Sound Expertise

Season 2, Episode 13 – Cold War Money and New Music with Eduardo Herrera and Michael Uy

TRANSCRIPT prepared by Andrew Dell'Antonio

SPEAKERS
Eduardo Herrera, Michael Uy, Will Robin

Michael Uy 00:00
I compare it to a gushing water pipe in a funding desert. It really was a lot of money to not just play around with, but cement some ideologies or aesthetic viewpoints regarding avant-garde or serialist, or even just Western art music writ large.

00:31
[Intro music]

Will Robin 00:47
It is one thing to write a manifesto. It is another thing to bring it into reality. Welcome back to Sound Expertise. I'm your host, Will Robin, and this is a podcast where I talk to my fellow music scholars about their research and why it matters. So in 1958, the composer Milton Babbitt writes this infamous essay for High Fidelity magazine, which he titles The Composer as Specialist, and which his editor cannily retitles, Who Cares If You Listen? In it, Babbitt makes a cogent argument for the period. Composers like him are writing increasingly abstruse, scientific, modernist music that can't easily be understood by the general public, at a time in which scientists are receiving massive amounts of government and university funding for doing things that were also abstruse and not easily understood by the public. It was the Sputnik moment, the space race, the nuclear age, and Babbitt argued that American avant-garde artists should be able to tap into a bit of that sweet Cold War support that was so widespread for scientists. In the most polemical moment of the essay, Babbitt argues that composers might make a "total resolute and voluntary withdrawal from this public world to one of private performance and electronic media." That sentence, and the title of Babbitt's essay, have dictated an ongoing conversation among American composers since the 1960s. Should they care about who listens to their music? This decades-long back and forth, though, overlooks a crucial component of Babbitt's manifesto. It's one thing to make a demand. But it's another thing entirely to have that demand actually fulfilled. My guests on the podcast today are musicologists Eduardo Herrera and Michael Uy. Last fall they both published new books in which they researched extensively the answer to that question, what were the mechanisms that fueled and funded a new infrastructure for the musical avant-garde in the Americas during the Cold War? I say Americas because this wasn't just a US specific issue. In the 1960s Babbitt's modernist ideology was shared by figures in Latin America, who helped create the Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales, or CLAEM, a hub for the musical avant-garde in Argentina. Funding and shaping both the US and Latin American enterprises was the hugely influential Rockefeller Foundation, which will form the jumping off point for our conversation today. The story of

how all this happened is one of money and power, and of Cold War experts and elites, as you'll hear now, in this episode of Sound Expertise.

03:20
[Intro music]

Will Robin 03:27
So thank you both so much for joining me today. We have Michael Uy and Eduardo Herrera joining us to talk about the role of Cold War patronage on the avant-garde in the Americas. And to start off, I just want both of you to say a quick Hello so we can hear your voices and know who's speaking when they're speaking. So hi, Michael.

Michael Uy 03:46
Hi, Will.

Will Robin 03:47
Hi, Eduardo.

Eduardo Herrera 03:48
Hi, Will! thanks for inviting us, this is gonna be fun.

Will Robin 03:51
Absolutely. Thank you for joining me. So I'll start off with a question for Michael, which is about a topic that both of your books share in common, the role of the Rockefeller Foundation in supporting avant-garde music in the Americas in the 1950s and 1960s. Michael, can you talk a little bit about what the Rockefeller Foundation was, how it came to be a major supporter of the arts, broadly speaking, and then specifically how it ended up funding a lot of modernist music in this period?

Michael Uy 04:19
Sure, so the Rockefeller Foundation was founded in 1913 by John D. Rockefeller, he was estimated by some to be the richest man in the world, the richest man in a really long time. And so with the advisement of a Baptist minister, Frederick D Gates, he established this foundation to "improve mankind." They have always been interested in funding and supporting a whole range of different areas. But in terms of the arts and humanities, you get some ventures in the 1930s, but it's not until 1953, there was this big grant to commission new works with the Louisville Orchestra. And then you have program officers who are working within the social sciences, who also start exploring grants to music, arts, and the humanities, that eventually lead to a division for the arts in 1965.

Will Robin 05:39
They originally spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, right, on new works for the Louisville orchestra, which is, I guess, millions of dollars in today's money. Why new music in particular, when they could have probably very safely funded just the Metropolitan Opera, or even just the Louisville orchestra playing Beethoven or whatever?

Michael Uy 05:58
Sure. Well, they did fund Lincoln Center. That was a huge project of the Rockefeller family. So they definitely did fund what we might say are more conservative approaches to arts funding. But in terms of the Louisville orchestra grants, and the ones that came after, it really had to do with the people that they consulted for recommendation. And so I talk about the experts that they brought in, people who had strong institutional elite affiliations. And these were composers and orchestra managers who said, hey, look, there's interesting stuff going on with this orchestra, or with this university, I think that you should start putting in hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars, which in today's value is millions or tens of millions of dollars, into these new music projects. But it really had to do with the people that they brought in as experts.

