book or I look at my phone, or I do anything that us millennials do to avoid talking to strangers for more than 45 seconds. These brief conversations over many years have given me an acute sense of what people know, and what they don't know about my profession. Because yes, I am a professor. And yes, I do teach music history. But there's actually a more specific name for what it is that I do. I'm a musicologist. In fact, back in grad school before I could say I was a professor, and when I didn't always want to tell people I was a student. I used to say I was a musicologist, and I was usually met with blank stares, then I'd have to explain -- usually tendentiously and a bit apologetically, because after all, I was still a grad student -- what a musicologist was. I couldn't really blame people for not knowing. I'm not a zoologist or an archaeologist or a psychologist or any of those other ologists that people already seem to know about instinctually, because they learned about them in second or third grade or whatever. But eventually I got tired of offering my explanations. And so when I could I started telling people, I was a professor of music history.

Lately, though, I've been thinking more and more about how important it is to actually explain my field, not in a few sentences on a plane or at a dinner party, but in long form conversations that give a true sense for what it is that musicologists and music theorists and ethnomusicologists actually *do*. And thus, I've started this podcast, Sound Expertise, because that's what we are ultimately, we're experts in sound. We study the meaning of sound today, yesterday and many, many years ago. We do this in all kinds of different ways. We talk to people, we read books, we analyze musical scores, we immerse ourselves in archives, because we believe that knowing a lot about sound, mostly musical sound, can tell us more about the world.

So in the coming weeks, if you continue to tune into Sound Expertise, and I hope that you do, you'll hear a lot more of me -- I'm a musicologist named <i>Will Robin</i> -- talking with other scholars of sound, other sound experts: musicologists, ethnomusicologists, music theorists, music critics. We'll be talking about our research, our teaching, what it means to study music in the way that we do. We'll talk about motets and operettas, University based hip hop ensembles and Sega Genesis games, and a lot more.

And when I first began brainstorming who I wanted to talk to, for this podcast, I started thinking about research that was very far from my own wheelhouse. I work on contemporary classical music in the United States, what composers are up to right now in the present day, and as a result, I often don't have a great grasp on what's happening in scholarship of music from say, 400 years ago. And so I'm particularly excited about my guest for this very first episode of Sound Expertise. Erica Supria Honisch, an assistant professor at Stony Brook University, who researches sacred music in Prague during the 16th and 17th centuries. We've talked about her research during some downtime at the 2019 conference of the American Musicological Society. I miss downtime at conferences. It was a fascinating conversation. I hope you enjoy listening.

[Music]

So you work on early music?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 4:19
I do!

<i>Will Robin</i> 4:20
and primarily in the 16th and 17th centuries?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 4:23

Exactly right.

<i>Will Robin</i> 4:24
So how did you actually first get interested in studying and kind of teaching and writing about early music?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 4:30
I think like a lot of music historians, I started out by playing an instrument and for me it was the piano. A piano showed up in the house when I was about seven. And my brother got lessons before I did and I was very jealous. And so then I begged for lessons too. I waited a year, I was able to take them, fast forward to college. I wanted to pursue music more seriously. And I got sidetracked (I thought at the time) by music history classes, I got so interested in the context for the music I was playing, that I started focusing on those more than practicing. And at the same time a fortuitous incident occurred in which I was one of the few people who was interested in learning harpsichord at my institution. And there was an opportunity to learn, and to learn how to play early systems of notation, what we call figured bass. And so I learned how to do it. I got sucked into the world of first the 18th century then the 17th century. And I just kept going back and sort of finding these interesting worlds that I really had had no idea existed. And so I found my way in sort of through an instrument and then found my way right back through classes, really lively classes, into this idea that music could help us answer big questions, and so I got totally addicted.

