Sound Expertise – Season 2, Episode 4 – Teaching Music History with Sara Haefeli and Andrew Dell'Antonio

TRANSCRIPT prepared by Andrew Dell'Antonio

SPEAKERS
Andrew Dell'Antonio, Sara Haefeli, Will Robin

Andrew Dell'Antonio 00:00
Having experienced this, I can't go back. And the thing is, of course, by doing this, I had to let go of the expectation that that percentage of the grade, that 10%, would have anything to do with the content of the course, which seems paradoxical. And yet, the result, the meta-result of having a student think about music and culture in a profound way as a performer is... I mean, that's what we... I think that's what we *want*.

00:24
[Music]

Will Robin 00:46
Hi, I'm Will Robin, and this is my podcast, Sound Expertise. You might be looking at this episode and wondering about its intimidating length -- it's our longest to date -- and perhaps about its topic, too: teaching music history. It's an old adage in academia, that teaching and research are entirely separate domains. And so if this is a podcast where I talk to my fellow music scholars about their research, which it is, why are we focusing on teaching? And if you're not a musicologist, you might also be thinking, well, I don't teach music history. So why should I care about any of this at all? Well, I've got two moderately spicy takes for you. First, teaching absolutely *is* research, because great teachers have a specialized knowledge of pedagogy that they have built over many years, in real time in their classrooms, and reflecting on those classroom experiences. And second, even if you don't have anything at all to do with teaching music history, I think you will find yourself quickly engrossed by this episode, because this is a discussion of pedagogy as a mode of inquiry, as a way of unlocking potential not just in your students, but in yourself, to opening yourself up to new ways of thinking. If you think of yourself as a learner, or as a teacher, whether it's in music history, or another topic entirely, this conversation is going to be relevant to you. Which brings me to my guests, I am joined by two of the most fascinating pedagogues in musicology today, whose work as teachers I have followed and admired for years. Sara Haefeli, associate professor at Ithaca College, and Andrew Dell'Antonio, Professor of Music at UT Austin's Butler School of Music. let's turn things over to them and to this deep and insightful conversation.

02:27
[Music]

Will Robin 02:39

So thank you both so much for joining me today. I'm very excited for this conversation with Andrew Dell'Antonio.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 02:45
Hello, yes.

Will Robin 02:47
And Sara Haefeli.

Sara Haefeli 02:49
Hi, Will, it's really a pleasure to be here.

Will Robin 02:51
Absolutely. So yeah, I wanted to start off by delving briefly into both of your kind of music history pasts. I'm someone who discovered my love of musicology in the classroom as an undergrad. And I imagine that's possible for both of you as well. Can you talk a little bit about your own personal experiences in music history classes as an undergraduate student and what that was like for you?

Sara Haefeli 03:17
Sure, I'll start, my experience was exactly the opposite. I had a terrible music history experience. Class was at 8am. It was all of the sophomores in one room. The professor lectured without notes. I later realized that he made a lot of things up.

Will Robin 03:33
[laughs] That's amazing. What would he make up?

Sara Haefeli 03:36
Oh, he told us about how the Mozart Requiem was completed, which was total fiction, in retrospect. Yeah, things like that. We had tests that we kept and passed on to the next generation. So every class would inherit this bundle of old tests that we would just memorize so that we could pass the test. And there would only be two or three new questions each semester. So we all did fine on the tests, but it was painfully boring. I remember often waking up from a dream at the end of class. It was really, really a terrible experience. But I had a fantastic cello studio professor, who was also a musicologist and really challenged me to think deeply about the historical context of every piece I played. So some mixed experiences. Andrew, what were your undergrad music history survey... hopefully a better experience than that. But...

Andrew Dell'Antonio 04:48
It was and it wasn't. So I should start by saying I went into the family business. My stepfather is a medieval historian. And I actually... I'm a recorder player. And I came to the study of music as a recorder player. And in fact, I was extremely fortunate when I was a high school student that Tom Kelly was Assistant Professor at the Five Colleges where my stepfather taught. And he was willing to have this pimply teenager play recorder in his band, in his Five College Early Music Ensemble. And so ... I had experienced it before then. But right there, I was able to be mentored by somebody who was an

extraordinary pedagogue, and also a great musician. And right away, I was really enthused by the notion of playing music and studying music. And so I went off to college, I actually thought I was going to study psychology, then I got a C in my first psychology course, and, and stay with music as well, because I started doing some music. Um, I was just telling my students this in my class, I used the very first Norton Anthology, which had just been published. And one of my instructors was, in fact, the person who created the first Norton Anthology, Claude Palisca. And so I don't remember my survey very well. It was a two-semester thing. And I think it was similar. I don't think people were making stuff up. But it was not dynamic. I think I hung in there, because I thought early music was interesting. But I would say, looking back to how I was taught, I learned a lot, but I don't teach that way.

Will Robin 06:18
Right. I mean, I think what's striking with both of you, and the reason why I wanted to talk to both of you, especially given your not so great experiences in the music history survey is that both of you are interested in this as something change. But you're also ... a lot of scholars teach, most of us teach. And a lot of us teach music history survey. But not all of us necessarily spend a lot of time thinking about pedagogy as an issue. How did you each realize that, thinking about teachers, teaching, researching how to teach, and actually publishing on teaching was going to be kind of an important part of what you did as musicologists.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 06:59
I'll start on this one. Now, it's my turn to say that it happened by mistake. In a way, I think I realized, as I got underway in teaching, that I cared a lot about it -- that I cared about making sense of it in ways that was not just about imparting knowledge, but getting people excited about information, because I had in my own way, but I realized that not everybody did in the same way. So I started reading about it, making sense of it. But really, in a way, I'm a bit of a Johnny come lately to this systematic exploration of pedagogy, I think I've really only been doing in the last decade or so. And I'm not a spring chicken -- I mean, I'm in my late 50s now, and I've been teaching a very long time before I actually looked into the -- call it science, if you want, art, the methodology of pedagogy, I was gratified to see that some of the things that I had come up with, that I had picked up on, fit that. And also, I was humbled to realize that some of them didn't. And that it was necessary to take a step back and think about outcomes, but also to be careful about certain ways that outcomes had been instrumentalized to mean certain other things that I wasn't necessarily in agreement with. And so I've been especially really interested -- but this is again, even more recent, in the last maybe three or four or five years -- in questions of critical digital pedagogy and so forth. But again, I think other folks -- and Sara is definitely one of them -- have come to this well, before I did in terms of methodology.