Will Robin 07:10
Interesting. Yeah, I want to definitely talk about some of those people and who they were and what their motivations were. But to kick it over to Eduardo, you've written a bit about the Rockefeller family specifically having this intertwined philanthropic and business interests that were also related to what the US government was up to during the Cold War. Can you talk a little bit about how some of those arts goals in the Rockefeller Foundation intersected with their political ideas, their business, desires, and and all those intertwined things, which ultimately leads to what you're writing about this Latin American Electronic Music Center?

Eduardo Herrera 07:51
Yeah, absolutely. So the way that it intersects with Latin America is fascinating, because a lot of that money came from oil. And a lot of that oil was coming from Latin America, and in particular, the interest of the Rockefeller family on Venezuela. And specifically Nelson triggers an interest in understanding Latin America. Nelson is very worried that the people that are working in Venezuela are not speaking Spanish, not understanding where is that they are, and as the US starts becoming seen in a negative political light because of foreign affairs during the 20th century, all the interventions, all the invasions, occupations, then Rockefeller feels that they need to establish better connections, better ties with the region. So it's interesting that at that point, the Rockefeller Foundation starts paying more and more attention to Latin American projects, even though there's supposed to be an independence between the business side and the philanthropic side, there is a turn towards philanthropy in the region. And it is during the 40s that Nelson Rockefeller, with this interest at heart of improving the business conditions in Latin America, starts participating more and more in government. And eventually, when he's proposing some sort of cultural exchange programs, he's told - Why don't you just direct this project from this office, which in the short version is called the Office of Inter-American affairs, and this from the 40s he started doing all these cultural exchanges and what we'll call now cultural diplomacy efforts, including the famous Walt Disney movies, where Donald Duck means the Brazilian Jose Carioca...

Will Robin 09:51
I have not seen this Okay,

Eduardo Herrera 09:53
Oh, it's completely worth it. And then the tres amigos, the three amigos which are the Mexican counterparts. And Donald Duck dancing samba and things like this, but it's part of a whole set of efforts.

And it dovetails nicely with what Michael was telling us because those individual efforts of supporting avant-garde, especially with the Louisville orchestra, start having strange reception within the Rockefeller, there's some doubt that helping the arts through individual Commissions is the way to go. And I think one of the things that matters is that some of these works, people just simply didn't like them, which to some it was okay, they felt that supporting the arts was good enough, that they didn't have to like the result, but to some degree, for some this was kind of discouraging, finding this art that they didn't like, but the turn that happens is one that says -- instead of supporting individuals, let's support institutions, so that we have more structural impact in this particular field. And that's when the two meet, because there's an interest in Latin America. And there's an interest in supporting the arts, but through institutions. So we get to the beginning of the 1960s, with these two things in mind. And here comes Alberto Ginastera. And John Harrison, John P. Harrison is one of the officers of the Rockefeller Foundation in charge of Latin America, they meet, and they've been thinking about something similar, which is creating some sort of important music program in Latin America. And thus comes the second highest funding program in music, which the first is the Louisville and the only bigger one is actually the Lincoln Center, towards the arts. But here comes the next one in money is a project to organize a Latin American School in South America, in Argentina. So that's where that particular intersection happens.

Will Robin 12:05
And that's CLAEM, which we'll talk a little bit about in a minute. But the other interlocking big context for this right is, with both the electronic music centers ... center, I guess, in Latin America, and all of the centers, which we'll talk about soon, that are established across the United States, either electronic music centers or kind of university contemporary music centers, there's this idea that these are laboratories, which is maybe also the reason why it's more interesting to support these than individual commissions, too, because it gives them the sense that this is the Sputnik moment, the US is entering the space race, there's this fierce competition with the Soviets over military supremacy, but also scientific and mathematical Space Race thought. And so avant-garde music works really well in this context, if you frame it as coming out of an almost laboratory ideology, is that fair to say?

Eduardo Herrera 13:02
Yeah, absolutely. I think that there is a whole discourse about the scientificity of music making at this time, that matches the modernizing efforts that are being pushed towards Latin America. Now, this particular moment cannot be understood without thinking about the Cuban Revolution. The big fear in the cold war that is triggered by the Cuban Revolution is that the rest of Latin America will follow in order to effect social change. So the response of the US is - try to create this change in a non-revolutionary way by supporting what they call a modernization project. And here's where one of those overlaps, one of my points in my book, and that I think is the same with Michael, is that we really talk about the people involved and not necessarily the abstract institution. So we have that the policies in the US that are talking about modernization theory come from Walt Rostow, Walt Rostow is an adviser to the government, especially to President Kennedy. And Rostow actually works and informs the work of who will become secretary of state, Dean Rusk, who's just recently president of the Rockefeller Foundation. So he comes out and participates of this and it's sustaining the economic discourse; when you see how the Rockefeller family, and particularly David, I would say, but also Nelson, talk about economic development and political changes, they talk with the words that Walt Rostow has crafted

