

Jeremy Dutcher

S2E4:

LISTENING TOWARDS EMPATHY

18th of October. 2021.

It's already episode 4 for this season, and today DECLASSIFY welcomes onboard the remarkable activist, tenor, composer and musicologist Jeremy Dutcher. Jeremy's music transcends boundaries: unapologetically playful in its incorporation of classical influences, full of reverence for the traditional songs of his home, and teeming with the urgency of modern-day struggles of resistance. A member of Tobique First Nation in New Brunswick, Jeremy first did music studies in Halifax before taking a chance to work in the archives at the Canadian Museum of History, painstakingly transcribing Wolastoq songs from 1907 wax cylinders. As he listened to each recording, he felt his own musical impulses stirring from deep within. Long days at the archives turned into long nights at the piano, feeling out melodies and phrases, deep in dialogue with the voices of his ancestors. These “collaborative” compositions, collected together on his debut LP *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa*, are like nothing you've ever heard. Listen to this episode as Jeremy and Victoria unpack the practices of listening deeply, bringing Indigenous voices to the table and the challenges of repatriation and repatriation.

Victoria Pham

Hello hello! It's been a bit of a break here on the podcast but I am so pleased to be back with you all. Especially as this week's guest is someone whose music and words I have listened to and watched perform for a number of years, as well as someone whose name has come up several times in previous podcast conversations and episodes. Without further ado I would like to introduce this episode's guest who is non-other than award-winning composer, musicologist, tenor, activist and Tobique First Nations song carrier, Jeremy Dutcher. For a quick background, Jeremy is not easy to pin down. His music seeks to, in his words, transcend boundaries by unapologetically incorporating Western classical influences with his reverence for the traditional songs of his home. In continuing his ongoing practice of listening, dialogue and sonic repatriation, I am so looking forward to speaking about reclaim and reactivation through music. Welcome Jeremy!

I'm so happy to join you here and I got a chance to like listening to a bit of your your work with with this is it called the classified is called to classify? Love that, by the way, it's perfect. Thank you. So yeah, I've been really eager to have this conversation because I think the ways in which we can like complicate or problematize this idea of of what we're even talking about, we're talking about classical music, I think is is to our servers because I think we're in a moment right now where those lines maybe aren't, you know, as clear as they were and maybe it's not even necessary to be so I think there's a lot of generative possibilities in this moment about what we can you know, even call this I don't even To be honest, I don't want to start this conversation with like, but I don't even use the term classical music so much anymore. I read this term, Western art music and I quite like that because I think it is It speaks more I guess balanced about, you know, other types of musics. So it's it's because, you know, every type of music has classics.

Victoria Pham 10:12

Yeah, exactly every tradition has their own classical ways of expressing themselves.

10:17

Exactly so so I come from a different tradition that's maybe not so much in line with the, like Western European musical tradition, although I do love that kind of music and I do sing that kind of music sometimes, you know, coming, you know, as an indigenous person to the, to the site of what we might call Western art, music can be kind of a fraught thing sometimes, you know, because you there's not a lot of us making music in that space. And so the examples when I looked at as a young sort of music maker, I looked out at the landscape of the cannon and sort of how it saw or how it imagined indigenous people of North America I was kind of shocked to know that there or is really, really coming from a place of well, I'll call it claim the racism and othering you know, of of, of our people you know, and I'm really a proponent of you know, nothing about us without us it's really important that whoever is whoever is being represented they need to be at the table to to guide how that representation is going to is going to go so I guess it was through studying and being in in classical music institutions that I came to understand that oh maybe there's a there's another pathway to take that we can honour who we are as as people of culture and people of you know of this place you know, indigenous people to this place and maybe we can bring bring that to the site of classical music and and that will be beautiful just on its own. And then the music's on top of that, because I really do believe like our, our traditional songs, and our melodies are just some of the most beautiful I've ever heard. And I hope to so I said to kind of arranging those melodies and and that's kind of maybe why we're talking here today is because I kind of sit at the, at the intersection of, I guess, indigenous music, but I was also trained as a, as a as a tenor. So I kind of have that sort of classical

music education as well. And I guess part a lot a big part of my work is just trying to balance those. Those two worlds that are kind of at times polar opposite, you know, but you know, as the more time that I spend kind of putting those two musics in dialogue with each other, the more I realised that, you know, I actually don't know that they're all that different because they, they take the same amount of breathing and connection to body to sing them and to sing of your spirit and sing from your spirit. So I think, yeah, I try to marry those two worlds all the time, but sometimes it's easier than then others. Yeah. Anyway, that's just a little about me. I guess I should probably introduce myself as well. I can't really