<i>Will Robin</i> 5:49
Yeah, we'll talk about some of the big questions, but everything so you sent me a couple of chapters from your book, which you're working on and a journal article. And it seems like everything focuses on Prague, right? So how did Prague become the place you wanted to write about?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 6:04
Yeah, that's a great question. I was interested in Central Europe, I think, in ways I didn't quite fully understand when I first started, you know, thinking about what my research project would be. I have family roots on my dad's side, I should say, in Central Europe, in actually parts of the world that I study now, quite by coincidence. So I was kind of aware of the area ... I was aware that the Hapsburg were a dynasty that had sponsored a lot of music. So I knew that there's probably a project in there somewhere and I thought, well, you know, these wealthy patrons, the Hapsburg. I wonder what they were doing earlier, you know, before the period when we think of, you know, Mozart and Haydn when they're the kind of at the height of their musical patronage, at least as far as the standard stories go; and -- turned out there were some great

emperors who loved art and they were living not in Vienna, but in Prague in the 16th and 17th centuries. So I thought I would write a dissertation that was about Habsburg patronage in Prague. What a great idea. The trouble was the king that I decided to focus on ...

<i>Will Robin</i> 7:09
...the king. I like that. That's not how I approach my work, but... (both laugh)

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 7:14
... an early music question, but I've got a patron, you know, you got a patron. His name is Rudolph the second. It's a great name. He was a patron of the painter, Arcimboldo, the guy who paints the fruit heads. And so he was, you know, he seems to have been a really curious and interesting guy. And so I thought, well, this is fantastic. He had a lot of music coming out of his court. I've got a dissertation here, nobody's really written about it. Nobody's focused on the Prague context. And I discovered very quickly that Rudolph the second did not care much for music. He was not super interested in it. He had musicians. And so I started to figure out well, you know, there's something here because there's all this music. So what were these musicians doing? And it turned out they were doing what musicians always do, which is they're freelancing, and they were finding other patrons, they were going into the city. They were building their own networks. And these were complicated and interesting. And so then I found myself in this city, and you know, moved kind of away from this castle up on a hill, and down into the streets of the city. And there I found all these different languages and all these different religions living together. It was a really cosmopolitan city at a time we don't expect it. And music was this thing that kind of connected people and sometimes really divided them. And so it became a totally different project.

<i>Will Robin</i> 8:32
Cool!, That's, that's really I mean, that like the standard path, like the kind of cliched path is like, we identify some like niche, or whatever that like, you know, there's one king that no one's covered, and like, let's do it. But then when you keep looking, then you discover there's like a totally more interesting story.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 8:49
Yeah!

<i>Will Robin</i> 8:49
I mean, it seems like part of your work deals... you talk about this and the book a little bit, that there has been a standard way of kind of studying this period and the Hapsburgs and you're

trying to do things a little bit differently. What was the kind of typical path of studying early music and courts? And how are you trying to look at it a bit differently?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 9:11
Yeah. So, this is a great question. A lot of the earlier work, it's incredibly valuable. And what it was doing, it was understanding what music did for the people who paid for it. Why would they pay for this? You know, what was it accomplishing for their public relations, for their image, when they were trying to advertise themselves, you know, as more powerful than that other king over there? And I think that's great. But music, of course, is a thing that travels, and it gets used outside of its original context. And so I was really curious then, about how when music sort of escapes the patron, if you will, what does it start to mean? People don't always listen the way they're supposed to. They don't always hear the things they're supposed to, right? And so I became really interested in what happens when we sort of flip that a little bit. We think of music as this thing connecting the Hapsburgs and their subjects. But then we think about what the subjects are getting out of it, and how can we start to answer those questions. And some of the answers are quite surprising.

<i>Will Robin</i> 10:13
So we assume, I guess, when we're looking at a kingdom, that everything's top down, and that the rulers impose whatever their values or their music are on the people, and then the people just kind of absorb it, but you want to ... that's not actually how it works on the ground.