and created -- these stages that countries need to go through to modernize. And this modernization was seen as an essential way of stopping the possibility of revolution. So, when you think about music and the objectives of creating these music centers, one of the objectives was to modernize these groups of people that were seen as behind, these composers that were behind, which was different than what was happening in Europe. Europe, the Marshall Plan, the idea was to rebuild what was already there. The musical project in Europe like that, for instance, the Congress for Cultural Freedom is promoting, is more like revitalizing that scene, while the projects for Latin America, which in the political realm is the Alliance for Progress, had to do with modernizing, it was not revitalizing but modernizing. So there was an update aspect, and technology was central to it. And that scientific discourse of music as research, music as experiment, comes into play really strongly.

Will Robin 15:47
And this discourse is most infamously articulated by the composer Milton Babbitt and his infamous, Who Cares If You Listen or The Composer as Specialist, depending on what title you prefer to run it by essay. And so Michael, Babbitt was one of the experts consulted by the Rockefellers and one who I think helped steer the direction of what they do post-Louisville. So what is the Rockefeller agenda with modern music in the United States? How does it shape the landscape for American composition? What is Babbitt's role in triangulating these things?

Michael Uy 16:23
Yeah, I think it's really interesting to hear Eduardo's response about the way that Rockefeller might have seen their Latin American project as one of modernization, whereas from the US perspective, they saw their projects a little bit differently, because it wasn't about necessarily what was going on internationally, but what was going on at home, and this Soviet threat at the beginning of the Cold War, about falling behind scientifically. And so Milton Babbitt was certainly someone who was very successful working with the Rockefeller Foundation, because -- and I think it's important in this case to use the title, The Composer as Specialist, because he was conveying himself as a specialist, as an expert. You can read in the letters that he sent to John Marshall or other program officers. His reference to his background in mathematics, that he's taught both mathematics and physics, not to mention music. Even in the grants proposals that Columbia Princeton Electronic Music Center proposed to the officers, they had a very scientific leaning in the vocabulary that they used, about referring to their center as a laboratory, about measuring tape precisely in feet and seconds, and all these things. So I think it was a system that reinforced itself, because the Rockefeller Foundation had always had this reputation of being a science-based foundation, more so than Ford. And they also took their structures of evaluation, the consultants and panelists and peer review, from their more scientific programs, whether it was agriculture or medicine, or other areas, they would use the same kind of criteria and the same forms to evaluate the arts and music. So it'd be not just budgets and people involved, but also levels of innovation, these very objective, seemingly objective ways of evaluating things. So it was fascinating to see fleshed out in these memorandums and reports, how much they saw their music and art programs also as ones about scientific progress. And that informed their decision to fund University new music centers, as you'd mentioned earlier.

Will Robin 19:09

Yeah. And so the first big one of these is the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, which is this iconic home for one of the earliest major synthesizers that Babbitt and his colleagues helped bring into existence. What was the infrastructure post that grant? How many different programs did they establish around the country, where were they located, how much money was going into this big thing.

Michael Uy 19:34
So there was actually quite a bit of regional diversity and breadth. The Centers spanned from coast to coast with some big ones in the center of the country in the Midwest, at the University of Chicago, at the University of Iowa. There were in total 19 grants to 12 institutions. And the Rockefeller Foundation gave away close to $2 million to these University new music centers, which, in today's value is is roughly 18 million to $20 million. So that was a lot of money to give away in five years. I think if we heard Rockefeller or Ford or any foundation giving away $20 million in today's society to new music, or to establish or beef up new music centers, I think that would turn heads. So the fact that this was happening amidst all sorts of other funding that Ford and Rockefeller and the NEA we're doing... I compare it to a gushing water pipe in a funding desert. It really was a lot of money to not just play around with but cement some ideologies or aesthetic viewpoints regarding avant-garde or serialist, or even just Western art music writ large.

Will Robin 21:13
If we go further south again, Eduardo, what was the Latin American version of this? What was CLAEM? How did come into existence? What was the Rockefeller role in helping bring it to existence?