Sara Haefeli 08:42
Well, I don't know that I've been doing it so much longer. But I started teaching at University of Northern Colorado as an adjunct faculty member and was really actually very fortunate to teach a wide variety of classes. So I started teaching a history of rock and roll class and then took over the survey class and then taught a lot of integrated arts education courses, collaborating with my music education colleagues, movement specialists, visual arts specialists, and I think those experiences outside the music history core really shaped how I thought about how people learn, what classes should look like, I also taught theory and sight singing. So I just had this really wide variety of challenges as a teacher.

And then when I got the job at Ithaca College, Ithaca is a teaching institution with a very heavy teaching load. So I took a colleague who had just gotten tenure, a theorist, Debbie Rifkin, who's a brilliant pedagogue, took her out for coffee and asked her -- Okay, how did you do it? How did you get tenure with this teaching load? And she said, You have to turn your classroom into your laboratory. And she introduced me to the field of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and started a conversation with me about Oh, yeah, tell me what you're doing in your classroom. And I said, I'm not doing anything interesting. And she said, No, no, no, tell me -- what's going on. And she drew out of me the fact that I was having my students blog, and I was so impressed with the writing outcomes, and really encouraged me to do a SoTL Scholarship of Teaching and Learning research project based on blogging as a very effective writing tool. And that started my path. So it was it was a little bit out of necessity, that when you're when you're teaching, you know, 4/4, 4/3 load of courses, you don't really have time to do those deep research projects in your historical field.

Will Robin 10:53
Right. What was it about... how did you come to getting students to blog? And what was it about that that kind of unlocked, you know, new interesting avenue for, for how you were teaching. Yeah, I mean, this idea, I guess, you have, on the one hand, students who are can be learning a different way of communicating. Right? So like Andrew, do you, you have kind of structured a lot of assignments in that in that same way, right, trying to not make it basically the regurgitation of information that they learned the previous day, as regurgitatory as possible, but trying to find ways for students to be more creative in the kinds of things that they write and talk about.

Sara Haefeli 11:11
I think this started, when I was teaching history of rock'n'roll, I taught that class online quite a bit as well. And I really enjoyed being able to use the discussion forum as a way to kind of pre-load synchronous discussion. This was many years ago, before any of us were using the words synchronous and asynchronous every single day, right. And so I wanted to do that, but I wanted everything that the students did to feel authentic. So I think writing on a discussion forum doesn't feel as authentic as creating a blog. And this was back when blogs were hip, you know, almost 10 years ago. And the potential that the students could have actual readers, so I found that the authenticity of the task, and the idea that someone could actually be reading this made the writing better. They weren't communicating to me, who knows infinitely more than they do. Or at least in their view, their minds -- it's not true, but ... and so that awkward teacher-student issue of audience, they now had potentially actual audience and they... the grammar got better, the content got better, they started owning their own authority, they would connect reading assignments to their own experiences and write about those. And it just became so much more interesting to read. And I learned more, and instead of them telling me what they thought I wanted to know, which I never learned anything new, in those kinds of writing situations.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 13:28
Yes. And again, that's something ... I mean, I'll credit, Sara, among others as inspiring this move. I mean, it really is one of these things, that you think, well, of course, you want people to write authentically from their perspective of what they find meaningful. But it is also true that that is not the way that I was taught to write music history as an undergraduate student, or do music history, in a

survey context, at least. I was kind of in the more advanced courses. And so the whole question of how do you help students, like Sara said, embrace their knowledge, embrace their authority, embrace their ... what they have to offer? I think... So yes, I'll briefly speak to one of the assignments that I've tried this semester, because it's very fresh in my mind. I decided towards the last minute of finishing the syllabus last ... the back in August, that I would take about 10% of the grade and have the students do an assignment on something that was not necessarily related to our course subject. So we've come up with -- my colleagues and I have -- a set of large scale historical questions that we provide to students the beginning of the first course of the sequence, that are, you know, here's what historians *really* care about, not dates and and names, but you know, questions of identity, and so forth. And so, there's a list of possible bullet points of questions. And I ask the students, take a look at these, pick one that you think is interesting, and think about how you will find out about this topic in the music that *you* care about, in this course, whether or not it's the music we're talking about this semester. And I want you to document your process in doing that. And then, at the end of the semester, again, drawing on excellent work by other scholars of teaching and learning, I came up with a set of rubrics, through which they could sort of talk through this. And students have started submitting this. And actually one student submitted it early, so I took a look -- about two days ago. And it was, it was stunning. It was like -- I looked at this and said, this is why I did this. I didn't know why I was going to do this. But I did this because a student really embraced the notion of careful thoughtful scholarship about music, about something that the student cared about. And it was not about the timeframe we looked at. But honestly, the odds that this student will come out of the course thinking about music and culture and history, in a way that's much more profound than what they started with, are so much greater than any other, more standard, call it regurgitation, or factual based, or standards based, where you know everybody has to learn the same information. That... that never happened. I mean, I've been teaching here a long time. And it's the first time that I've looked at an assignment and said, the student has clearly moved to a very different level in their thinking about what it means to study music and culture. And it's mind blowing. I mean, I can only hope that the other 87 students in the class will have done likewise, they won't, right. And that's fine. But even one is, it's so stunning. So maybe it's similar to what Sara experienced, is that having experienced this, I can't go back. And the thing is, of course, by doing this, I had to let go of the expectation that that percentage of the grade, that 10%, would have anything to do with the content of the course, which seems paradoxical, and yet the result -- the meta-result of having a student think about music and culture, in a profound way as a performer is, I mean, that's what we -- I think that's what we want.