Victoria Pham 13:26

yeah, no worries at all. I mean, I encourage that because that's the best way for conversation to happen organically. Yeah, I always wonder how you'd like to introduce yourself because some people like to be asked a question or are you ready to just go on to be

13:40

totally well, you know me I'm always here for I don't know if it's you editing this but it is me editing it.

13:48

I wish you luck. No, but I'll just you know, in our way we're taught to introduce ourselves and our language first, so I will do that, and then I'll translate to English. So quite a procedure when delay we spoke to edublog and booj, our neighbourhood called menarche. Kakaako Sakamoto similar to them, now that again, we will do jagi mooching demon. So, I just said that I'm very happy to be here. Hello, everyone. My name is Jeremy Dutcher. I come from loose territory, which is on the east coast of what some call Canada. And I come from I bring in the The Raven and the wolf clan, as I'm here with you today. And, yeah, that that would be how we will introduce ourselves in our way. And then I said, I'm a song carrier. I'm a singer, which is a sort of traditional designation for, you know, we all have a role in our community, you know, and this just happens to Be mine. So I've been kind of helped in that way, from a young age, you know, by some of the elders and the knowledge keepers in our community that have passed on a lot of our songs, because our, the way that our music works, and the way it gets passed on is very different from a classical tradition, right. And so you know, I didn't necessarily go to an institution or a school to study these songs, but just coming up in the community. And, and there's this kind of like, one on one more mentorship between our elders and the and the song keepers and the people that that carry those songs forward from generation to generation. And we don't, we don't have it written down in the same way, right. And so it takes that oral tradition and that, that in real time propagation of our music, to pass it on. So I've been mentored in my life by a couple of very generous and wonderful song keepers. And that's how I get my songs. And that's sort of where I begin as as a musical person, but then added into that I'll say, is also the classical elements of my training and my teaching, that have allowed me to paint my traditional music with as broad of palette as possible, because I have all of these different ways of tapping into to voice and sound. And yeah, I guess just exploration and play. So I love music. That's what I do for a living. And I'm very, very lucky to do that. Even though it's shifted a little bit right now. But yeah, I'll just say that introduce myself that My name is Jeremy and I love music.

Victoria Pham 16:45

That's really beautiful. I love that that's like a sort of like, kind of a beautiful and simple sentiment to go down to because honestly, sometimes I forget that I'm doing this because I love music. It's just really easy to forget it in the industry. So it's a nice reminder to hear someone say that.

17:01

Yeah, it's because it's the most basic truth of, of all of us that are doing this work is that when the day is done, and the work, you know, kind of gets through her head. Music is what brings us back and what heals us, you know, so yeah, I know, we've shared the mind in that way.

Victoria Pham 17:22

What you mentioned kind of earlier, before the two aspects of your music training, joining together to make this kind of unified stream to your work, is that something you always wanted to do from a really early age, or when you're first emerging as a performer?

