

Sound Expertise Season 4:9 –

Sound Expertise Reflections with Will Robin and D Edward Davis

Transcript prepared by Andrew Dell'Antonio

Will Robin 00:00

Welcome back to sound expertise. I'm your host, will Robin, and this is the season four, final season, penultimate episode of a podcast where I talk to my fellow music scholars about their research and why it matters. I am very excited today to be talking to one of my favorite music scholars, who is also the producer of the podcast, D Edward Davis, aka my friend, Eddie. Hi, Eddie!

D. Edward Davis 00:47

Hey, Will. How's it going?

Will Robin 00:48

Good. So as I mentioned, this is the second to last episode of our final season, I'm sorry to say, we are drawing the podcast to a close, and so I wanted to take an episode to reflect back on what the podcast has been, what it's meant for Eddie and I, what I and Eddie have wanted to achieve with it, and how it all went. So please indulge us in this conversation. Eddie will ask some questions, and I'll answer them, and I'll probably ask Eddie some questions. You won't be hearing my voice much longer on this show, so hopefully this can act as a little sense of what the podcast has been and where it's gone. So I'll turn things over to Eddie for questions.

D. Edward Davis 01:27

So you pitched me this idea. You brought me on as a collaborator at the beginning, and said -- I have this vision, and I need someone to help me produce this. Tell me about your vision from the beginning. What was your original impetus for wanting to start a podcast? What do you think this podcast was gonna be like?

Will Robin 01:43

So as you know, and as I probably said at some point on the show, I have an absolutely horrible memory, except for academic stuff that's not about me. So I decided to go back a couple days ago in my email and dig up what the early sound expertise emails were. And I searched my inbox for sound expertise and got every single email that has my signature in it, because sound expertise is in my signature. And then I funneled that a little bit and began to recall, which I kind of remember, that the original idea came all the way back in 2017, and this show actually started in 2020, so this is long before we started the show, which is -- our mutual friend, Ellen McSweeney, who's a wonderful ... she's a therapist now? Therapist, violinist, cool person...

D. Edward Davis 02:31

songwriter...

Will Robin 02:32

Lives in the DC area, and way back when I first started living in DC, in 2016-2017, she interviewed me for a podcast that she was doing, which I don't know if it ever came into fruition. And I liked this idea. I had been listening to podcasts for a while, a lot of comedy podcasts, like Comedy Bang, Bang, which I love, and also interview podcasts, Marc Maron's interview podcast in particular. And during the course of our interview, which I enjoyed, about ... I guess it was about my academic work in my life or something, I was like -- I could probably do this and buy this \$100 microphone, which is a Blue Yeti microphone that I'm still using, that looked like a real podcaster's microphone. And so then I started thinking a little bit about -- what would a podcast for musicologists look like? And there were some examples at the time which are still going strong. The new books network has episodes that feature new books in music which are really wonderful, hosted by different folks. But I had been involved for the last -- in 2017 for the past, I don't know, five or seven years in doing a lot of public oriented musicological work, primarily as a writer. So I tweeted a lot back when Twitter was enjoyable, or more enjoyable, I wrote for The New York Times, The New Yorker, liner notes, program, notes, that kind of thing. And so I was thinking a lot about ... most of that work involved me taking musicological ideas from my research or ... my own research, or from the work of others, and finding ways to adapt them for non-academic audiences. But that work didn't necessarily foreground what actually musicology was, and so I thought an interview podcast could be a way to actually show people outside of the world of Musicology, what musicology was. And the original name I came up with for the show in 2017 was -- What's Musicology, which is a terrible name for a podcast. [Eddie laughs] I don't remember exactly who deferred me from it. It might have been you later on. Anyway, so I actually recorded a pilot episode all the way back in spring of 2017 with my colleague, then colleague, Nick Tochka, who's a wonderful ethnomusicologist, where we basically talked about -- I think the way that I pitched the show was -- pick two things you've written, two academic articles or a book chapter, and we'll read them and talk about them. And we did it in my office on campus, and it was an interesting conversation. And then I got busy with book stuff and life stuff, and just kind of let it lie for a while. And then July 2019, I'm looking at my email correspondence, is when I pinged you. And at that point, I had been thinking about the idea for a while, but hadn't found the time to work on it. I had carved out some time as I was nearing the end of my first book project to think about it more, and realized I had also been listening a lot to this great podcast, Why is This Happening? hosted by MSNBC's Chris Hayes, which is still one of my favorite podcasts. I was just listening to it this morning, and he typically will bring on an expert in one area, and they'll talk about some political or economic or social issue for an hour. And it's a really engaging conversation that's designed for people who don't know anything about the topic, but it's also accessible for people who know a lot about the topic. And he opens with a monologue, and then there's the episode, and then there's a little outro. And it seemed to me like that format would work really well to talk to other scholars, not necessarily about one or two things they've written, but about their recent work, or their career more broadly, with the idea that basically, there are all of these people in the world who I don't necessarily think of as anyone in the world, because when I teach public Musicology, for example, the way that I talk about it with students is -- it's not about trying to reach everyone versus academics. It's about trying to reach some specific audience that's not a traditional academic audience, and in my head, it was basically... there are all of these people who took a music class or two in college or maybe even in graduate school. Maybe they're a composer or a violinist, or maybe they're out of music entirely, but they enjoyed the experience of connecting with something called musicology in their academic life, that is maybe in the past for them, they might not have known it was called Musicology, and they're highly unlikely five or 10 years out from that experience to go and pick up an academic