Unknown Speaker 10:26
Yeah. So sometimes I guess the risk one can fall into, or the danger one can fall into is, if you just sort of explain the propaganda and you -- and we're sort of, then we're buying into it. And we know today, like none of us is listening without opinions to what we hear. And I don't think people were any different back in the 16th and 17th centuries. The thing is, the propaganda is what survives, and so how can you read that kind of against the grain, and find other bits of evidence to find the sort of the counter narratives

<i>Will Robin</i> 10:55
And the propaganda is musical. I mean ... so I want to talk about the music but ... First, can you give us like an extremely brief historical sketch of what's going on in Prague in this period? There's a lot going on.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 11:08
There's so much! I'll give you a very .. a nutshell explanation. Prague was basically the largest and most important and most well connected city in Central Europe at this time. It was a

crossroads,, there were trading routes between East and West. And it was the capital of a very wealthy kingdom, the kingdom of Bohemia. And long story short, the Hapsburgs were this kind of small dynasty that happened upon ... they married into, inherited the throne, the Bohemian throne. And the Czechs who were the dominant language group there wanted to have their king live among them. So they moved their court to Prague and it became this important capital. That's great, until the Habsburg start to impose their own religion, sometimes their own language, on their subjects. And so when the 30 years war breaks out, which is a war about religion, about autonomy, it breaks out in Prague and it's a rebellion of the Bohemian subjects against their Habsburg rulers. And it draws -- it sort of stretches out for 30 years. And my book and my study really covers the century from 1550 to 1650. The lead up to the war and then the devastating war itself.

<i>Will Robin</i> 12:17
And what are the religious conflicts that are kind of playing out? accompanying the... I mean back really, I guess, intertwined with the political conflicts?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 12:25
Yeah -- So a century before Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses up in Wittenberg, there's a fellow named Jan Hus who is preaching in Prague, and he's saying a lot of the same things that Luther is gonna say later, and he actually really influences him. And so we can call them Hussites, these Bohemian followers of Hus; they wanted vernacular liturgies, they disagreed on some doctrinal points that are kind of a little arcane, I suppose, if we get into the details. They wanted to have more control over their liturgies, basically, over how they worshipped. And so, the Catholic Church called him in, accused him of heresy at the Council of Constance, he was burned at the stake. He was a martyr. And so the Hussite religion remained really strong long after he died. And it was the Habsburg attempt to suppress that, that really leads to the outbreak of the 30 Years War. They want -- they love their local liturgy. They love Hus. And it's all fine until the Habsburg said "Now you must all be Catholic." So.

<i>Will Robin</i> 13:26
All right, so music plays a role in all of this. What's happening musically in Prague in this period? What are people singing? What are they playing? What are they listening to? Like at the most like, zoom out, tell us what's going on?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 13:39
So in the castle, they're singing... there's a lot of sacred music up there. There's a big Cathedral that's kind of nestled within the walls of Prague Castle, and it's filled with music. Whenever the Imperial chapel is called upon to sing, which is on major feast days, or major political events like

coronations, we get trumpets, we get drums, we get cannons firing, and we get masses being sung inside the Cathedral. And if you go down into the city, and this is one of the things I learned in the course of doing my research, every parish church had its own choir. And this is a surprise, because they weren't, you know, clerics, they weren't priests, they were laymen. They were butchers. They were shoemakers. They were literate men. But they replaced all the clerics who had been displaced by the earlier Hussite kind of movement, the Reformation. And so the city is absolutely filled with laymen who are often singing the same -- and choirboys, I should say -- who are often singing the same music that's up in the cathedral, but in a totally different context. It's their own independent churches. And then of course, there's the street music and there's a very, very rich and massive really, Jewish community that is also richly musical; they were also singing polyphony, they were present at royal entries. We have documents of them singing in ways that really struck the Christian listeners as unusual and interesting. So there's all kinds of music going on from every different community.

<i>Will Robin</i> 15:04
And you talk a lot about this metaphor of coexistence in terms of -- the terms you use, which I like a lot, are "multilingual" and "multiconfessional," so I guess multiple languages and multiple religions in this period.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 15:18
Yeah, absolutely.

<i>Will Robin</i> 15:19
So where does music fit into this idea of coexistence between these different religious and political and kind of social and ethnic groups?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 15:28
That's a great question. So, I tend to steer away in the present day from the notion that music is a universal language. It's not. But there's a way in which it's kind of common ground in this period, particularly when the text is in Latin. That's the language to which all learned people aspire. The best music is written in Latin. And so I think music fits in as this kind of shared territory and everyone... It's a kind of commodity. People buy it, people copy it when they can access it. Imperial composers might have their own networks that they send it out to. And it becomes this thing that people ... they have this kind of shared sound; and even so, it doesn't... what I'm really interested in, in this multi confessional multilingual world is it doesn't necessarily bring people together. And I'm interested in that tension.