17:36

what I hope is a unified thing. Sometimes it feels pretty scattered. But sometimes you really just cobble it together on one record, and put it out and hope that it makes sense to somebody. Yeah, I will say like, I try to think of it in the ways of like, I'm able to, to use more types of paints and brushes and sculpt things in new ways. Rather than feel like it's a conflict, you know, in myself, although I felt that too, I try not to live in that place of, of musical conflict and try to like, put them in dialogue instead. So that can sometimes be difficult, you know, like, for example, we went across, I made this record called Well, listen, we've been to Okinawa, which was a record of songs in my language, based on old archival recordings from the early 1900s. And we got to take those into Symphony halls all across Canada, and we got to collaborate with with the country's top symphonies, you know, it was incredible, and we brought our ancestor music into those places, and we reverberated them and we brought our people into those spaces. And I think for me, it's like, what can be most important is the representation that I'm getting to, to go and offer, you know, and really reclaim and claim for the first time maybe these kind of like, spaces of Western art music that have when they have engaged our people. It hasn't been, it's been, you know, maybe how would I say this paternalistic or from a sense of like, Yes, we have the, this is the music of pedigree and we're going to explore some some cultural folk music and Isn't that wonderful? No, no, no, no, no, no, no. I hope we can bring in a new way of seeing can because all music all peoples have musics. And you know, what I've seen in my own experience is, is people that were maybe even 10 times as hard to nail our traditional music, and to make sure that it's sung in just the right way. And make sure their language is just correct. And that same work ethic happens in the classical realm as well. I've seen both. And yet one gets kind of elevated in this way of like, well, don't they work hard to like? And oh, isn't it? Isn't it like amazing? And yes, it is, you know, but, but I just hope to not just reflect the beauties of my own people back to themselves to say, hey, look, our way is beautiful, too, but also to open up the classical music space, and to say that we really need to start thinking about cool stories getting put on stage. You know, I think I look at the companies here. I think Europe's a bit of a different story in terms of, you know, houses and companies that are willing to take risks, because I think audiences are willing to take risks, but here is really, really, like, they're just putting on the classics, you know, and that's, again, why I struggle with this word is like, because I think it's coming from a very, very particular lens. And if we don't name that, if we don't talk about it, it's the great unseen, right? Like, it's what we don't talk about, which is that, like, all of our sense of what classical music is, is tied up with the history of white Europe. And you know, it's like, and then that's changing a little bit, but our entire sense of what counts as fine music is distorted. I hope that all the time, we can have conversations to not not make people feel bad about that, because I have no interest in that but just open up another possibility and say, like, Yeah, um, and then this is not to say we all need to go to a World Music Festival next week, you know, I don't think that's everyone's path to it, but try to, you know, incorporate some difference into our, into the ways we're programming, you know, and for these houses, and for these companies, and for the people that are programming music. You

know, I've heard time and time again, oh, our audiences aren't ready for that, you know, you know, you know, and it's like, well, that's your job, then you need to prepare them and you need to educate them to let them know that there's more than just what you've been offering them for the last you know,

22:21

100 years. And, and, you know, we can all do this together, but it takes it takes a real institutional effort to, to educate and to make accessible other forms of music and knowledge that aren't so rooted in a particular worldview.

Victoria Pham 22:44

If you touched on that thing about programming, it's such a big problem in Australia we also unlike Europe, very very conservative. So when you open a programme we tend to have Beethoven Bach Brahms and they're kind of the big three on in like across the entire nation. And only in the last I'd say two or three years have they begun systematically trying to engage our first nations peoples in Australia to be involved in the concert hall but even then it's like one person annually, two people annually and it's I can't help but think sometimes it feels a little bit tokenistic

23:16

you know, and I think we really need to get past this because you know, it is wonderful that we're getting in these spaces and having and sharing our music but but until it comes from you know, until we get our people on the boards of these institutions until until you know our people feel like we can come into that space in a comfortable way and we're not judged for what we wear or like how we show up to that space you know it's like it's a real but anyway I don't know but again, I don't know further stretches out to because if I had my in my ideal world we're reconsidering how we're even formatting the concert hall yes you know it because I don't know that that if you know indigenous people or you know Torres Strait Islanders or you know any buddy you know, any indigenous person in the world would sit down and create a concert hall that looked like this is the stage and that is the audience you know what I'm saying? I think it would definitely if anyway I'm just going by my mind I think I would like create some kind of like other way of doing it that anyway, I was really tangent now. concert hall concept but there's some beautiful ones in Germany two that I saw quite recently that that have this kind of in the round but really like acoustically beautiful spaces as well and I thought wow, it just it was so much more of an inclusive and like immersive space to my family because I feel like kind of separated sometimes from the from like as an audience member looking on a stage it can be a form of like separation or like No, yeah, I guess I've been thinking about this a lot, because I'm like, trying to design my next show. My next kind of live format, and I think it might be in the round. Yeah, but I don't know, I'm kind of been also struggling this place between where my music fits, right, because I have been playing in like theatre spaces and concert halls and But increasingly, I understand that that's a limited space, in terms of who you get to speak to