Eduardo Herrera 21:28
Right, so this particular worldview that Michael was describing, which... I think you had one of your episodes discussing Kajikawa's work with Lauren, and I think that one has to understand it as part of the sedimentation of that investment of whiteness of the study of music in academia. Like, there's this influx of money. And this is one of the ways that it happens. So what will be similar in Argentina, is that as the center is invented, to have, first of all, a Latin American scope, which was a unique thing, it wasn't just a center in Argentina, it was supposed to be for the whole Latin America. And with a director, that is -- we could consider very conservative within the modernists, as Alberto Ginastera. I mean, he was experimenting with new techniques during the 60s for sure, but he was by no means at the forefront. He was more Berg than Cage for sure. So the fact that Ginastera is willing to start this place, not just by bringing a lot of scores, and creating a library, and having great teachers, you know, bringing Copland and Messiaen and Xenakis, he actually allows or fosters the creation of an electronic music studio, something that he would never do. And he would never -- this was not part of his interest. And he talks and he gets connections precisely with Columbia-Princeton, so that Davidovsky informs what equipment to buy, because, of course, the model is coming from outside. That particular perception of getting models from abroad will be a space for criticism from the local composers, that will point out that the conditions of the United States and the conditions of a place like Argentina, were simply not the same. So that in fact, there's going to be a failure of the studios everywhere else to succeed because of the impossibility to continue financing this kind of aesthetic. So to some degree, the aspirations of making a US studio in in Latin America only is successful while the Rockefeller money is there. Once it's gone, it disappears. The final aspect of the puzzle here is that -- and I would love to hear Michael speak a little bit about what was the case in the US -- But once the Rockefeller

gave the money, there was not a lot of supervision or follow up. Here's the money and you have the seeds here for creating something but there was never like a preoccupation that -- hey, you know, they're inviting Luigi Nono, which is like, if what you're trying to stop is communism, you probably...

Will Robin 24:22
don't invite the communists to town. Yeah,

Eduardo Herrera 24:24
right. The one that is actually waving the flag. And a lot of the composers were very close to Cuba and had been or were traveling to Cuba during the years of the revolution, composers that had escaped Chile for being part of the Socialist Party, so there is no follow up in what happens to that. So it becomes actually a space of resistance to some degree through the students, not the professors but through the students. So I don't know what Michael has to say about that. That aspect of the follow up in the US because it would be interesting to compare.

Michael Uy 24:56
Sure, I think that there were definitely similarities, that there was a bit more of a hands off approach. So they weren't deciding things like what to program, what to perform, which composers' music should be played. But there could have been, I suppose, a degree of proximity distance, some directors did go to concerts, they traveled around the US, like Norman Lloyd would have these diary entries about going to a concert at Sarah Lawrence or somewhere else and commenting about the music that was played. But I agree that it wasn't as hands on or controlling as it could have been. One thing that I wanted to echo, when Eduardo was saying about this issue of the prevailing whiteness of these approaches to funding and what was funded... both the whiteness and maleness. There were women, composers who participated and were involved, but the room was just full of white men who were deciding on behalf of music. And were deciding on behalf of mankind, improving the situation of mankind. And that's something that we shouldn't let go of too quickly, we should pause and spend some time about how white and male these individuals were.

Will Robin 26:38
Your book is titled, Ask the Experts. And you're of making this critique of the idea -- expertise is this incredibly valued thing in this period, in the cold war, because, you know, you look to scientists and officials and policymakers, it's all about expertise, and so like these musicians, Aaron Copland, or Milton Babbitt, or whatever, Bernstein, they are trying to get into the expertise conversation, but only certain musicians are allowed to be experts. So how does that actually work? And how does it narrow things in terms of -- not just, it's only white guys who are being listened to, to create this very well-funded stuff, but also it shapes, questions of aesthetics and genre and style, too, right?

Michael Uy 27:25
Yeah, and I think I concretize that, in the ways that expertise relies on cultural and social capital, and how those criteria that are seemingly objective, when seen in a resume or a CV, can be filled with their own psychological biases, or things that are left out, ways of excluding others with expertise, who have not traditionally had capital, whether it's social capital, cultural capital, or economic capital. And I think what's interesting is the way that I've approached the book in terms of expertise. And Eduardo has

approached his book in terms of elites. But they're both ways of preserving power and control within the hands of a few and excluding others. Not with, per se, evaluations of quality or excellence, there are, but those are subjectively laid by the people who are involved and it becomes this self-reinforcing system. So I'd love to hear more as well about Eduardo talking about these elite art worlds and how there might be a connection with expertise that they provide, too.

Eduardo Herrera 28:51
It's a point that we've never discussed in private, Michael, but it's fascinating that these elites that are chosen in Latin America to lead this project -- and in this case, I'm talking about the Di Tella family, which were the local rich family, the equivalent to the Ford or the Rockefeller in Argentina, that are going to be hosting this center for music. The language that was used to describe who should be chosen to lead these institutions that were to be supported was to find indigenous leaders. So, to me it was fascinating. a breakthrough moment was to find that the indigenous leaders, the Di Tella family, really were just as connected as anybody else. When I discovered that Guido Di Tella, who's the leader of the foundation, the Chair of the foundation, actually wrote his dissertation under Walt Rostow, who was the person that was giving advice to Kennedy and who wrote the rules on economic growth and the stages of economic growth as an anticommunist manifesto. So that even when going abroad, the circulation of ideas was within a specific circuit of cosmopolitan elites that are -- of course they see this indigenous leader, but they also see themselves when they see someone, this person had graduated from MIT, his brother from Columbia. They had PhDs,they had already participated in these particular ideas that are circulating within academia. So when they look for -- Who should we fund, they find a version of themselves, that is almost the same, but not quite, which is a very Homi Bhabha kind of understanding of that mimicry, that you see yourself but not quite. So it was a perfect match. They saw what they needed in these indigenous leaders. So it reinforces that idea of elites self-perpetuating and legitimizing themselves.