<i>Will Robin</i> 16:19

So what's an example of music not bringing people together?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 16:22
Right. So one example would be the motets, which are polyphonic settings of sacred texts that were sung out in the streets during certain feast days, certain feast days that were points of controversy between the Hussites and the Catholics. And so in those kinds of contexts, the same Latin motet, I should say, if it was sung in a street with a Catholic procession that was passing through your neighborhood, and everyone had to kneel down when it went by, regardless of whatever your religion or conviction was... that motet sounds very different than that same motet sung inside your own parish church. You know, for an -- I shouldn't say an audience, we think of them as audiences now, but a community of faithful, where it is the thing that really you're all expressing your shared doctrine. In one case, it's kind of militant and really invades space and in the other case...

<i>Will Robin</i> 17:18
What happens?.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 17:19
So sometimes people riot; there are occasions where people refuse to kneel, and they're severely punished. And sometimes the story seems to be a little bit exaggerated. Like, you know, they'll say that, oh, this person was you know, he was executed and it will be a story that's spread around Europe to say that in Prague, the Catholics are so bad they execute people who don't, you know, who don't kneel when this procession passes by, but it often causes these ... it sort of causes these little flare ups that then eventually lead up to this big flare up, and sometimes people will.... we get the sense that people refuse to listen sometimes, they'll walk away, they'll, you know, they'll ... we'll find that they're not in their usual places. In Vienna around the same time, on the feast of Corpus Christi, which is a very important feast, there's one time when -- the markets weren't supposed to be held that day, that was out of respect for the feast; and Protestant merchants insisted on holding them, and not only, like, selling things, but actually doing it on a street where the procession was going to pass. So there was a sort of point of contention and a lot of milk literally spilled because they kind of -- they literally ran into each other. It was called the milk war, because ... and there was a real worry that it might turn into something like a very bloody revolt, like had happened in France, or these sort of religious wars that were happening elsewhere. There's a real concern, it would turn very bloody.

<i>Will Robin</i> 18:46
So when we typically think about a genre, like the motet in music in this period, you know, we look at the text and the relationship between the text and the music and we make some

conclusion about what the music means. So when you take that and then you add to it people fighting each other... I mean, maybe not fighting-fighting, but you know this dissent and rebellion. How do you feel... does that affect what the music means in Prague in this period?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 19:10
Yeah, one of the things I realized very quickly with ... just looking at this music, listening to it, singing through it, is ... it's very conventionalized in its gestures, it's actually very hard to do with this early music in the 16th and 17th centuries, what we do with music of the 18th and 19th centuries and say, Well, you know, when Schubert does *this* in this song, this is what he means. Or, you know, this is how he's interpreting the poem. It's actually kind of hard to do that for some of this music, because its most important role was to convey a specific doctrinal message or something. And so, one of the things I discovered in studying these Latin texted motets is that the musical language is *highly* conventional. And part of that is because it needs to be ... people need to understand, you know that this particular motet is supposed to make us think of these things, and pray in a certain way. And one of the things I discovered, in thinking about these things in these different contexts, is that the same sounds can be heard radically differently, depending on what the sermon is that comes before it, depending on, you know, things like the ritual context, like whether it's in procession, whether it's being sung in your particular square -- or, sorry, your particular parish church, and so it becomes very, very hard then to attach specific meaning to specific sounds, and you realize everything is contextual. And it's something that I feel very strongly about, because I think *today*, musical listening is absolutely contextual.

<i>Will Robin</i> 20:41
Sure! You listen to a song and half the time you don't even know what the words are, you know, it's about a breakup or whatever, I mean that's basic and simple, but..

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 20:48
No, exactly, that's exactly it! Or, and the other thing is too, like, you know, what you hear -- it depends on who you are. And I think that's the thing we sometimes lose, because we sort of imagine these sort of ... "The Listener" in the 16th century ... and there was no "The Listener" back then.