monograph or download a journal article that costs \$45, is behind a paywall, both because that work is not necessarily intended for them, and also because it's literally hard to access. It's expensive, or it's confusing to find. And so conversations with fellow academics about their work and their lives and in doing the work, could fill that niche of someone who's still curious about maybe Musicology, but has no necessary pathway towards fulfilling that curiosity. And I remember when I approached you, you said you didn't listen to any podcast, and I'll talk about that in a minute. But for people who do listen to podcasts, scratching the curiosity itch is, I think, a big part of that. So that's where I landed on the idea. And then I came to you and pitched you the idea and said -- Could you maybe pretty please figure out how to make the audio sound better on this recording and/or other recordings?

D. Edward Davis 07:46

I definitely remember our earliest conversation about this, where I said -- What is a podcast? I don't think I said -- What is it? But I think I said -- What good are podcasts in the world? And I was real cranky about it. And you said -- it's just a thing you listen to when you're walking the dog or doing the dishes, and I very angrily said -- I don't have time in my life for these podcast things. And now, of course, it's five years later, and I listen exclusively to podcasts all the time. So ...

Will Robin 08:10

Well, you like listening to birds, so that's a better thing to do on a walk than podcasts, but...

D. Edward Davis 08:15

Sure, I'm not listening to podcasts on the walk so much. That's bird time, but certainly in the car, or certainly doing the dishes or whatever, finding in those quiet moments that podcasts can be a place where -- exactly what you said, you can learn something about a subject that you wouldn't otherwise pick up a book about. I think that's a really good way of describing it. You used the word public musicology before when you were talking, and I've heard you use that term a lot. And I think maybe when I first heard that term, I was a little bit suspicious of it, or skeptical of it, or I thought -- isn't all... the whole point of research is that you're making it public, but you're talking about a very specific kind of public and I think you did a really good job just now of explaining who that public is. It's not people within the discipline, but it's trying to make those ideas accessible. I don't know if accessible is a word you would use. But what did you ... Yeah, you said that those books might be difficult to access, or difficult to obtain, so trying to make those ideas available to a more broad public, I think, is one of my favorite goals of this podcast. And we should take this moment to shout out the tagline that you say at the beginning of every episode, which is that it's a podcast where you talk to music scholars about their research and why it matters. I think that's a really powerful way of framing this podcast.

Will Robin 09:28

Yeah. The title What's musicology? had to go pretty quickly. I don't remember exactly what the reasoning was, but one is, it's not a very good title. I'm sure Emily, my wife, would have told me that, she's good at thinking about those things. Another is, I wanted to get away from Musicology, although there's, I think, an implicit ... I'm a musicologist. Most of the guests are musicologists -- I like to think of the podcast as focusing more broadly on scholarship around music So, ethnomusicology, music theory, popular music studies, folks from outside of academia who do work that I think is substantive and scholarly. And I remember thinking about Sound Advice as the name of a podcast, but it's already the

name of a podcast, and also is not a good name because we're not giving advice. And then at some point, I don't know... were you involved in the title brainstorming?

D. Edward Davis 10:15

My memory in that moment is gone. Anything that happened between March 2020 and July 2020, is deleted from my brain. Yeah, I like that a lot. Maybe we can use that as a segue to talk about some of the guests. Maybe you can talk a little bit about -- in the earlier seasons, were you mostly reaching out to people that you already had preexisting relationships with? And then at what point did you start reaching out to music scholars who maybe you had only encountered once or twice or had a professional relationship? Or when did you start reaching out to absolute strangers and just cold emailing and saying -- I'm interested in your research, would you consider coming on my podcast? Can you talk a little bit about ... feel free to name specific guests if you want to, but I'm not asking you to call out specific names, but just what was the progression from your end of, getting people to get on board with this show?