Victoria Pham 25:37

what kind of audience, it feels comfortable enough to even enter that sort of space, because it's designed to be exclusive then, like you mentioned before, we're separated because Western art music has built a structure where the audience is expected to be kind of passive in their experience. So you kind of sit back and take this grand music and rather than participate in it,

25:58

which is, I guess, is a whole different kind of experience and understand that why we have that that kind of, like wash of experience. Yeah, I just, I hope to breathe another kind of way of thinking into that space and, and try to make it a little, because that was the way that like, when we talk about indigenous music and how it's traditionally practised. I mean, I can only speak for the context over here, but, but it truly is collective, you know, we sing together, and these songs are shared songs among all peoples. So those lines of like, performer and audience are really blurred in our contexts. So I think that's important to acknowledge, you know, and sometimes why our music doesn't always fit in a classical music space, is because it's not, it's not a passive activity, you know, and even, you know, even what the songs are for, like, I think, this idea of an audience, and this idea of song as entertainment is something that's also a little foreign to our ears, because song is action, it's connected to life, it's connected to how we move through space and our activities that we do. So if we are going down the river, in a canoe, we're gonna sing that song, as we go, you know, it's connected to the ways in which we live our lives. And so, to decouple it from that is to also change what the song is, and to change what that even does, and to, you know, when we talk about, because Western art music has been so codified and so detailed, and so transcribed, when we talk about another kind of music, that that doesn't move in that way, and yet, carries the the same amount of detail and pedigree, in order to be able to understand the nuances of that music. You know, when we start to look at song, not just as entertainment, but as a carrier of culture, and also a carrier of language and of and law, which is it's kind of a new concept, to me is this idea of languages law, but I was out in the west coast of Canada, like in what's called British Columbia, but I was visiting with some indigenous people there. And they were saying, you know, and they had this very strong understanding, and it was new to me, but it really resonated with me. And then I came around here and started talking about it with my people. And they were like, Yeah, for sure. Because there's this idea that that song is law and it's it's a song in an oral culture, when you don't have writing systems. Song then becomes much more than entertainment becomes a legal forum, in which we pass on our ideas and how we are to relate to one another. And so those song keepers then become the keeper of the the record, you know, of how we are to relate to each other. So that inspired me for sure. Maybe I'm just biased as somebody who loves music. But it really did it made what I'm trying to do to try to like highlight the songs of my people and and our languages and all of that it made it feel real and it made it feel like oh, yeah, it's contributing to something that hopefully will we'll live really long time you know, because yeah, I have this worry. You know, we are our language is in a really, really hard place right now. Because of the the impacts of colonisation and things like the the boarding schools and residential schools that we had You're in Canada, but also in Australia, and in America and in Scandinavia, all over the world. This happened to just people where our kids were taken and attempted to be re educated away from our traditions. And so a lot of our languages have been severely diminished in their usage and in their, their, their general fluency among our peoples. We're kind of at a point right now where we have less than 100 speakers of our particular language. And so it's not true coast to coast, you know, there's languages with with with 1000s of speakers, and that's 10s of 1000s. And it's amazing, but particularly on the East Coast, here we are in a pretty dire situation with our language is so that, you know, maybe even in this next generation, we might not have any speakers that were that were at birth, or that came up in the language, you know, so yeah, for me, the music and the work that I'm doing is all kind of in service of that, because we're really kind of in the 11th hour of this sort of struggle. And, yeah, we got to do everything we can. And so the record that I made, was all in Leicester Square language. And that was very intentional, and no translations provided as well. And that was a very intentional decision, actually, because I wanted very much to speak to our people directly. And to I guess, like we only we never convince anybody of anything, I don't think I think we will only show people our passion and, and show them our light and our interest in something and maybe then that will spark something in them. And so for me, the the kind of thesis of my work, or what I wanted to do was to

highlight our the preciousness of our language and of our traditional music, and lift it up in the highest way that I could. And I was able to use, you know, the paint brushes of classical music or Western art music to to make that a really beautiful painting, I hope. But it was all in service of the the project, I've listed where language revitalization, and in showing, you know, my people how beautiful their