<i>Will Robin</i> 21:02
So this is identity.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 21:03

It really is. I think so i think, you know, I want to resist the idea of this, these sort of monolithic interpretations that hold true for everyone. I think they held true for some people, maybe if things worked the way were supposed to have.

<i>Will Robin</i> 21:17
You have... I mean, you talk about this experience of a kind of individualized listening being important because the music's, again, like, it's not just coming and meeting everyone's understanding in the same way, but are there individual listeners that you look at as, like, people who are affected by this music or have a relationship, who talk about this music?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 21:37
Every now and again, I'm really lucky. And I find something in a source that hints, just gives me a little glimpse into what people were hearing, and I have two concrete examples. One is an archbishop named Cardinal Harrach, who was working in the 17th century. He was a good musician. Harrach - right, yeah, it's a good name. And so he's working in the 17th century, he's very musically trained. And he expresses strong opinions. Whenever he goes to Rome, he comments on Papal singers, he goes ... when he's in Prague, he says, you know, actually our singers here are better than those ones up in Frankfurt, you know, and he'll make these value judgments. So that's one kind of listener that's very helpful, but he's just one and he's a very powerful person. He's very literate. He's very learned. The other side of that, there's a little snippet I found in a kind of diary that was kept by the Jesuits in Prague. And sometime in the 1580s they decided to sing basically a new motet that they'd acquired and it's a four voice motet, and they name it in this Chronicle. And they say... and they sing it on Good Friday. And they say it's the strangest thing, by some unseen power, it moves the affects of everyone there. And this -- I mean, this is remarkable. We just don't think of this and they'd like in this otherwise totally businesslike ...

<i>Will Robin</i> 22:55
What does that *mean*, move their affects?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 22:58
Move their emotions, everyone wept. It's this kind of ... it just means that the music worked in a way they weren't expecting, and we know what the piece is, and so there's a little kind of postscript to that, that I find absolutely fascinating because it's a Catholic piece... and it found its way through Poland into Saxony into the Lutheran liturgy. And it was a piece that was sung on Good Friday in Bach's Leipzig, and it was sung often at the end of the St. John passion, this motel that was written in Prague, moved everyone's affects, moved the emotions enough that the chroniclers made a note of it, you know, they were writing about other things, but there

they are they say this piece of music by the way that worked really well. And it travels and then you know, 120, 130 years later, there it is in Bach's Leipzig and he's hearing the same music. Totally different contexts.

<i>Will Robin</i> 23:47
So, coexistence -- I mean, it's the fighting, but it's also hopefully not fighting, right? So, it seems like you talk about the ways not just that music, but also like music as a metaphor becomes this metaphor for coexistence. Can you talk a little bit about that, like the meaning of harmony as musical harmony and as like, social religious harmony?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 24:10
Absolutely. A word that just comes up everywhere. as it does for us, it comes up everywhere in the 16th and 17th centuries is the idea of harmony, we should live harmoniously. And the fascinating thing is, when you've got a city, where a lot more lay people are singing, and a lot more lay people are singing, like, *polyphony* than in other places. Harmony has a meaning, a kind of *narrow* meaning, that it probably doesn't have in places where it's just become a mere metaphor. And that meaning goes back to antiquity. Harmony in the sort of ... this old formulation, going back to the ancient Greeks, is the concord of discords. It's trying to figure out just how much difference you can accommodate, and how can you have different sounds that will sound well together; and that is harmony. It's not unisons, it's not the same sounds, but it's different sounds that can somehow be accommodated. And so we start to find in this religiously pluralist city, where everyone's trying to get along, pastors and priests trying to figure out and trying to admonish their parishioners to live musically and to live in harmony, but also that always means -- and this is, I think, sort of a cautionary note, lest we get sort of rosy... rose-colored glasses about all of this -- there are always limits. There's some people who are never going to be able to be accommodated into that harmony. And so this becomes a real question: how... what are the limits of what can be accommodated, the difference that can be accommodated?