Will Robin 17:11
That's what we want, that's the outcome.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 17:12
That's what I want, let's put it that way. And I think that's what we often say, We want these students to think more deeply about... but then, are we giving them the tools to do that? And for so long I wasn't. And now, I'm starting to, and it's very satisfying.

Will Robin 17:25
Yeah. You know, it's striking. And I want to ask Sara to jump in, because I know that you've thought about the exact same thing, but like, there's the ... I guess, maybe there's two kind of like meta shifts

happening in a lot of different people's surveys that they're running, the undergraduate music history surveys, which, for listeners who don't know, it's basically like, people who come to college, generally, to study music, are probably planning on becoming professional musicians in some capacity, and then us musicologists have a year or two with them to kind of teach them whatever music history is, which was once like, you know, Machaut to ... I don't know, John Cage or whatever. And it's now become ... the one big shift is let's change who we're teaching about and the genres we're teaching, and the composers we're teaching. And then I guess the other shift, which is what we're talking about now, and I want to keep talking about is the shift of -- is this a music history sequence? Or is this a kind of what do musicologists and historians do with music, kind of like teaching them how to be, how to think like us, in a way. And Sara, I know, that's kind of been your preoccupation.

Sara Haefeli 18:33
I mean, that's exactly it. There are two issues. One is about diversity, inclusion in the survey, in the content that we're teaching. And then the second is really the how, how we're teaching it, what we're teaching. So I had a pretty significant crisis in 2015. We had our own Black Lives Matter protests on campus, the students initiated a vote of no confidence in our President, who then stepped down. So it was a pretty significant moment. And during the protests, one of my students came to me and said, Hey, we, I think we should talk about what's going on in campus in this class. And my first knee jerk reaction was like, No, we have every single day scheduled in that march from Machaut to Cage, every single day, is ... I give them on the syllabus, you know, exactly what we're going to read, what we're going to talk... what the lecture is going to be about. And I thought to take a whole class day to talk about this means, you know, losing a whole genre of music.

Will Robin 19:38
You lose like a century!

Sara Haefeli 19:40
Yeah, exactly. You lose a century. And luckily, I was wise enough to not answer right away, and I thought about it, and I said, okay, but you have to lead the discussion. And the student said, Sure. And so you know, organized the room in a circle, I sat on the outside of the circle and the students talked in very clear terms about how, frankly, racist the music curriculum was, about how they didn't feel prepared as educators to go out and teach in diverse communities. That they were very disillusioned by the stress of the curriculum. It was hard to hear. And I finished up that semester, and then I had a sabbatical the next year, and I spent that year rethinking how it was going to teach. So instead of the march from Machaut to Cage, and me lecturing, I decided that first of all, the content had to change. But secondly, there was a problem with the container, there was a problem with the whole frame of music history. So I spent that year thinking about outcomes, right? What do we want the students to be able to know and do at the end of the class? And I thought about, well, what is it that I do as a music historian, I don't spend a lot of time memorizing dates and Opus numbers. I don't even spend a lot of time with style recognition. And when I got the job at Ithaca College, they asked me, you know, what is the ideal outcome for your students? And I said, I said, Yeah, style recognition, they should be able to recognize, know if this is Baroque, or classical or late romantic or expressionist, right? I decided that that wasn't really central to what musicologists really do or really care about. So I was simultaneously working on a book about writing about music, and was thinking very carefully about what is it that

scholars do when they're doing research? So we're typically... start with a topic, but investigate that topic within a very rich context. That context could be economic, it could be cultural, social, it could be a context of previous research by other scholars. But out of that rich context, we formulate a research question. We gather information somehow, sometimes it's by reading secondary sources. Sometimes it's by diving into archives, and looking for primary source materials, doing interviews, looking at ethnographic data. And then we have to interpret and analyze that information. And I think that's something that we've really failed to teach, is to teach students how to interpret and analyze data. And so that's how I've shifted the music history sequence at Ithaca College. And the other framing problem was the whole march from this, you know, teleological march from Machaut to Cage, which assumes that Cage is somehow influenced by Machaut, and that that's been this tidy` little, you know, the salamander to the lizard to the .... you get my teleological ... yeah, this evolutionary march. So we now instead look at case studies that are designed to inspire further inquiry on behalf of the students. And so the students read, sometimes a scholarly article, sometimes a piece of primary writing, or listen to a podcast, like an episode from your podcast, Will. And then they discuss it, but then they have to apply the same kind of methodology to their own research question. So this is like, Andrew's kind of -- what I'm thinking is his 10% project is kind of like his Google genius project. Where they have to say, Hey, you know, a further question that's inspired by this case study is x, and their projects are beginnings to a further analysis and interpretation; because of course, in the span of a survey course, they just don't have time to fully explore those. So my outcomes have shifted from being able to regurgitate information on a test to being able to articulate a musicological question, and to begin to figure out how to answer it.

Will Robin 19:46
Right. And you, I think we've talked about this before about the day to day classroom, you actually just have the students working in groups, answering these questions, right. Which is ... I'm trying to ... I'm still trying to imagine being able to do that. But can you talk a little bit about what that looks like, because it's very different from any classroom that I've worked in.