For our first intermission is an excerpt of the first work on Jeremy's 2019 Debut Album, Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa. This work is entitled Mehcinut, and to reflect on this performace I leave you with some words from Jeremy:

"I'm doing this work because there's only about a hundred Wolastoqey speakers left. It's crucial for us to make sure that we're using our language and passing it on to the next generation. If you lose the language, you're not just losing words; you're losing an entire way of seeing and experiencing the world from a distinctly indigenous perspective."

Victoria Pham 32:37

And essentially, I actually wanted to know, like, on maybe a more boring or technical side, how you approached integrating your language into it. Because I know you've done research in the archives and the museums in Canada as well, and whether or not that played a part in how you produce the album in the UK?

Jeremy Dutcher

Yeah. Oh, totally great question. I'm so happy to talk about that time in my life, because it was almost six years ago now. But it was really transformative. And it kind of set me on a really amazing path, you know, where I get to do this for for my life and get to share music and my culture, my language in a really wide way. So I guess it started. Yeah, six years ago, now. I was seated around the kitchen table of one of the elders here. Her name is Maggie Paul. And she's a song carrier as well. And she knew that I was really, really interested in that in the old songs, like the traditional, like really old music of Melissa, we are people. And so she told me, you know, if you want to, if you want to really know the old songs, if you really want to get a deep understanding of it, you can't stick around hear those songs out. They don't they don't live here anymore. She said, If you really want to hear them, you got to go. You got to go west, you got to go to the museum, and we got to go into that archive. And you know, she said, wouldn't it be nice if somebody could bring that back? Our elders, they always do this. They always like they they throw it like a general like kind of like, wouldn't that be great if somebody were to go and bring those songs back to us? And so but I kind of understood what my what my directive was. And so I, I went to the museum, spent a couple of weeks there in the archives and just kind of digging through all the all the plethora of like of content that was there, right because this, this anthropologist, he had lived in our communities. There's, you know, seven communities all up the river here and You know, he lived there for seven years. So he was he was, it's a deep field work among our people. And so it wasn't just the music, although that was mostly interested in that site just as a as a as a sound maker. But there was also you know, photographs, there was also like objects like drums and like moccasins and like deerskin. You know, you know, poaches and beading and all different kinds of different objects of my ancestors. And so I sat there with that for a while and kind of just tried to let it speak to me. And it was an incredible time, because they really did in a way. And what I knew instantly was that these can't be here, like, they can't be locked up in this institution.