<i>Will Robin</i> 25:42
So if music ... I mean, that gets us to kind of disharmony, and so what are, what were the ways in which music could actually be in some way, kind of like, weaponized as a force for creating not just difference, but even like violence in some way? I was thinking of the ... you talk a little bit about Prague's Christians versus the Jews and some of the kind of conflicts that emerge in that.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 26:04

Yeah. Well, there's an interesting aspect. One of the big surprises in delving more into the Jewish community and their presence in Prague was that they sang polyphony. And they sang it as fully part of these royal entries in the 16th century. Fast forward to the 17th century, in the 30 Years War, a lot of Christian musicians have been sent off to war or they're, you know, they've fled basically at this point. And so there's a shortage of musicians and a lot of Jewish musicians step in, to kind of fill in the gap. And so what happens is, the Jews are totally, absolutely capable of singing the music that the Christians are singing. Christian musicians and Christian priests start to complain as soon as peace sets in, they complain, and they complain about the Jews, because they say ... They do it in distinctly musical terms. And they complain because they say that even though the Jews can kind of mimic -- it's a familiar kind of accusation against the Jews -- even though they can mimic the sounds of Christians ...

<i>Will Robin</i> 27:14
Looks straight to Wagner!

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 27:15
Straight to Wagner. You know, they're deliberately undermining the beats. You know, they're singing with a slight sense of derision. And so they'll say these things ... and because of that they are agents of disharmony. And so we find this moment where they're basically part and parcel of the fabric of this multi confessional, multilingual city, and part of its musical fabric too, their difference is heard, but it's allowed and accommodated. And when they start being sort of woven *too* closely into that fabric, and singing some of this music, then they become accused of disharmony -- before it's just difference, and then it becomes disharmony, and then they're fighting constantly for their rights... and one of the one of the things that that I discovered is that they're ... a lot of the terms in which they frame their own pleas to the Emperor is in terms of their humanity: they're musical because they're human. They're human because they are musical. And it's a really interesting set of, and really...

<i>Will Robin</i> 28:16
Almost like the demonstration of humanity because of artistic excellence, respectability kind of trope. Wow. So, I mean, that seems to resonate constantly, historically. But how do you... do you feel like your study of coexistence and music has ... I mean, we're in a very ... time of ... coexistence seems quite fragile. Are there lessons for our, our current moment? From Prague in the 17th century?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 28:45
I mean, I feel like I write... I'm writing this project very much with the present in mind. Absolutely. And I think...

<i>Will Robin</i> 28:52
... checking the New York Times...

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 28:54
Oh, absolutely. No, and I'm just so acutely aware of people trying so hard ... so many good people trying so hard to live well together, and so many other people, undermining the very terms under which we are trying so hard to live together and accommodate and respect and welcome difference. And so I think the lesson to be learned from... and maybe this is too obvious a point. that the lesson to be learned from Prague in the 1610s is this works as long as you don't have powers from above, insisting on sameness, insisting on regularizing what must not be regularized; insisting on, you know, dividing where a simple sort of accommodation had sufficed for so long, and it's an imperfect and it's always an unsettled kind of pluralism in the 16th century, it was not ideal, but it works basically, and it's only when you come in from the top and you say, you know, things must go *this* way. And this is the way we are here, and we *must* be here. It's only when that happens that violence breaks out and it's terrible when it does.

<i>Will Robin</i> 29:59
So that's -- I mean, that in a way is a story that hasn't... that we wouldn't have gotten in musicology without your kind of work, right? Because otherwise we had this simple kind of like, one to one exchange between rulers and subjects in Prague in this period. I don't know the literature super well, but you obviously do. And so now we have the idea of difference being a part of this city. Musical difference, ethnic difference.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 30:25
Absolutely. Yeah. And thinking ...

<i>Will Robin</i> 30:27
not to toot your own horn...

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 30:28
No, no. And I am so grateful for the work that... the really rich work that has been done on the courts, because I think there's no doubt that the Hapsburgs were excellent image makers, and they were acutely attuned to how they were, how their image was being read. And I think there's still so much work to be done in that respect. I just think that music, because it travels in books, and it travels when it's sung., it opens up these other pathways and so sort of a follow up to that is that music books -- because they were precious -- survive where other kinds of

documents don't.   So sometimes they're the only documents of certain kinds of communities, of certain individuals. Sometimes you'll find a person's name, a doodle in a book, where otherwise these people have vanished completely. And the other kinds of documents are destroyed. So we have this unique little window onto all kinds of incredible...