Sara Haefeli 24:36
It's very different. And it's very sad for me because I love lecturing. I love the song and dance of it. I love the performance of it. You know, you have a captive audience that has to laugh at your jokes.

Will Robin 24:48
[laughs] It's like podcasting!

Sara Haefeli 24:51
Right? The choreography of it, is just really really fun and I decided I had to give that up. If this was going to be a truly empowering experience, then I had to decenter myself, especially as a white cisgender heterosexual female in the classroom, to decenter that authority. And so I took a course at Harvard Business School on how to teach case studies, which was fantastic. That's the signature pedagogy for business schools all over the world. And really studied how case study teachers guide discussion in the classroom, it's this very active Socratic discussion process. The difference is that business cases usually present a problem that needs a solution. And music history cases aren't necessarily problems that require solutions. Sometimes they might be. But more often, they are

situations that might inspire further questions. So really studying how to ask questions, what kinds of questions to ask, how to dig deeper in the students, how to get them to that state of a little bit of frustration, that really excites the energy in the classroom. So we spend a day for every case, in a big kind of case study discussion. And then the rest of I'd say probably a two-week unit is spent in groups, working on their own projects, and then typically they get to present those projects to the rest of the class.

Will Robin 26:34
Wow. Andrew, how do you -- what's maybe -- pre COVID, say? How do you ... How does a typical day in your classroom work? Do you lecture? Do you break students into groups? How do you try to balance the kind of learning outcomes versus information versus...?

Andrew Dell'Antonio 26:51
That's really great. And I really appreciate Sara articulating that so well. Because not only do we -- some of us -- like to perform and choreograph and create arcs of narrative that -- really some of us found -- that's part of what we found entertaining as students, those of us who now have PhDs. And students still, and I'm getting about this in a roundabout way, this is the way I go, I apologize. Students still want that. I systematically use mid semester anonymous surveys about Okay, What do y'all think is going well? What do you want more of, what should we do. And I always get a number of students saying we want more lecturing. While... and I know that that's actually not going to be the most productive way for things to happen in the class. So, I mean, students are primed to want that, and to want that kind of narrative. And so providing some of that I think is relevant. So directly to your question. Pre COVID, I also, like Sara, had to force myself to stop lecturing. And I did so semi effectively the last few years, partly by porting a number of my lectures into recorded mini lectures for students to listen to before class. So all these cool slides and stuff like that, that I developed over the years, I recorded and gave students before class and then it couldn't use them anymore, right, it was sort of forcing myself not to have that resource to riff off of. What I found frustrating, and what I didn't have a resource to resolve until this COVID semester, and what now I'm thinking for next semester, so in a way, I'm sort of in the middle of this, was that I teach about 80 to 90 students in a cohort. And unlike Sara I... fortunately I have TAs and my teaching load is not quite as heavy, but it is a large group. And with a large group, discussion can happen well in the breakout sessions that the TAs lead, but it cannot happen particularly well in a group of 80, especially in the room that I have been put into, which is a recital hall. So I'm on stage.

Will Robin 29:02
It becomes a performance.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 29:03
It becomes... it's very difficult, I mean, and I will get off the stage, but the physical space itself makes it much more difficult not just for me to move away from a stage, from a frontal place, but for the students to turn to each other and move into groups. So that's been a real difficulty. But also because I make a point of not obligating students to come to class, I always have -- I've even -- pre synchronous times, right, pre COVID, I had an option for students to do something if they did not want to physically come to class, because I came to the conclusion a few years ago that making students -- nine o'clock in the

morning, especially -- making students *be* there. There's always going to be a few who for reasons, I mean, both personal, legitimate, and just -- it's a mandatory class so you can't make me enjoy it -- are going to have ... are not going to be there because they want to be there. And so, I've often had a small... I mean, by halfway through the semester, only about half of my cohort shows up, which is okay, because those who show up are ready to do the work. And those who aren't showing up have other things they're supposed to do instead. And so I'm okay with that. But I've been in a space that has not been collaborative. This semester, with COVID, teaching online entirely, I was fortunate to be able to teach entirely online, on Zoom... yeah, there were some things that weren't great about Zoom, but I could break out everybody into zoom rooms, and have them discuss. And I think it was fantastic in terms of engagement, commitment, and I had to think creatively about what to have them do. And now I'm thinking actually, it just got in touch with our scheduling person saying, Okay, can I move my class into the orchestra rehearsal room? Because,

Will Robin 30:43
Oh, interesting

Andrew Dell'Antonio 30:44
reasons. Right. First of all, that way, that's where there's not a stage. But second of all, because it's a space where people are used to working together, right? I think space is so important, and we do have rooms on our university campus that are collaboratively usable, but they're in high demand. And plus, you know, the metaphor of these performers, as Sara says, most of these students, actually, I guess you were saying this, most of the students are coming to music schools thinking they want to be performers. So bringing music history into their performance space I think will be interesting. And it will give me a much better physical chance to get people to go into breakout rooms and work in breakout rooms. So I guess I haven't answered this question maybe quite the way that it was set up to be answered. Because in a way, I have not been satisfied with trying to flip, or however you want to think of it, of making the classroom more participatory as a large cohort. Because the space in which I've done it has made it difficult to do that. And, you know, habit has made it super easy to rely on talking, right? Because, as you can hear, I love to hear myself talking. And I'm so brilliant at it. And you know, I am objectively a pretty good lecturer in the grand scheme of things. But it's not as effective. I think, for us to loop back -- and maybe this is a question that maybe you were going to come to, Will, so I'm going to guess what your question might be, to loop back at how this came to be, this shift of our teaching, my teaching came to be. I was again, fortunate that I don't know Sara if you have to, if you have to rely on ... if you're the one essentially teaching most of the survey kinds of courses at Ithaca. I'm fortunate enough to have a relatively solid cohort of colleagues. And we came across with a curricular change that our Ethnomusicology colleagues pushed for -- we all pushed for it, frankly, but we're moving, we moved from this chronological, teleological, evolution-based, Whiggish if you want to call it that, you know, moving towards the future because everything becomes better, linear narrative, to -- we created a new course, to be taken the first year of a student's career in music, that is a much more cross historical, cross cultural, Music and Culture course, that is more case study based. I don't know that we're quite as ... we have gotten our heads around the case study approach quite as well as Sara has, but it sets students up to think about big questions before they come to the survey. And so it's challenged me to be prepared for that, but also helped me be prepared for that. And it's also because we had to bureaucratically shave hours off of the sequence courses in order to create this new