Like, I know, these archives in these, these museums, they're trying their best to preserve and protect our histories. However, there is, in my mind, a way in which these material objects of our people, and these things that belong to our heritage can be ultimately accessible to our people, right? So why did I have to, you know, take a take a plane or a train to get into the middle of the country, you know, to access these, these archives? You know, why couldn't I just go to our community centre down that down the street and do that. So for me, it was accessibility, and that's kind of the problem I wanted to solve. Or sort of that issue that I saw out there that that I thought could really be mended by accessibility, you know, just bringing those voices and those songs and my time and experience in that archive out to the people. So yeah, I guess. I started to think about like, Okay, well, how do people how do people meet music these days? You know, how do they How do they come to hear new songs, and maybe that's on YouTube, or on Spotify? Some of those things, you know, so, so how can I get into those spaces, and then it started to dawn on me, Well, you know, maybe I'm not gonna be a traditional composer, maybe I'm gonna make albums, you know, and be a musician in that way, if I really want to speak to people, and if I really want to take my music to my people, that felt like, the most accessible format to do that, so and then the language piece kind of just came through the process, right? You know, understanding that? Well, actually, to be honest, it came when I was studying classical music at university and I was sitting you know, as a singer, you have to study languages to write. So I was I was studying German, I'm studying for German test, trying to, you know, get all these big, massive compound German words in my head, and you know, it's just was not sticking. And kind of just like, in a kind of a sort of epiphany moment, just to say, like, German is going to be fine. You know, there's a whole country of people, there's a couple of countries and people that speak it over there, you know, French should be fine. English is gonna be fine. You know, only our language is spoken here, is only spoken here. You know, and it's in a real crisis moment right now. And so I got to be doing everything I can to be in support of that project. Because when we lose that, when we lose a language, we don't lose words, right? Like, it's language is so much more than that language is truly like our philosophy and our, our way of moving in the world that how we relate to one another. So there is a distinctiveness within language practice that is important to maintain. And I think a lot of peoples around the world, they understand that, you know, especially when they're a linguistic group living outside, like in a hegemony that is not their own, you know, I think we have to carve out this space all the time to say that, like, especially because we are the first peoples here, this is the only homeland that we know. So we need to carve out that space and insist on our sovereignties and insist on using our languages and, and not translating sometimes and that's okay, you know, I get a lot of people coming up after shows, you know, you know, asking for translations, and it's like, well, I can't I can't flatten my world for you. You know what I'm saying? There is something that gets so lost within that, that active of simple word for word translation that I think is. Yeah, it doesn't serve us to dull ourselves to each other. And I think that when we can sit inside that uncomfortable bonus of like, maybe not understanding for a moment, there's actually something magical that happens on the other side of that, which is that we get transformed through a new understanding, or a new empathy or seeing, you know, people outside of a headline, you know, because the ways in which indigenous people in this country are talked about are often kind and are often rooted in our traumas, and rooted in the bad shit that happens to us. But okay, cool, cool. You know, but it's like, I really want to problematize that all the time and reframe our stories in joy. Because when I look in our community, this is what I see. I see resilience. And I see joy. And I see people that have survived over 500 years of colonisation, and are still singing and offering our gifts to everyone, not just our own people. And for me, that's something to celebrate.

INT 2: For our second intermission is a recent work emblematic of Jeremy's incorporation of Western art music into his practice. This is an excerpt of 'Honour Song' performed here in collaboration with cellist Yo-Yo Ma on Ma's 2021 album 'Notes for the Future.'

Victoria Pham 41:03

And you mentioned the word empathy before, I think that's a really, really powerful thing that your practice and your music has offered to everyone, because I've listened to your album several, several times. And it's given me a deeper understanding, even though as you said, there, no translations, even though I don't understand what it means. There's a kind of spirit to the culture that's embedded within it. And I feel like that's the powerful aspect of the music.

Jeremy Dutcher

That's all good. You know, it's like, for me, I guess I kind of took that lesson from the world of opera, which is to say that like, to be honest, when we go see an opera, you know, and it's not in our language of origin, I really don't think most people are sitting there reading the scroll titles, you know, it's nice as a reference point, when we go to be transported into stories, you know, and I think when we let ourselves do that, and take away that, that mask of, of kind of direct understanding, we actually gain a lot from that. So So I do think, you know, classical music tradition or opera for, for showing me that because it allowed me to step into a space to say that, like, it's all good, it's all good. Just, I'll see you at the other side of the concert. You know, it's gonna mean something to a lot of people, it might not mean something to you, but but just trust that that story that we're telling is bigger than the words that that that is included from words, word to word. Yeah.

Victoria Pham 42:24

And what was it like navigating your practice in your indigenous heritage into a classical music space? Was it uncomfortable? Did you have any deep and difficult conversations to have to overcome to get that into concert halls?