Michael Uy 30:53
One of the scholars that I cite is a sociologist, Michel Lamont, who talks about homophily, or love of the same. And so, value is created when these people see a project that reflects maybe their own worldview. And so they rate that project better, or even as you're saying, with these first degree personal connections, x might have studied with y, who might be working with z. And so expertise or kind of elite quality, become very limited in its distribution among people. And that kind of concentrates things even further.

Will Robin 31:40
It's striking to me, when I was reading both of your books, I was thinking a lot about this, whether it's elites or experts, at the same time that these projects, the Rockefeller stuff, but also the National Endowment for the Arts, which we'll come to in which the Rockefeller .... that was partly inspired by the Rockefeller model, these government officials, or these foundation officials are trying to legitimate the idea of giving money to the arts to begin with, that unto itself in the United States is not something that -- rich people give to the arts but not necessarily these foundations, or certainly the government. And so, I'm wondering, could you ... could they have given... Could they have made, I don't know, john Coltrane or Miles Davis ambassadors for the arts in the United States in the 1950s? I guess some of these people were ambassadors internationally, jazz musicians as cultural diplomats, but it feels to me like

they chose the most selective white male, classically, you will get a picture of this guy, qnd you say, well, that's an expert, because they're trying to legitimate this enterprise. Does that make sense?

Michael Uy 32:54
So I'm happy to respond to that. I think one of the great things about studying more than one institution in my case was to see how things worked differently. So with the National Endowment for the Arts, with the NEA, and with the National Council for the Arts, which is the presidentially appointed body that kind of worked in tandem but slightly oversaw the NEA. You see how a public agency or government agency operated differently because it had to be more transparent than what the foundations were doing. So we should remember that Nancy Hanks, who was a second chairman of the NEA, who very much had this pedigree of working with the Rockefellers, she was very intimately professionally tied with Nelson Rockefeller, who Eduardo mentioned earlier, and brought over that system of panels and peer review to the NEA. But she was a woman, obviously, she was one of the most powerful women during the Nixon administration, and had a huge impact on the arts. In addition, there was Walter Anderson, who was an African American musician, composer, director, who was in charge of the music program at the NEA and Billy Taylor was on the National Council. And so I think you get more diversity with the NEA precisely because you have more private citizens, congressmen, Senators, who see the composition of the NEA, what its programs and directors are like, what its panelists are like, because these all are published annually in the reports, and that provides a degree of accountability that is kind of foil, as a contrast to what you saw with Ford or Rockefeller.

Will Robin 34:56
Yeah, this question of government accountability versus foundation lack of accountability is one that I want to come back to, since it's come up a lot more recently, and how people are critiquing charitable donations and patronage and all this stuff. But one of the other big looming questions in both of your work is the issue of how these experts and elites shaped the aesthetic landscape for contemporary music in this period. And there's this dominant idea in the 1960s-70s. Or at least, looking back on that period of what some have called a serial tyranny, or the idea that 12 tone composers, academic composers are really in charge of musical institutions and force everyone to write 12 tone music, and this has been partly debunked, but it's still kind of this myth that sticks around. Is that what's happening at CLAEM, Eduardo? Is there a comparable serial tyranny in Latin America due to this creation of this modernist electronic studio? Who are the main composers at CLAEM? What is their relationship to the different streams of the avant-garde that are happening in this period?

Eduardo Herrera 36:11
Right, so the first thing to understand is that, the students at CLAEM are taking both, instrumental lessons, classes on history and taking electronic music studio; and it's a comprehensive master's program, if you will, because it's a two-year program, that they're coexisting and they depend on local professors and foreign professors. And you can see a change in the foreign professors from the beginning of the 60s to the end of the 60s. So, the local professors, one being Ginastera, who is perhaps the more conservative, learned and applies some of the serialist language and applies at this moment also some aleatory tendencies, but not to any particular extreme, he is very careful in using successful ways of applying this, but his right hand, Gerardo Gandini, who is very young and basically the age of most of the fellows during the beginning of the decade, is much more in tune with

experimentation, with Cage, with -- you know, when he goes to Italy, he's learning from all the different Musica Viva and all of these different improvisation groups. And he becomes an attraction for the students to study with him, to ask for his advice, for his work, and...