course, it's given me less time to "cover" material, which has made the idea of coverage even more absurd, and therefore has given me the chance to not ... to hang on to it even less. I guess the other piece is, again, working in the College of Fine Arts overall, I've realized that most of our colleagues outside of music gave up on the notion of the comprehensive survey a very long time ago, for whatever reason, and they have not expected students to march through the "chant to the present" or whatever, however we're we going to phrase it. And I think one of the things and, you know -- we have this textbook that everybody uses, I think the monolithic presence of the Burkholder - Grout - Palisca book, terrific as it is in a lot of ways, has driven our sense of obligation to that trajectory. And I think that's going to be an interesting question moving forward -- as people are letting go more and more of textbook resources, I mean, so I don't know, maybe you moved away if you're working on case studies, if you move away from that, then in a way that opens you, right?

Will Robin 34:47
Right. It frees things up.

Sara Haefeli 34:48
That's right. That ... the idea of coverage has always been a myth. Even though it seems like coverage, right, that we have this pressure of coverage. That *that* textbook has always been a construction. Things have always been left out, right? And I think that's becoming increasingly an obvious statement. But I think 10 years ago, it wasn't so self-evident.

Will Robin 35:14
I was in a... you know, we pushed through a big music history overhaul a couple years ago, and I was kind of shepherding it through these various committees, and I was in a meeting with performance faculty where we were talking about it, and a choral conductor said, Well, what about -- I mean, if you do all of this, and you, you know, don't teach all the masterworks, you're going to, Who... when are you going to learn about the Duruflé Requiem? And I was like, I've never heard that piece. And then it was like, What about? What about...

Andrew Dell'Antonio 35:46
[laughs] Busted!

Will Robin 35:47
What about Schubert's masses, and I was like, You think I have more than one day to spend on Schubert, and I'm going to spend it on his masses? Like, which are in the Burkholder too, and that's an issue too, right is like, when you only have one day per composer, and maybe four per era, like you are, you are teaching the classics. And that's, yeah. But to return to the coverage thing and the ... just to talk a little bit more about the why of moving away from lecturing. You know, Sara, in one of the articles you've written about your pedagogy, you have this great line, which I just want to read and talk a little about, which is, you write that your goal is "giving students a sense of ownership over their own learning, they discovered that they were ultimately in charge of their own educational outcomes. They were no longer passive recipients of facts, but were part of the creation of the body of knowledge we call history." Can you talk a little bit about that, empowering students in that way. And also, I'd love to

talk about some specific examples that both of you have of students who felt empowered, and what that meant to them coming out of the classroom.

Sara Haefeli 36:55
Yeah, exactly. So I want to say that students have always been in charge of their learning outcomes, they either come to the table or they don't, right. And me designing the perfect content, or the perfect lecture, or the perfect assessment has not helped them come to the table. They have either decided to do it or not. And I found this to be true years ago, that 10% of the students, no matter what I did in front of the classroom, I could be tap dancing every day, and they would still learn music history, because they are curious and active, they're listening, and they're talking to each other. And 20% of the class would fail no matter what I did, I could be the most ingenious teacher, and they just weren't engaging.

Will Robin 37:46
And by failure, not saying fail the class, you're saying fail to learn, which is...

Sara Haefeli 37:50
Right. Yeah, exactly. And, you know, I came to realize that had very little to do with me, it had to do with the students. So how do I support the students in the significant gifts that they bring to the classroom and trusting them that they're here because they want to learn. And this is something that I've really learned from Andrew, too, that trusting that they're going to bring their skills, their abilities to the classroom; and that if they're not showing up, it's not because they're lazy, it's because something else that's significant is happening in their lives that's blocking their ability to show up. And by penalizing them with a grade or some other sort of penalties is not going to inspire them to show up; it just makes it worse in many cases. I'm not sure this is the question. Right... oh, the question is about how to inspire the students to take ownership. One of my colleagues, Dr. Beatrice Olesko, she's a music education colleague, and she wrote her dissertation on democratic classroom practices in K through 12 music classrooms, and it's really brilliant work, but thinking even in the earliest classes, music classes, that students can choose and decide and engage in significant democratic ways. And that this always has a social justice edge to it as well.

Will Robin 38:49
The empowerment.