Will Robin 10:22

Well, this would have happened before that, theoretically, or ... I don't know, actually, that's a good question of the name. Anyway, Sound Expertise worked. And also, I like this idea of the expert, because the Chris Hayes podcast I mentioned, a lot of the ideas... it's not just like we're going to talk to some politician, or some political guy who goes on TV, one who goes on TV, it's let's talk to an expert in this area. And I like the idea of emphasizing that all our guests are experts in sound in some way. One of the funny things too, that's kind of crucial to this process. Well, not funny, because it was a global pandemic that killed millions of people and was horrible, absolutely horrible. But the original idea, when I kind of rebooted it in 2019 and started thinking about it, was basically -- I would do all these recordings in person with colleagues, friends, or people that I didn't know, and then we would kind of bank them until we could get a full season. So the first episode that I recorded for the show after this initial pilot thing with Nick Tochka, which wasn't the right format, was with Loren Kajikawa, who's a wonderful scholar of music and hip hop and race, and that is still one of our most popular episodes. It's a great episode. And we did that. He's local. He teaches at GW. We did that in my apartment in DC in 2019. And the sound, I'm sorry to say, because that episode still gets a lot of downloads, it sounds terrible, not because you did your best with it, but ... and then I recorded two episodes that fall at AMS with Michaela Baranello and Erika Honisch, both of whom are people that I knew and reached out to. So the idea was -- I'd go to a conference and try to Bank a couple episodes there. I was recording in hotel rooms, obviously not ideal conditions. I recorded a couple scholars who visited UMD in my office on campus. And I think we had five or six episodes, by the time the pandemic hit in March 2020, that were live in person recordings with people that the sound was never very good. I also honestly found the environment really awkward, of sitting across the table from a person and getting them to talk really in depth about their work. I think there's a weird discomfort about that. Flash forward a few months, and by May 2020, everyone in the country is really comfortable talking on Zoom for a really long time. And so that was a crucial shift for the show in terms of making it more feasible to actually do with the guests that I wanted to do it, make it more reasonable that we're not ... I'm not going to ... I don't know when I would ever be able to be in a room with Susan McClary and sit across the table and interview her. So once we switched to zoom, everything made a lot more sense as far as the format goes, people felt a lot more comfortable, I think, talking. The sound quality got a lot better, then I was recording in the

basement of my rental house in Silver Spring, which had great acoustics. This is the basement in my house in Tacoma Park, which has, I think, slightly worse acoustics, but does the trick. So your question was guests. And so initially, yes, people I knew, not necessarily close friends, per se, but people who I knew and whose work I liked. One of our early big gets was Alex Ross, who's a longtime mentor and personal friend of mine. So that wasn't a very hard get, but that's one where we recorded it in my house in Silver Spring, I think. And then, I think it was really the pivot from season one to Season Two. Season One contained primarily people that I knew personally in some capacity, even the big names like George Lewis or Marian Wilson Kimber I had had some connection with. And then season two, I put together the dream list of people that I really wanted to talk to who I thought were ... Again, not everyone that I think is an amazing scholar whose work I admire ended up on sound expertise for all kinds of different practical reasons. But to be able to start the season with Susan McClary and end it with Richard Taruskin... Taruskin, I knew personally, but it was still not an easy thing to get him on the podcast. McClary, I didn't know at all, but was very kind and willing to do it, which was wonderful. And then there were people in there who I had no relationship at all, but I knew I wanted to do an episode with, like David Hunter, who talked about Handel and the slave trade...

D. Edward Davis 15:14

Was it the confidence from the success of season one that gave you a feeling like -- this is turning into something that people are actually listening to. There might be well known, important scholars who would want their voices to appear on this.

Will Robin 15:30

Yeah, I think it's that, and I think it's the fact that, fortunately, most of the people that I've interviewed for the show had never done a podcast before. Including... I just interviewed, and this is a preview for next week, this week Will Cheng, who's a wonderful scholar, a major thinker in musicology of the younger generations, and who said this was his first time doing a full length podcast, which -- he seems like the exact kind of person that should have been on 15 podcasts in the last couple years, and so there's a low bar in that sense. People aren't getting asked to do this a lot, so they're not necessarily turning it down. I think there are some people who didn't necessarily know what it was. I don't think any of the big people that I asked in season two decided to do it because they had heard of the show, necessarily.

D. Edward Davis 16:20

It was more just that they didn't have as many chances as they want to talk about their research. And here's someone who wants to ask them some questions.