Will Robin 37:43
he is like the Boulez-y guy of... kind of like the sexy younger... Well, I don't know about sexy... aesthetically sexy!

Eduardo Herrera 37:50
... right, everybody recognized his capacity to improvise on the piano, to stylistically play in different ways. And people really admired him. The younger students also really admired him. So they start working with him a lot in terms of the local professors. The next local professor that is very important is going to be Francisco Kröpfl. Kröpfl is from Romanian or Transylvanian descent, but moves to Argentina very, very young, and is really a pioneer in electroacoustic music in Argentina, but really in electronic music from a very much Cologne derived thinking, where the control of every sound parameter is important, where serialist understanding of timbre and rhythm and everything is under that premise. So there's that dialogue happening there. Now, if you look at the early composers that are brought, there's a lot of Italians -- Riccardo Malipiero, Luigi Dallapiccola, they're being brought and they're working within serialist and post-serialist, if you want, or strict serialist techniques, and those are the classes they're teaching, I think, among other things, because they're easier courses to teach than others, teaching these particular techniques, but you also have people like Messiaen, who, when they come they're not really thinking still in like the 1940s Messiaen, we're talking about the 1960s Messiaen, he's not really into that serialized or work with rhythms. But he actually comes to talk about desi talas from India. And in fact a lot of students are a little bit lost -- what was the -- they don't know. Same thing with Copland; Copland comes with a very much pan-Americanist perception of what's happening and what it might be to create a music from the Americas which is a little off for the students. But as you move to the end of the of the decade, you have Sessions being one of the people that comes, Earle Brown, that is being brought -- and in fact Argentina was already since very early, even from the 50s, playing music by people like Feldman, when Feldman was not even being played in New York, he was being played in Argentina, because there was an attraction to this. So the transition is from a much more conservative, serial-based group of composers, with several exceptions, to a much more, let's say, invested composers in graphic notation and improvisation. So there's that shift.

Will Robin 38:02
So there's much more -- it sounds like a more general eclecticism. Eclecticism I guess, is happening in the US. And the mythology holds to the serial thing. Michael, what is the role... Do you see the serial tyranny thing, whether or not it exists, as being a product of Rockefeller money in a way?

Michael Uy 40:53
So I don't know if I completely believe that the myth of serial tyranny has been debunked, I think that others have said a lot about the prestige system that serialism had over the American academy at this time. Nonetheless, because, composers wrote all ... you can write serial music in a tonal way, and people trying to... changed and evolved. I think I mentioned that more than a serial tyranny was this tyranny of Western art music, that it wasn't just serialism that benefited but also different kinds of

"classical music," whether it was Neo romantic, or ... the chance composers didn't really get that much attention from either Foundation, which is kind of interesting. There are other scholars who speculate that they might have spent more time benefiting from the systems of patronage in Europe. But I'd still say that the Rockefeller Foundation in particular, more so than Ford, still did give a lot of money and power and influence to the serialists. I mean, Milton Babbitt and Ralph Shapey and Elliott Carter, they all received significant amounts of money, and attention, they were able to make some of ... they were able to get so much notoriety, because of their positions of privilege, overseeing and managing these new music centers at Chicago and Princeton. Not so much Elliott Carter, but he was someone who was very close with all of these people involved and benefited from having his music performed.

Will Robin 42:55
So these are all ... the money towards CLAEM, the money towards these Electronic Music Studios, and ultimately, the way that that infrastructure, the National Endowment for the Arts comes out of some of these models from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, these are all planting seeds that that continue to exist to some degree today. So how do you see the role of experts and elites reproducing itself over time so that the problems in the structures that we're left with now can be traced back, I guess, 60 years to what happens back then?

Michael Uy 43:35
Well, I'm going to jump in. But I think I'm going to pass the baton immediately to Eduardo, because I think one possible thing that might be lost in that question is that once foundation money disappeared, or was not continued, then many of the programs, at least in the United States, kind of closed shop. Some did continue in smaller forms and continue to this day. But they were also really reliant on Rockefeller money that once the five-year grant period ended and no money was continued, then they didn't exist in the same way. But I want to pass that on to Eduardo too, because I think he has an interesting story on CLAEM...

Eduardo Herrera 44:24
Well maybe this is the one you're thinking about, I'm not sure. But there is something to be said about the amount of subsidy that classical music in the US and in Latin America has needed in order to exist to the level that it exists. And I think even today, if we look at the money that somewhere like the Met receives from governmental sources in general, exceeds the amount of every other folk, let's call that thing folk, whatever that is, folk and traditional music program in the US -- just the Met. Maybe after the interview, we can take a look at the numbers, but it's pretty much at least doubles it, but I think...

Will Robin 45:11
I think Michael makes that point in the book, that there's more Met money than there is money for all folk and traditional arts -- is that still...