Sara Haefeli 39:31
The empowerment, right? And that everyone is empowered and everyone can be part of the story, everyone can be contributing to the body of knowledge. So this has been quite significant when we're studying a case that even on the surface might appear to be a pretty canonic case. So for example, we did a case on on the Stravinsky Rite of Spring. And the students needed to then articulate their own research question about the Rite of Spring after reading Tamara Levitz's book chapter on racism at the Rite. And this group of mostly music education majors, said that they wanted to look at the Rite of Spring and how it shows up in the movie Fantasia. And I thought … at first I thought, oh, gosh, this is such a cop out. Like, this is the only thing they know about the Rite of Spring because they grew up watching Fantasia in their music classes when their teacher was sick or whatever, you know. But you know, again, it's like Andrew said, you have to force yourself to not intervene, right? You have to force

yourself to step back and trust the students. So I said, Okay, yeah. And I said, it's not yet a research question, right? What is your research question? So they started doing the research and found out that Stravinsky was actually very unhappy with the product in Fantasia. So then the question became, why would he have been unhappy with it. And they ended up doing a side-by-side comparison between the reconstruction of the ballet and the visual elements and Fantasia, and came to the conclusion that there were so much movement in the original ballet. And that movement was absent in the visual representation in the animation. And that's actually a very profound observation. And I'm watching their presentation thinking, I could imagine seeing this presentation at a conference, right, the Society for American Music conference, this is incredible. So that's an example of a group of students that I originally thought was not very gifted, that was really taking an easy way out with a project, but ended up coming out of it with sort of very powerful and profound observation and research. True research.

Will Robin 42:18
Andrew, you've done a lot of writing and thinking about what you call "cripping" the music history classroom, rethinking the classroom experience from the perspective of disability. Can you talk a little bit about how that works, your history with this idea and Universal Design for Learning?

Andrew Dell'Antonio 42:39
Yeah, sure. So I should say that I come ... I initially came to this topic out of interest connected to family and friends, two of my younger family members and several of my friends have disabilities that are more or less visible. I also in the last couple of years have kind of gained even more salience in that I was myself diagnosed ADHD and learned a lot more about how I had and hadn't learned and engaged with material through this. There's a great deal in what we teach that is about normalizing and standardizing. And a lot of that is about outcomes, and that we want to have everybody coming out of a course with a particular set of outcomes. But oftentimes, we provide a pathway so those outcomes are limited. I mean, everything can be limited, right? Anytime you include you also exclude. And this is something else we could talk a bit about is the whole question of making our teaching more inclusive, is a process and given non infinite time and not infinite resources we're always going to be leaving some things out. And it's always going to be provisional. But the idea being that we make assumptions about our students' abilities, their capacity for certain kinds of learning, on the basis of our own learning, and on assumptions that we make about what is legitimate and illegitimate ways of demonstrating knowledge and so forth. So my own learning frankly, about the Universal Design for Learning approach, which basically at its core is about the need to open up both ways of showing information, ways of students then demonstrating understanding of information in multiple ways, multiple pathways, and for me, the one that's most salient is multiple reasons to engage; so the affective side, which is something that Sara was talking about earlier, right -- if a student will bring what they can. This is also connected to other theories of understanding and pedagogy that ultimately say: a student will do what they can -- always. And if they're not doing something, it means that they can't. It's ultimately -- even the "won't" aspect is really more about "can't" than "won't." And even if the student thinks that they are not going to do it, it usually is because there's some barrier to their ability to accomplish. It's a very radical rethinking, because it requires, again, as Sara was saying earlier, we were both saying earlier, letting go of a lot of authority. This notion of Universal Design for Learning -- this word universal is a perilous word, right, I have some disabled friends who make the point that access is... something that's accessible, it's not a steady state thing, it's something that's accessible to a person for a purpose. And

every person will have a different purpose and different abilities with which to engage that thing. And so it's not enough to just make something accessible, because that's not going to work for some people to do what they will. It's a principle that I've been trying to make sense of. And I think it also connects to not just disability, which is the main kind of advocacy that I've been familiar with, but also with issues of culture and race, with privilege in general, because a lot of people who have not had certain kinds of cis white male privilege have had fewer opportunities to build certain kinds of understanding of what we now call standard academic practices. And so that's another piece of how I tried to build my pedagogy, is to give many different ways for students to demonstrate knowledge. I mean, you know, I used to have tests, I don't have them anymore. I used to have a research paper because you got to have research paper. But you *don't* have to have a research paper. You can give students a chance to build tools for research, as Sara was mentioning, and then have the outcome be entirely different, but more meaningful to them, more real to them, to their classmates, and to the future of the profession. How many of our students are going to be writing research papers, like we do, after the survey?

Will Robin 47:18
Yeah, Go ahead, Sara.

Sara Haefeli 47:20
So I was just going to say -- part of my motivation for a Universal Design for Learning approach is so that students never have to ask for accommodations. Right, the class already accommodating to the to the best of our ability. So yeah, first thing out was tests because the primary disability or need for accessibility that students come forward with is because they have anxiety. So anxiety, depression or right -- right, it's just huge. The threat of a grade, especially since they're attached to the student scholarships at a very expensive school like Ithaca College, that it was just crippling their ability to do well, and to take intellectual risks, which is really what we want them to be able to do, right? To ask a truly open research question instead of one that they think, oh, there's resources in the library and this, you know, so that was ... that was one of my motivations for a UDL approach. And the other one was exactly about this issue of inclusion and diversity. We assume that people are like we are, right? But musicologists are strange creatures, we work alone. We like to read, we like to write, right? And I found, reading quite a bit of studies that minoritized populations often work better in groups, they do not suffer from the hyper individualism of White America to the same extent. And that's one of the reasons why I turned to using group work. Now, some students that do have some sort of social anxiety, although there are very few of my students because they have to work in ensembles, right? They play in chamber groups...

Will Robin 49:23
Right - they're used to group work, it's part of their musical experience.

Sara Haefeli 49:27
Exactly. But even so, I've had students that can still collaborate through Google Docs. Right. Andrew, I was surprised to hear that when you made attendance optional, that your attendance went down, I made attendance optional, and my attendance went up, actually. But we're a different institution and a little bit smaller. So that cohort, the students showed up for each other to work together.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 49:53

Yes, yes. Right. Yeah, I think for my group, again... because the cohorts form around studios more than across the university. There's less, but I'll say students have been showing up more after this new freshman class that we've done that works very hard to move the cohorts out of the studio silos and more across a collective freshman group. But yeah, I think part of it is the size, part of it the institution type, but you maybe they're just ... what you're providing them is more attractive, I have to keep working at it.