Jeremy Dutcher

I mean, absolutely, I don't think nothing we're doing is like, uncomplicated or easy. I don't know if that's how that said, but you know what I mean, it's like, there's a certain level of tension and how the Germans would say Stormont about it, you know, we got to have that push and pull that, that that sort of frenetic energy to create something big, that's gonna do something in the world. So yeah, you know, I definitely had doubters and like, people within classical music institutions that look down on whatever is doing and, you know, you know, said as much to me or, or people that, you know, just didn't believe that we had something to offer in that space. And all the time, I guess I just had to insist that we did and keep the vision strong, because I knew that and it was especially beautiful coming to do that orchestral tour last year, you know, to take our music to the highest form of that, you know, the big sound using every palette, every colour in the palette. Because it was a really beautiful opportunity for each of those cities in those symphonies to engage not just with me, because at the end of the day, as an indigenous person, still I am a guest in Calgary, or in Toronto, or in Vancouver, you know, there are local indigenous people

everywhere, you know, and I think we got to always remember that so it's not just enough to bring in one artist from across the country, you know, that that represents their people and shares their songs in their language, but also, how are we engaging our local communities, you know, as programmers as people that are that are making the decisions, making those curatorial choices like how all the time are we looking at our feet, and looking at the ground and saying, okay, but who's been caring for this land? You know, for a lot longer than us, you know, and it might be a noodle and that's a fine answer to but how are we engaging because yeah, keep in mind like indigenous people we sometimes make these same oversights to we aren't in relationship with our local Stewart's you know, I'd I kind of had to learn this the hard way, but just the long way to say that like, you know, going around and I will just say that like, cuz I don't want to get stuck to negative people. And I'll just, I'll provide the way that I got out of it. And, and my methodology now because I think, yeah, we can get, we can get sort of stuck in the in the in the mud here. But what I will say is now all the time, Everywhere I go, I know whose land I'm on, I know the treaties in which they've signed, I know, the languages that they speak, and I know, maybe try to learn a couple words, you know, as a sign to say that, like, I'm a visitor in this place, I am grateful to be here. And here is who I am. From our perspective, you know, from my perspective, please share with me who you are. And, you know, when, when concert halls and venues and presenters really get that right, it is such a beautiful coming together of local people, and of newcomers and people, and visitors and all of these, and it becomes grounded and rooted with in a local tradition, which is to say that, like everywhere has a different way of gathering and welcoming and all these kind of stuffs. And if we can start to hand over that microphone and start to hand over that curatorial space and start to hand over the keys to the concert hall, who knows what's gonna happen for me, it's always a chance to like, keep that door open and let as many people in as possible. So that we can have many different voices at the tables that we may like, know each other better, you know, like I said, not darling ourselves to to each other, as we meet.

Victoria Pham 46:37

Yes. And I like the idea that it becomes a super collaborative community space, I used to have this dream that one day on a concert hall could just be a civic space, rather than this kind of quiet space that, you know, people can only enter if they have a ticket or dress the right way.

Jeremy Dutcher

Well, it's really interesting to like, kind of frame it off the side of a museum to or like a site of an archive, you know, because they do take this kind of institutional form of like, ticketing and like, you know, checks and like, you know, concession stands. And like, I just think there's like, there's other ways in which we could gather, that aren't about solely capitalism and reproducing. Like the rigid models that we've been offered. And I guess, you know, for me, it's kind of, I'm leaning away from that concert space all the time, and kind of thinking about, oh, how do I take my music into, into outdoor festival spaces? If I really want to talk to a lot of people? Or how do I get my music into, you know? Yeah, and then I guess this whole thing of like, Oh, well, I'm, I'm not gonna go into a bar and do my music. I guess not really. It's not really what I want to do, either. So it's about finding, but I guess yeah, finding a space that that could hold all of that, which we don't really have. We need like a new concert hall. I like your idea. Just like we got to make it a civic space. And like, really open it wide open. I think that's really gonna. Yeah, in the same ways, I just think it would reinvigorate it. Because right now we look at, and we just look at the institutions here. And they don't feel relevant. They just don't feel like they're joining in the current conversation. Right?