Will Robin 16:27

Yeah. I think people... I got this question a lot: how did you get Susan McClary? I emailed her, and she kind of knew who I was, and is a really nice person. And it's been really lucky throughout the podcast to just know that -- it is the reason for the podcast, in the sense that these are all major thinker who do not have a million places to expound their thought. And that's itself a beef I've always had with the field of musicology: I don't think we do enough work getting out there and doing that kind of thinking in the public. But it's also a benefit for me, because I get to send people emails, receive nice responses, and I've had... I can count on one hand the number of straight up "no's" I've gotten, and I obviously won't say who those are. But the other thing is that the impetus for season two, was that season one was

really fun and I really liked it. We built a significant audience over the course of those 10 or 12 episodes. Just so the listener knows, you can probably assume this, but the format that I've always had is that ... I have never had the desire to have a weekly podcast, that seems like an absolutely insane amount of work. So I will typically plan on a season coming out in a few months, and then bank episodes in advance so that we can release them weekly for a set amount of time, and then stop and then do another season in a year or two, or whatever. And so we built an audience, there was significant listenership, people talking about it on social media. I think the big season one moment that was the one that really crystallized what the show was and what it could do was -- in the midst of having banked all these episodes weeks or months in advance, there was this controversy online with Steve Reich, which you probably remember, he was reported to have made a racist comment in the 1970s by a music journalist, Val Wilmer is her name. And so people were, this is kind of a cancel Steve Reich conversation happening on Twitter. And this was back when, again, Twitter was more enjoyable. And it was this thing where it was like, everyone has opinions about this. There is one specific person whose name is Sumanth Gopinath, who has the definitive take on Reich and race, because he wrote a dissertation and multiple journal articles on this specific issue of Steve Reich and the politics of race, appropriation, racial politics, et cetera, et cetera. And Sumanth is a wonderful scholar. His work is incredibly deep. It is also 30 to 40 page articles that are hermeneutic analyses that are ... even if I put ... and I remember, I put some of those PDFs on the internet, I think I dropboxed them, just so people would be like -- Look, this is what you should read to know more. But even if you have the PDF, reading those, I would say, to a certain degree, requires a kind of graduate level thinking, which makes a lot of sense, because they're designed for musicology journals or books or whatever. So our season was ongoing, this was the first time that we ever did ... We haven't done this that many times. I was like -- let's try to just get an episode recorded immediately and drop it next week. And so I talked to Sumanth, and it's a wonderful conversation. I think it's still our most popular episode, because it serves ... and this is, I think one of the things that I realized through the course of Sumanth's episode. is that it serves a need. It acts as a resource that did not exist before. There was a conversation happening around Reich and race. There was no place to go to learn more about that conversation besides just social media shade type stuff. And now there is a 50 minute thing you can listen to where you can learn a lot, despite not having necessarily any clear entry point.

D. Edward Davis 20:16

It's still our most listened to episode? Is that true?

Will Robin 20:20

Yep, it is most popular. The top three are Reich and Race with Sumanth Gopinath. Number two is Music Schools and White Supremacy with Loren Kajikawa. Number three is Wagner and Alex Ross, and number four is Handel and the Slave Trade. These are early episodes. Number five is the Taruskin episode.

D. Edward Davis 20:37

What I'm hearing when you say that is -- give some love to our other episodes everyone, because lots of good episodes out there, get them in competition with those. One thing I want to say about the downloads. I remember you telling me at some point that you can track downloads over time. And there are these moments where you see these bumps in certain older episodes that maybe we assume

comes from... maybe a faculty member is assigning to their students -- you should listen to this episode, and then we get this little bump where a whole classroom full of people are all tuning into this one episode about this topic. So just to go along with what you were saying before, the podcast is something you can listen to weekly, but it's also a kind of resource, or almost an archive of these ideas that then people can go back to and listen. Educators can point their students towards -- there are places where this conversation is happening that is a permanent bank of these ideas.

Will Robin 21:27

Yeah, that was one of these other revelations over the course of season one, that this is timely, but it is also permanent, and it is permanent too, in the sense that I am going to pay our host Buzzsprout 12 bucks a month forever to keep these things on Spotify and Apple podcasts.

D. Edward Davis 21:46

Shout out to Buzzsprout!

Will Robin 21:47

But that also relates to another thing, which is in terms of the design of the show, the goals of the show, and my ambitions of the show early on, which is I wanted it to be a podcast that was like other podcasts. That sounds like a really obvious thing, but most... a lot of podcasts that are produced by academics are on just a website or SoundCloud... they don't exist in the same places as other podcasts or have the same formats as them. And I don't want to denigrate experimental work that is maybe being made for a specific community and exists in a specific way. But the goal would be that, if someone would scroll through Apple podcasts... and early on, we were on the charts, I think when we first... I don't know, maybe around the time of that Gopinath episode, we made it onto the apple podcast music charts very briefly. And that you would click on it, and you would see a logo that looks like a real podcast -- and shout out to my friend Julia Hurst, who's a great graphic designer and ceramicist and all-around interesting person, for our great logo. And you would listen to it, and could immediately get -- it's got a host who gives an intro. It's got a clear message. It's got an arc to the episode. It's going to be done probably in under an hour, occasionally over an hour. And there's going to be another one next week, probably. And all of that stuff, I think, is really important if you are an academic who wants to do public work, and this is, again, something I talk about a lot with students and also with colleagues: try to fit your work into a genre that exists and understand what that genre is as you work at it.