Will Robin 50:31

I mean, it's so -- everything that we've been talking about, it's so striking how so much of this is just about trying to resist who we are, like in a productive and positive way. Because I still don't really assign group work, even though I should, because when I was a student, I was always the one who hated being in groups, because I was the one who would end up doing all the work. Not necessarily because the other students were worse, but because I was like a type A, I became an academic, right, like, it's clear. And so you end up ...it's so easy to basically find the six students in the room who are kind of like you, and basically get a lot of rewards out of teaching those six students really well. And there's no penalty for it, like, no one's going to dock your pay, because ... and most of the rest of the class is going to do fine. But like, there's so few incentives to rethink things. There's so much work, I mean, everything you've been talking about is so much work that goes into reconceptualizing it because you have to throw out things.

Sara Haefeli 51:39

Well that's true at the front end, it's a lot of work on the front end, but once the semester gets going, it is so freeing.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 51:47

Yeah it is. I agree.

Sara Haefeli 51:47

So I'm not grading assignments anymore, right? All I'm doing is tabulating a group, peer to peer evaluation scores and their own self-reflection score. So I think part of the pain of group work is that you knew that your professor was going to grade it, and it had to be good to get a good grade. So that's taken off the table and...

Will Robin 52:09

you have the students grade each other?

Sara Haefeli 52:12

They're grading each other. Right, and they're grading each other on how well they work together, the quality of the ideas that they contributed right, were they kind is on my rubric. Right? It is process instead of product. And so my semester has become so much more joyful, because now I really am guiding student inquiry, working with them in meaningful ways, and not meeting with them, where they're, you know, questioning, why is that marked wrong on my paper? or Why did I get that question wrong on the test, which took up so much time.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 52:49

So much time and energy, and I mean, grading -- I'm sure that those of us who are listening to this podcast, who teach -- grading is the worst. Grading is the worst thing that you do as a teacher. I mean, for some of us, it's more boring than others, because of the way our brains work. But it is, I mean, I don't know, some people may just love grading, but most everybody I've talked to, just says, Oh my god, you know, it's that time of semester to grade -- exactly the way Sara is saying, we're now at the very end of the semester, we're recording this in December. And, and I don't -- I have very little grading to do. I mean, in fact, the little grading I have to do is just noting that somebody has done a thing, pretty much.

Sara Haefeli 53:25

Right, exactly.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 53:26

And the students are writing a lot. In short chunks. But every day they write something. And so every session, I have the 80-some short little things that students write, but again, I'm noting that they exist. And the students themselves, at the end of every unit, give themselves a set of points on the basis of how they feel that they have engaged with the material, and I and the TAs who help me reserve the right to change that up or down. I remember when I first started doing this, I got a really helpful caveat from Sara that said, women often underestimate the quality of the work that they've done, if you let them self-assess. And so you need to be able to give them more than they think they should deserve, which I've done on a regular basis. Men, sometimes the other way around and that's fine. You know, there are situations in which you can document whether the student has done things, but in the end they need to assess and what I was, you know, talking to friends in -- what, the real world -- work in business. And we were agreeing that -- I found this as a supervisor too, with professional employees -- supervisors don't grade employees; employees evaluate their work and supervisors ratify that. That's the way that it's done. So in a way, I think the kind of Ungrading, which is what some people call it, that Sara is doing, that I'm doing, actually trains our students to work in the world much better. The other thing I was thinking about and actually this is just kind of hit me now. And I've always been really in admiration of the sophistication of Sara's group approach. And I've always been a little bit leery about that partly, Will, precisely because of what you said is, even though I didn't do a lot of group work as a student, I remember being frustrated. And I've certainly gotten from students in the past a lot of "Oh, I hate group work, because I'm the only one doing all the work." But I think a lot -- it so much has to do with how you structure the assignment, because I suspect that most of the assignments that you did, Will, that you hated so much, were not assignments of the kind that Sara is putting together.

Will Robin 53:43

Exactly.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 54:13

Which are actually empowering assignments about process, they were more about, Oh, my God, someone's got to do the thing. And then for all the reasons, some of your classmates didn't have the bandwidth to do the thing. And you did, and then understandably it pissed you off, because you were

doing all the work. I mean, I've seen this happen. In the past when assigned group work, that was not good group work.

Sara Haefeli 55:52
I also have the groups assign roles. Right? So you can... Andrew Grenade has this brilliant thing where he tells them to think about movie set roles, you know, someone's a director, someone's an editor, someone's a writer, someone's an actor, right, you know, ` or just really clearly identify what part of the project that they are responsible for. And then I've also often coached groups to leave gaps, if people aren't doing their work, leave the gap, right? Don't enable them to not do the work, right? If it's a class presentation, and then there's a hole in the presentation, there needs to be a hole in the presentation. And this applies to -- and I tell them this overtly -- this applies to our relationships, too. Right? Don't enable someone to continually not show up for you. Right, let there be natural consequences for not showing up and not doing the work.

Will Robin 56:52
Yeah, I mean, it's striking how we internalize grading and evaluating in this particular way as something that's so natural, because we've been doing it, the students are used to it since day one of school, but it's also striking hearing you talk about this thing, how grading is so bizarre, because it doesn't reflect something that ... it doesn't grant any set of values that is useful in the world, whereas if you learn how to show up for people, that's actually... or you learn to grade each other on how to be kind, that actually is something that you should learn in a classroom ...