Michael Uy 45:18
The Met receives seven times the amount of all folk and indigenous music, from foundations. And this was between 2006 and 2015. But yeah, it's significantly more.

Eduardo Herrera 45:31

So you see that when the Rockefeller cease funding CLAEM, basically in the mid 60s, among other things, because the Rockefeller decides that they need to look towards America. So they push a program that they called America First. So they push this program and basically CLAEM ceases to have that support, it eventually closes. Because the models that were being imported did not function. They were not the way that modernity in Latin America was functioning, period. It was a different model. And I think it reminds us that all of these cosmopolitan, and maybe we do want global, which they're really not global, but you know, this circulation of ideas into international and sometimes transnational ways. They always have a localized version. And you always need to localize them, because -- and even within the country, same thing. It's very different to fund one of these centers in the Midwest, than it was on the East Coast, than it was on the West Coast. So there is a connection there between the fall of the funding and the amount of subsidy that classical music needed to exist. To this, I will say, and maybe this is the story that Michael was referring to, maybe not. But one of the things that I was wanting to understand, was this particular Argentinian family, why did they choose to sponsor the avant-garde and not something else. And I think the reason was ultimately two things. One is, as a new elite, they were an industrial elite in a country that had traditionally hosted an elite based on agriculture and on cattle, it was a very much countryside, power from the countryside, they needed and they found a space that represented some of their ideas about worldviews, this was at the forefront of music making, this was perceived as being the cutting edge, which is where they were positioning themselves. But again, this is a very abstract level when you talk to the two brothers, and when you see what the two brothers are saying, the two brothers of the Di Tella family that ultimately are making the decisions, then you see that split that shows a very interesting contradiction. One brother loves the arts, does not fully understand what's happening here, but understands that that music that he doesn't understand, is ultimately the top expression of human creativity. It's that blind belief in the art, so that if he doesn't understand it is because, it's on him. But this is art, ultimate creation of humans. So there's a blind belief in art. And the other brother hates this music, absolutely detests it, and thinks it's the most... a complete waste of time. But is being absolutely pragmatic in understanding that to legitimize their position as elites in the country, they cannot simply be the the car making or refrigerator making family, they need to position themselves as an elite that is funding the arts, that they're philanthropists, that they're contributing beyond that. And it succeeds. Because both of them eventually, they're no longer just elites in the industrial world, they become part of the political sphere, and one of them becomes a councillor for Argentina for a couple of years, the equivalent of a state department, and the other becomes minister of culture, and eventually ambassador in Italy, so there was a transformation of this money through the arts, it was effective through the arts, which I think is not that different from what happened with the Rockefeller earlier in the century -- it kind of connects the two stories in an interesting way.

Will Robin 49:40
Maybe this will get to the big, final-ish question that I haven't -- and this might be a long ramble about... the idea that this project is that these two brothers and this family relates to this whole conundrum with arts funding in the United States, and I guess maybe in the Americas, of arts patronage being this kind of elite plaything, that you have these families who gather enormous amounts of wealth and then hide it in tax shelters, and then those tax shelters become foundations, and I'm being extremely simplistic. And then what gets funded is maybe the result of peer panels. But it's also ultimately, it's a non-democratic system, they take money away, that could go into our tax system, and then give it to

whomever they want. And this has become a critique recently, there's a great book by Anand Giidharadas which talks about the problem of patronage today, and that goes back to the roots of these foundations in the early 20th century United States. And so I'm all for arts patronage, as someone who leans towards the left, I'd like to see like a new WPA or a reinvigorated NEA or whatever. But at the same time, even with those programs, they have all of these blind spots that goes back to this reliance on experts and on their system. So I'm wondering, from your individual case studies, can you imagine a more just system of arts funding in the United States or in Latin America as well? What is the ideal version of this system that makes it so that all different kinds of genres are funded, and the money ... and it's democratic? Maybe if that's something you think is important? Or if that's just me being a lefty, or whatever?

Michael Uy 51:32
I think, Will, you and I have had kind of...

Will Robin 51:37
... some drunken talks about this one.

Michael Uy 51:39
I think these conversations are best had with some sort of drink in one's hand. But I speculate on this question in the epilogue of my book, we have some statistics and some data to put some numbers on foundation giving versus government giving, that with arts grants, more than half of foundation grants to the arts are over $500,000. Whereas with the NEA, the average size of a grant is $25,000. I think it's tied to this larger question of the wealthy becoming even more wealthy and having an undue influence, based off of charitable tax deductions, than those who -- 90% of Americans who pay taxes, make charitable donations, but not all of them can get deductions for those donations. And so that skews a system where we, on the one hand, say that we want both public and private donations and contributions to the arts, but on the other hand, the, the scales are so tipped. And so without going too far out left field, I do think that a greater role for the government, whether it's the federal government, through the NEA, or State arts agencies that give away a significant amount of money, and to a much more diverse set of artists, that they do need more to be able to democratize art making in this country. It's not just about Western art music, or orchestras or operas, which receive the vast majority of funds, but also, all those other underrepresented minorities and women who are making art and music but don't get to tap into arts grant making for all sorts of different reasons. So that's my two cents. And I speculate as well on ways to reform tax deductions and the tax system, and everything, but you can check that out in the book, if you have more questions about that.