D. Edward Davis 21:47

That reminds me a little bit... I have my students read the first chapter of *How Music Works* by David Byrne, where he talks about creation in reverse, and the idea that the systems are already there, you have to create for those systems, rather than creating an original idea that doesn't relate to anything that already exists in the world. Those systems are there, take advantage of them.

Will Robin 23:45

I should read that book. I think I read it in... It might have come out when I was college. I read it a long time ago. I should read it again.

D. Edward Davis 23:52

I recommend Chapter One. It's an interesting way of thinking about making something for an audience based on the audience's expectations, rather than the artist's genius or whatever. One of the things that I like about -- again, shout out to Buzzsprout -- what it does is it pushes our podcast to many, many different platforms and services that people use to get podcasts. And it's so nice to be able to tell someone about your podcast and just say, find it wherever you listen to podcasts and it's just there, rather than saying -- Go to this specific website or having to track it down, there's something about offering it in such a broad way that if the goal of the podcast is accessibility and making these ideas accessible, then getting people to listen to it on whatever podcast service they normally use is also kind of fitting in with that goal.

Will Robin 24:40

Yeah. One of the most exciting and continually rewarding things that actually happened just a couple days ago, someone messaged me on Instagram, that people will just find it and binge it. There are people who actually will binge our podcast on a road trip. I just heard from a composer I think -- I'm sorry I'm blanking on his name, who said -- I just found your podcast and I've listened to all the episodes. That's something that you can do when it's in the right place, because I do that with podcasts I find and love too, and that's always really cool. And then also this, students... I talked about the non-academic, or imagine non-academic audience. But it is also true that one of the core audiences of our show is fellow musicologists, because those are people in my network. Those are people who have an innate interest in, obviously, the premise of the show, and who maybe have friends or colleagues, or alternately, people whose work they're interested in but haven't had the time to read -- they can listen to these episodes. And so, as much as I try to design the podcast so the conversations are steered towards anyone being able to listen who has some curiosity and being able to understand the topic. I'm also always knowing that there's a core audience of scholars who might tune out if I "dumb things down," not that I know what that means in this context. And a lot of those people now assign these episodes to their students, because, again, if you want to learn about Reich and race and you're in an undergraduate seminar, and I do this all the time. It feels weird, but when I have our graduate students read Susan McClary's work, it's supplemented with this podcast where you get more of a sense of her as a person. And I think that really can help elucidate complex topics and give the students also a break from reading 40 pages or whatever.,

D. Edward Davis 26:27

In the classroom, you can listen to me talk *about* Susan McClary, or listen to me talk *to* Susan McClary on the podcast, right? So you just mentioned a moment ago that someone reached out to you via Instagram, and I want to talk a little bit about the community of listeners or people's interactions with you. At some point, you made an email address for the show, and I'm pretty sure that wasn't at the beginning, we didn't have a way that listeners could reach out to you. You don't have to read emails that you got at this email address. But maybe just talk about what inspired you to create a specific account so that people could reach out to you and then what the community is like that has developed around this podcast over the last few seasons?

Will Robin 27:08

Yeah, the story of the podcast has been one of really gratifying, growing listenership. I don't want to get into individual download numbers for episodes, because that feels weird, but we have to date -- total

downloads of the show of all time are almost 69,000 -- 68,875. Our show has been listened to a lot. We have probably somewhere between four and six hundred weekly subscribers, but it's kind of hard to estimate that. And again, our numbers will go up because someone assigned it to a class, or someone discovers a show, or whatever. And early on, we had lots of nice conversations especially on Twitter, about the show. And also I was on Facebook... I got off Facebook at some point, and I want to say 2020, or so. I deleted Facebook. I kind of regret that, but we don't have to go into that. So we've had our listenership go up. We've had increasing discussions and attention. I started the email -- well, at the same time, and this is not something you should do when you have a podcast, I have pulled myself off of social media gradually over the last four years, basically, and for a number of reasons, political reasons, having kids and wanting to not feel juked by this system of attention grabbing. So I'm basically off of Twitter. I will occasionally post things, I used to even just post the new episodes, and I don't do that anymore, because Twitter hasn't let my followers see my tweets for at least a couple of years now. I still have, I don't know, seven or eight thousand followers, but if I tweet something, it gets one or two likes. So there's something broken in the algorithm there. I post our new stuff on my Instagram, but that's more of a personal Instagram, so it's not necessarily driving new listeners. And I'm off Facebook, so we have a bad social media presence at this point. If I wanted to keep this podcast going, I would probably be on TikTok, putting clips on YouTube, etc, etc. I have zero desire to do those things. That's honestly one of the reasons why the podcast is wrapping up is, I can't give it the kind of social media juice that I think it deserves. At the same time, it's really gratifying to hear from people, always all kinds of people have been listening to the show. I met people at AMS who I had never met before, who listened to the show, a couple were not musicologists, but they were just big fans. I started the email account as a way to hear from folks who I wasn't hearing from on social media, because by season three, anytime I tweeted about the show, it would just get no traction on Twitter, essentially, even though we still had a lot of listeners. So yeah, we've gotten a bunch of really nice messages from folks all over. I don't know if you have a question about this, but there's also the pandemic episode, which is, I think, one of the, really, most, I think, beautiful ways that we thought about community. Should we talk about that?