Andrew Dell'Antonio 57:33
...you should learn in the classroom. Right. I mean, as we all know, the further up one goes in academia, even grades matter less. Now, of course, we still have them. And I think this ... we're so used to them, that we give grades to graduate students, even though we're always only basically giving A's and A minuses, but they're still there. And that's the paradox is, again, it's a system that's there, that's asking us to do things, because we've always done it this way. And it takes a pretty significant risk, frankly, to step away and say, I ain't gonna do it that way. And I've talked to a number of colleagues who, you know, are in more precarious positions. I mean, I'm, again, I'm very tenured and very senior, and I can mess around, and there won't be any direct consequences by my superiors, even if they're not happy with what I'm doing, which, you know, they're mostly happy, but not entirely. But if I were, you know, I can get away with giving As to everybody, which I try to, if they show up and do the work. And if they don't, then then they haven't done the work. And then there's a natural consequence, as Sara says, but if they've done the work, then that's what I've asked them be to do. And my superiors aren't going to come down on me if I am giving 80% A's in the class, but they might, in a different institution, with an adjunct. And this is one of the tricky things, I think, I mean, people will often say, oh, gosh, I'd love to do what you're doing. But my situation is such that it's hard. And it is hard, which is why I try to put myself out there as doing what I'm doing, to provide a little bit of cover to some people, at least at my institution, to do the same thing. In my institution, it's easier for people to say well, Dell'Antonio is doing it. And because I'm structurally respected then that's, you know, it's harder to object to that. But at other places, it's trickier and it's hard to push against, I mean, one of my favorite books is called Ableism in Academia, Jay Dolmage is the author and it says a lot of great things about how disability discrimination structurally is embedded in academia just like racism just like all the

structures of discrimination that our society loves so much. But it really is endemic to academia that we grade people because somebody has got to fail, because if somebody doesn't fail, then how do you demonstrate that...

Will Robin 57:36
Failure has to be the benchmark for success.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 59:55
Exactly. Quality is only possible if some don't have it. And that, of course, you know, fits more broadly into the question of auditions and schools of music and things like that, which is a bit more of a rabbit hole that we can go down today. But that's I think part of what we're all up against, is the structural assumptions about what it means to learn, what it means to assess, and that our students come in with, you know, again, so many students, I think have felt very empowered by some of the things I've opened up, that ... I mean, I don't want to center myself, but okay, I've opened up these possibilities, and students have stepped in, and a lot of them have done amazing things where they left clearly feeling like, Hmm, okay, I really have value, and maybe they felt a little more sure in that than they had walking in the class. Others have really struggled, in a way have ... I mean, resistant is a bit strong, but I'm asking them to rethink their assumptions too; which ... all of us have assumptions that we hold dear. And especially white, especially male students come to assumptions about success and quality and value that they've always had affirmed to them. And my class doesn't affirm that to them..

Sara Haefeli 1:01:15
Well, it challenges the credentialism, right? So I've had students say, Hey, I'm not learning... I didn't learn about, you know, the Shostakovich symphonies in this 20th century class. And I didn't learn about this repertoire, and how am I going to succeed as a professional violinist if *you* didn't teach me this? And my answer is, there's the library, you know, like, what's stopping you from learning this, but it is this idea of, you're going to give me the credentials that I need to succeed. And of course, that's not true. I want to go back to Andrew bringing up this point of privilege that he and I share, because when we instituted these revisions to our classroom, and we stopped lecturing, we were both tenured professors. And I do want to recognize that for adjunct contingent faculty or junior faculty that don't have the authority to choose the textbook, or choose the readings, or even choose the structure of the class, that implementing these kinds of changes is very difficult and perhaps even risky. But I do want to say that it's not an all or nothing. proposition, right? There are small changes that the professors could make. So for example, when I started using case studies, I just replaced five lectures in an otherwise lecture survey course, with days where we explored collectively in the classroom questions about gender, questions about how do composers make money, things that just aren't addressed in the in the textbook. And when the students left the classroom after those classes, every single one of them said thank you, to me. They don't say thank you after I lecture, as brilliant as I am. They should, yeah, but I'm thinking it's not hard, even if you've been told you have to use the Grout Burkholder Palisca textbook, right; you have to use the Norton Anthology of Western music; you still can take moments to empower the students in these specific and small but exciting ways.

Andrew Dell'Antonio 1:03:13
[Laughs]

Will Robin 1:03:13

They should! Yeah. Well, I think that's a great place to leave it. Thank you both so much. This was a really fascinating conversation.

Sara Haefeli 1:03:43

[laughs] We could talk all day

Andrew Dell'Antonio 1:03:47

[laughs] Thank you. .

Will Robin 1:03:48

 I know. This was really fun.

1:03:49

[Music]

Will Robin 1:03:56

So that was a long talk, but I hope you learned as much from it as I did. Sara Haefeli is an Associate Professor of Music Theory, history and composition at Ithaca College. And Andrew. Dell'Antonio, is Professor of Music at the Butler School of Music at UT Austin. And I'm thankful to them both for taking the time to talk with me. On our website, soundexpertise.org, you can check out some links to their writing on pedagogy and other topics. And you might also recognize Andrew's name because he's been extraordinarily generous in creating transcripts for each of our episodes that are available on soundexpertise.org. Thank you again to Andrewor continuing to do this vital work towards making our podcast more accessible. I'm also grateful to my producer D. Edward Davis, whose work you can check out on Soundcloud at warm silence. I'm over on twitter @seatedovation and I encourage you to follow me and say hello. Finally, I do have one request. If you teach music history, or have friends who do so please share this episode with them or post it on social media. I really think anyone who listens to this will think differently about their pedagogy. And I hope it can make some real positive productive change. I'm really excited about our episode next week, a conversation with musicologist Jessica Holmes about music and deafness. Stay tuned.

1:05:12

[Music]