Will Robin 54:14
Do you have any takeaways, Eduardo? Also, thinking again, right now, arts and COVID -- artists are getting no bailout whatsoever from the government in the United States, whereas in a lot of other countries they are

Eduardo Herrera 54:28
I think that Michael was touching upon some important things about the role of state art agencies and some of the projects right now that are realizing this by things like creative placemaking and art plays

and all of those programs that are taking place, that to some degree connect or use some of the lessons we learned here and let me make a gigantic statement here: From charity, from the idea of charity, me giving here in my community and maybe taking my clothes to Goodwill, whatever it is, to humanitarianism, which is that virtuous act towards places that I don't even imagine, and abroad. And philanthropy, which often acts in a space in between those or above those, there is a problem with assuming they're good. There is the assumption of virtue in all of those actions. But we understand because there's enough research, and I'm thinking here on the work of Cilas Kemedjio -- I hope I'm not destructing the name -- from the University of Rochester. And then there's a book by David Kennedy, The Dark Side of Virtue, in which there's studies on humanitarianism and the terrible impact that it might have, precisely because there is no understanding of the local dynamics of whatever that might be -- at the international scale, at the local level, etc. And I think that that blind assumption of -- we need to be funding this particular art and not others, coming from experts, as Michael well produces, or that reinforce the ideas of elites, like I'm arguing, is charged with problems, is absolutely charged with problems. So that the lessons I think that we're gathering can even come from places like Brazil, where when Gilberto Gil became minister of culture, what he pushed for were called, points of culture -- That was the translation, points of culture, which is: visit places where cultural experiences or expressive culture is happening, and find out what they need to be supported and amplified, and support those programs in that particular way. You need for real, not in the way that that indigenous statement from Rockefeller came, but for real, you do need people on the ground, that understand the conditions, that understand what the community needs, in order to be able to help them. In other words, they need to be the ones that organize this, what they might need are tools in order to get these grants. In order to get this you might need to help in grant writing and you yourself as an agency need to shape those grants, and those applications in order that they can actually be accessible to these people. So to some degree, I think we have to turn a page, and COVID reminds us of this, on where are the places that this particular philanthropy, humanitarianism, or charity is needed. And there's one weird conclusion that I've reached in the last couple of weeks that I'm not pleased with, but it might be a positive thing about neoliberalism.

Will Robin 57:48
Great, it's good to have *one*, yeah.

Eduardo Herrera 57:49
I know. But I am thinking that to some degree, neoliberalism forces some parts of this white investment in music to be challenged, because it suddenly does not respond to the demands of the market. And we see that with our PhD programs, we see that with our DMA programs, we see that with our notions of what success in a music career has, right, what that means. And suddenly, neoliberalism is reminding all of the schools and all of these programs, perhaps there's not 100 Mets to hire all our singers. And we might be thinking, Hey, we might be training people to work in community choirs. And that is success in our field. So if you start removing that subsidy, those realities started kicking in, and they might actually be positive. So that was my sad realization regarding the neoliberal policies of a lot of our universities and our government.

Michael Uy 58:52
I can get behind that.

Will Robin 58:53
Yeah. Well, thank you both so much. This was a really fascinating conversation, and I appreciate you chatting with me.

Eduardo Herrera 59:00
Thank you, Will, for the invitation.

Michael Uy 59:03
Thank you, Will, this has been really enjoyable.

Will Robin 59:12
I'm very grateful to Michael Uy and Eduardo Herrera for that rich conversation. And you should check out their books, Ask the Experts and Elite Art Worlds. We've got links to those and their scholarship more broadly. up on our website, soundexpertise.org. Michael Uy is Allston Burr Resident Dean, Assistant Dean of Harvard College, Dunster House, and lecturer on music at Harvard. Eduardo Herrera is Associate Professor at Rutgers University, and is soon to join Indiana University as Associate Professor of folklore and ethnomusicology. As always, a big shout out to our amazing producer, the composer D. Edward Davis. Check out his music on Soundcloud at warm silence. As our season comes to an end. I encourage you to post your favorite episodes on social media. And feel free to tag me or ask me any questions you have on twitter @seatedovation. Many thanks to Andrew Dell'Antonio for transcribing our episodes to make them more accessible. Although we've got a bonus postseason episode coming out soon, next week is our official season finale, a conversation with the legendary musicologist and polemicist Richard Taruskin. You won't want to miss it.

1:00:26
[Outro music]