D. Edward Davis 30:00

Yeah, sure, we can talk about that. What was the inspiration for putting that together?

Will Robin 30:07

This was our season two ...

D. Edward Davis 30:08

... bonus episode. Yeah, our pandemic year

Will Robin 30:10

My wife Emily, who's a wonderful and supportive person who has supported the show and took our daughter on an adventure this afternoon so I could record in the basement without footsteps upstairs. Oh, and I have two children now, I don't know if that's on the podcast officially yet, but there's Ira and Goldie. Emily listens to Dan Savage's podcast. Dan Savage is a sex and relationship columnist, advice giver, and the format of the podcast is people call into a voicemail, like a Google voicemail, and leave messages, and then he responds to them. And so I was listening, we were listening to one of the

episodes in the car, this was, at some point deep into, I don't know, 2021 probably. And I was like -- this would be a really interesting way to structure an episode of having people leave us voicemails about their experiences of the pandemic,

D. Edward Davis 31:07

And it was around the one year anniversary of when things shut down?

Will Robin 31:09

Yeah, around the one-year anniversary, I set up the voicemail, and I basically cold emailed everyone I knew in the world of musicology and put it on social media, put it on the AMS listserv -- send us voicemails, and we got a bunch. I don't remember exactly how many, probably 20. There were a few we had to cut for various reasons, but I would ... if you're new to the show or haven't given a listen to that episode. It's like a really powerful... it's just really, I listened to it, I don't know, a few months ago, and it just made me cry, because it's ... I left my own voicemail in there. There's the conclusion from Marion Wilson Kimber is just this really incredible discussion of grief and history, just lots of different experiences from people in all kinds of different walks of life, in the world of music studies, talking about what that year meant for them, and you did an amazing job producing it, stringing together voicemails with music. And then Marian Wilson Kimber talks about the song ...

D. Edward Davis 31:17

"On the banks of the Wabash."

Will Robin 32:04

On the banks of the Wabash.

D. Edward Davis 32:09

It's a 19th century popular song,

Will Robin 32:23

Yeah. And I had reached out to Nonesuch to try to get the rights to a particular recording, and that was going to take a while. And then Eddie,

D. Edward Davis 32:32

I said, Nonesuch schmunsuch. [Will chuckles] I'll do it, just let me handle it, because I'm so often in the background on this podcast, and how often can I just insert myself into the narrative? So it felt like a fitting way to end that episode with a sentimental song. And I remember Marian Wilson Kimber talking about the idea of how socially acceptable sentimentality was, kind of the idea of whether we grieve publicly or we grieve privately.

Will Robin 33:01

Yeah, so you sang a beautiful rendition of the song, and that ends the episode, and that reminds me that we need to talk about one of the most important contributions to the show and its history, which is your incredible theme music.

D. Edward Davis 33:13

[Chortles] what do we need to say about the theme music?

Will Robin 33:19

I think I want you to talk about how you created it, but I think the first thing that I want to say about it is that I told you I wanted theme music, and from what I remember, you came back with something that you had worked on, which was, I believe some kind of soundscape, maybe a field recording of an orchestra tuning up. Is that right?

D. Edward Davis 33:39

Yeah, that's right. It was a compilation that I made of a number of string musicians. I used to work at a string camp, and I would make recordings there. And before every performance, each individual violinist tunes up. And I made a kind of compilation of 100 different violinists all tuning up at the same time. And it was this sort of dramatic soundscapey, droney kind of thing, which, if you have ever listened to my music, Will shouts out my SoundCloud on every episode, Warm silence... I do soundscapey, droney things I don't really do podcast themes is not really my meat and potatoes of what it is that I do compositionally. Yeah. So it was a fun challenge to say, what's something that's different than what I would normally do?