<i>Will Robin</i> 31:21
 Cool!

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 31:21
Yeah. This is why I got sucked in.

<i>Will Robin</i> 31:21
I mean, it's very clear that this is a great, really rich place to research. And how does that... I mean, how does this whole project relate? I know you're involved in an initiative, which I don't really know much about, about making early music more inclusive.. How does your work intersect with that? What is that initiative kind of about?

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 31:43
Right. So those of us who teach early music, we end up teaching invariably kind of a long line of mostly men and definitely all European men up to about you know, 1700 -- maybe we might squeak in someone from, you know, New Spain in the 17th century. And so a few of us -- there's probably about 30 of us now -- formed a little collective. We're all people who teach early music, and we don't want to teach it that way anymore. It turns out it's kind of a deadly way to teach it for one thing, and it misses out all the ways in which music had meaning and circulated. And it leaves out a lot of the important people who are making music at the time, and sort of influencing its sounds. So what we've done is we formed this collective, we share resources on ... whenever we find an interesting article, whether it's an art history, music history, that deals with some kind of ... maybe a marginalized community in a city, a musician of color, a music theorist of color, there are people that start to poke through even in the Middle Ages, and you start to find that there were, you know, musicians and music theorists who were not White in Europe. And so we find these little tidbits and we try to share them with each other. We share assignments, and the goal is that just in this very low key level, we're all gradually kind of shifting the way this stuff is taught and opening up, hopefully, new areas of inquiry for the students who are in our classrooms.

<i>Will Robin</i> 33:05
What kinds of ... I mean, what do we learn better? When we make early music... ? That's a terribly worded grammatically question, but what -- I mean, what are the kinds of things that

we want our students to know, when making early music more inclusive? Beyond making it... It's I guess, part of it is just making it harmonized with what we believe in.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 33:24
Yeah, I mean, in some ways, it's just about, you know, we find ourselves in the past, right. But I think also it's just recognizing that, when music was made and heard back then, it was made in this rich and interesting context. And it was not in the sort of purified way that sometimes it gets sort of passed on in these sort of sanitized, you know, I mean, that in a kind of a loose sense of sanitized narratives where the women are written out, or, you know...

<i>Will Robin</i> 33:49
Oh, yeah, it's the 19th century. Now there are three women. Now it's the 21st, there are six!.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 33:53
Exactly. It's a kind of keeping our ears peeled for... There's a lot of interesting work going on. For instance, in this intersection between like Arabic or Turkish musicians and the so called West, right? There are really interesting things going on. If we just think about women making music in convents. They were far more creative than we might have imagined. And a lot of them are anonymous. We love attaching names to people, because then we can, you know, valorize them and elevate them and put them on pedestals. But what about all these anonymous women? So, you know, we learn a lot just by kind of taking a step back, looking at the sources, and finding everyone who was making music. There are many more than we could possibly imagine.

<i>Will Robin</i> 34:38
Wow. Well, this has all been really fascinating. Thank you.

<i>Erika Supria Honisch</i> 34:41
Thank you so much.

<i>Will Robin</i> 34:42
[Music] Many, many thanks to Professor Erica Supria Honisch for that fascinating conversation. You can follow her and her work on twitter at @DrCanonic.

I'm <i>Will Robin</i>, your host for this very first episode, and for many future episodes, of Sound Expertise. For more information and notes on today's episode, please visit our website, SoundExpertise.org.   Additional thanks to my producer and engineer and composer of our awesome theme music, the great D Edward Davis. You can follow him on twitter at

@WarmSilence and also check out his SoundCloud, also warmsilence to listen to some of his great music. You can follow me on twitter @SeatedOvation. Finally, please subscribe to Sound Expertise on Stitcher, Apple and wherever else you get your podcasts and tell your friends to listen. Tune in next week for a conversation with the musicologist Lauren Kajikawa about race, classical music, hip hop, and white supremacy in university music curricula. Trust me, you will not want to miss it. Bye!