Will Robin 34:23

Yeah, and I thought that the warming up thing was really cool. It had a really cool sound. It would work well. But one thing that I knew from the beginning this show is that I didn't want the assumption to be that musicology was the study of classical music, and so opening with something that sounded like an orchestra warming up felt like it was signaling a more narrow direction that I wanted to go in. And so I went back to you, and then you came up with... why don't you talk about how you came up with it? Because it's, it slaps so hard.

D. Edward Davis 34:50

I don't know, it's like, what if it was kind of a Trap Beat, but also it was in 27/8 or something like that. It has some extremely weird mixed meter that I'm not really sure what it is. And like most of the best -- I'll say, most of the best works of art that have existed in all time [Will laughs], it was written in 15 minutes. I didn't lose sleep over it. I didn't sweat over it. I just did it. And then was like, Okay, I guess this is it. And then it's been our podcast theme for 50 episodes. We just did a live episode in Chicago at AMS, and we played it over some big speakers. It was the first time I've ever heard it played in front of a crowd, you know, dropped the beat, and it was very satisfying to listen to loud over speakers.

Will Robin 35:33

It works, I think, what would have been amazing... and maybe we'll do this if we ever revived the show, which I'm not promising to do, because this is the final season... Have it performed live by a violinist and a percussionist or something? It'll probably be awful actually, but...

D. Edward Davis 35:50

Get the bad plus to perform it or something like that. [Will laughs] I also will say, my voice has appeared on this podcast before, because one of the other things that, Will, you've used this platform for is to talk

about your own scholarship a few times. We talked about your first book, we talked about your second book with Carrie O'Brien, and that's been ... the few times that I've managed to be able to talk on the podcast are when you are the guest or you are the interviewee in some way.

Will Robin 36:15

Yeah, and you always have great questions, as you do today, so it's fun.

D. Edward Davis 36:19

I'm just trying to talk to music scholars about their research and why it matters. [Theme music] . So you've referenced a couple times in a half voice, you've referenced -- well, this is the last season, or we're not gonna do it anymore unless I decide to bring it back, but I'm not gonna bring it back. And maybe, can you talk just a little bit about... you don't have to get too personal, but -- the decision behind wrapping this up and looking back on four seasons, what's the legacy of this podcast?

Will Robin 36:48

The time between each season began to grow because this is not my primary job. It does not pay me. I pay for it, and thank you, and I'll thank you many more times at the end of this episode, Eddie for doing all of this production work for free. I'm very grateful. And so when I decide to prepare for a season, a lot of other things stop. A lot of my research work stops, because it's a lot of work to do this. And I love doing the work. I'm happy to do the work. But in a sense, the podcast is not ... it's my vision of what I want, what I imagine music studies to be at its best, in a sense, but it's not *my* work in the sense, of, although we did a couple of those about my research, I'm talking about other people's stuff. And so part of it is that I want to have space and time to do my stuff, more books, articles, public writing, that kind of thing. Part of it is having two kids who are getting older, and I love being a dad, and I spend a lot of time with them, which is amazing.

D. Edward Davis 37:55

You should start a podcast with them.

Will Robin 37:56

I could start a podcast... Ira and I have definitely sat across the table and done stuff on a microphone, which... two white guys across the table talking to a microphone, is not the kind of podcast the world needs. But who knows. So part of it is a time thing, and then part of it is... I didn't really love this idea of -- I do a season, and I'll kind of be like -- wait the next season will come. And every time I'd see people at AMS or whatever, they'd ask me, oh, when's the next season coming? I'd be like -- Oh, soon, hopefully. And so I, unlike most academics, and this is something that frustrates me about academia, especially Musicology, just as the lack of, I think, enough public oriented work frustrates me is, I think there's a tendency to -- you do something and then it just stops and you never really end it. There are a million academic ... there are a million graduate student, cool blogs that started and they just peter out. And that's not just in academia. People start blogs and they peter out all the time. And so I think it's nice to put a bow on something and say -- we're going to finish this and it's going to exist as a summatory statement. There are going to be four seasons. I'm not saying down the road, in six months, if something happens that's really ...there's a really good reason to do an episode. I would be happy to do an episode. There's a world in which, in a year or two, I could also be like -- You know what? I've

actually ... I don't feel like I'm done with this. I am not done with it in the sense that there are a lot of people out there I would have liked to have interviewed. I have not done all the interviews that I want to do. At the same time, the interviews that I've long, always been burning to do I have done. And I think the last one of those that I had really had wanted to do, was Suzanne Cusick. Someone who I think is just a monumental figure in our field, that I wanted to be able to say -- we have an hour-long conversation with her, that I got to have that, and that's a wonderful episode that dropped last week. And then the social media stuff, the ecosystem for putting out this kind of work doesn't really feel like -- again, podcasts are on the rise. The fucking election was a result of podcasts. People are listening to podcasts for everything now. So it's not like you can't have a podcast in 2024: you definitely can. But you need to be more active on social media platforms that I don't feel comfortable on. I don't want to start, for example, having to do video on these and spin off TikTok or Instagram reels to get, to grab... I don't want to have to spend time juking the algorithm to continue to build this show. But I also wouldn't feel good about the listenership stagnating as I continue to put more and more work in it, because I wasn't willing to do the social media stuff, so all of that is part of it. And as far as the broader legacy, I really just hope that this is a continued resource, both for the folks within the field to know what it was through my brain's filter from 2020 to 2024, to have a sense of the history of the field. I think some of those episodes with senior scholars, it's an oral history of what musicology was like. I assign those episodes, especially when I teach the intro to musicology course. of being like ... you kind of have no idea what the field was like, in terms of how, in a certain degree, awful it was 30 or 40 years ago, especially for women and minoritized scholars, but just to have these as resources for people who want to learn about these topics, who care about them, for the scholars who are guests on them, for whom it acts as something that they can show or give other people to know more about what they do.

D. Edward Davis 41:42

I love it. I love the idea also, yeah, being like this archive of what the history of this field was like, that maybe someone could listen to these episodes at some distant point in the future and say, these are what the concerns were that people had. And this is also... young scholars and the kinds of things that they are interested in at the beginning of their career; and mid-career scholars, and the kind of work that they're publishing books about; and late career scholars, and the kind of history that they had. I love how in so many episodes, you ask people about what first got them interested in musicology, what was your path into this field. I think that can be so inspirational to younger listeners who ... no one is a kid and thinks -- I want to be a musicologist someday. It's not a dream field, but what is the thing that turns in people, that makes them move from maybe a performer into the field of research or scholarship or something like that, or what sparks their curiosity? And so I like that this podcast can be a long standing legacy to how people engage with the field of music scholarship. And I'm very, very happy to hear you say that you're gonna keep paying the 12 bucks a month to keep this going for a while. We'll see what the future holds for Buzzsprout and other companies. But meanwhile, I got all the files saved on a drive, in a fireproof box somewhere.

Will Robin 43:02

I was about to say, I'm going to put them in a USB drive in my safety deposit box at the bank, but you just reminded me of one more thing that that I think about with the show, which is -- My goal in life is not to create more musicology graduate students in the sense of, I don't see this show as recruitment for creating more musicologists in the world. Although I love musicology, I don't know if we need more of

us. I don't really know, actually, that's a great question that I'm not gonna answer right now. But I do hope that this is a show that can show people what this field is and why it matters, and whether that leads people to become musicologists, or simply to have more musicology or music scholarship in their life, and be able to think about those things, is something that I value and that I hope the show has represented

D. Edward Davis 43:54

Well, thank you so much for coming on my podcast. [Will laughs] Sorry, you say "thank you so much" at the end of the show.

Will Robin 44:03

I do! And the other person says -- are we done?

D. Edward Davis 44:07

And then I cut out the "are we done." Does this feel like an "are we done" moment? Do you have more stuff that you want to talk about?

Will Robin 44:12

This is an "are we done" moment. So I will do our outro, which will begin as it should, [Theme music] by thanking our host for today and my incredible producer and friend, D Edward Davis. Thank you, Eddie. It feels weird to say this to your face, but I am incredibly grateful for the many, many, many, many, many hours you have put in making the show sound as good as it is. Eddie's making a little heart with his hands, and I feel that heart with hands too, that I feel like I don't know how to make. So you can listen, as always, to Eddie's music on SoundCloud at warm silence, and you can listen to his theme music at the beginning and end of every episode. So thank you Eddie. As always, you can email us sound expertise 00 at Gmail. I'm on Twitter and Instagram -- I refuse to call it X -- @seatedovation. Thank you to Andrew Dell'Antonio, for these past few seasons, for transcribing our episodes to make them more accessible. Andrew, I'm very grateful for your work. Accessibility is really important for the show, and I know that lots of folks seek out the transcripts to either read them instead of listening to the show or supplement the show with them. And thank you to my wife Emily for all your amazing support, and to my kids, Goldie and Ira. Thank you to Julia Hearst for our logo.

D. Edward Davis 45:25

Thanks to everyone for listening. This is why we do it.

Will Robin 45:27

This is why we do it. And next week, the final episode of sound expertise, musicology and repair with will Robin, that's me and our guest will Cheng.

Will Cheng 45:39

Any interlocutor, anyone who's living in or through or despite musical institutions and practices and systems and communities, they're living musicological lives, regardless of whether that experience is translated into words on a page.

[Theme music] 46:30