Victoria Pham 48:32

Yeah, they also feel like they just they like guarding something for some reason. They're guarding this old perception of what or how cultural knowledge is made, or the value of old objects, many of which are not their own, but guarding them away from the public Bible and opening it up. And there's like only a specific way to read them, or to engage with them. And you can't touch the musical instruments because they're behind class. Yes, after things like that. This is a completely different irrelevant story. But a friend of mine, who's a collaborator, James new, and he's a filmmaker, and I have been working on this project, too. We gather these old Vietnamese drums, and about 3000 years old. And it's because we're both a Vietnamese heritage, but we're part of the Vietnamese diaspora now, after several waves of awesome colonisation. And we've been trying to reclaim them from French collections from collections in Europe and America and Australia. And after so much negotiation, and so much paperwork, which I'm sure you had to jump through when you were doing your archival research, like how much permission you require to access your own object from your own community. They said no. So we had to, quite literally, we went to the art market and bought one. So we self repatriated our own objects back to us in order to activate them and share that musical tradition that how culture has lost because it's something for 3000 years ago. So that process that it is brought all that back when you were talking about the archives because the lack of accessibility two objects that are ours is shocking.

50:04

Yeah, truly, it's shocking, you know, and it's like, and even when we, as you're stating like even when we do go through the processes and the and the ways in which they want us to make those repatriations and repatriations like it doesn't happen. And so, I don't know, I've like, I've been inspired by some of the, like African diasporic activism that's been happening in, in museums as well, where they're just like, well, we're just gonna take our stuff then, which kind of falls in line with maybe a little more of my political ideology, which is, it was like, ask for forgiveness rather than permission. And that's kind of how it was with with, with how I was working on my stuff was like, I just started using them in live shows, I just started, I put them on record, I wanted them to be with the people. So it didn't really matter to me, who was asserting copyright over these things, because they're not owned by a museum, or by an anthropologist, their own, collectively, and they're not even owned by me, too, that's also an important distinction also, you know, it's like to say that, like, these are collective ownership for all of our people. And that those lines do not, they're certainly not drawn by Canada, or by the institution of a museum or an archive. So, you know, that might get me into trouble sometimes. And I had, you know, a visit from the intellectual property rights people now. You know, at the end of the day, if we stand strong in what we believe, and I think, know what our vision is, which is to say that, like, we all just want it to be accessible, they just have a very different idea of what that looks like. And, and for me, I'm unwavering and who this needs to be with and who needs to be for it. And really, because I'm just executing the wishes of my elders, right, like, they're the ones that want me to bring this back. And so I don't really care about the what the copyright is talking about, No, that doesn't matter. I'm gonna do what I gotta do to get these back. I love that, you know, you just went around and bottle because this is like, and it's so sad that we have to do these things. But it does. It does really show the absurdity of these copyright and these, like, these institutions, which seem to throw claim over things which are not their own, and which were never their own, and which were often stolen under duress, right? So yeah, I don't know, I think I think about what the solution is, and, you know, take it all back, and they would, and why they don't want to give it back is that Oh, you don't have the proper rooms, you don't have the, you don't have the infrastructure that it takes to house it and care for it in the ways that we do. And so we're just going to continue to care for it if that's okay with you. And it's like, well, no, actually, because at the end of the day, and there's this really wonderful case that was out of, I think it was the West Coast here, like in BC, where they repatriated a

bunch of their stuff, but rather than putting it like up on a shelf, and doing the same kind of thing with it actually burned everything. Oh, which is like to free it, I imagine. Yeah. Right. You know, because because when we like in our way of thinking, it's like, those are like they're not objects, like their life itself, you know, and they're, they're like, the skins that like that are used are like the beads that are used, all of that has memory in it all, like it was just imprisoned for the last, you know, 120 years. And so they had their artists make replicas of everything, but those specific ones they wanted to, they wanted to set them free in that way. So you know, but I think we need to understand that as long as we're equipping our young artists with the tools and the trades that they need to, to keep our ways going, then we don't need to hang on to the vision of the past that isn't even reflective of who we are as indigenous people or, or any cultural peoples you know, it's like, we culture is living and it's, it's it is today, right? And so, as long as we can keep in mind where we come from and know that and let it inform what we do to create today. We don't need to keep these things hostage in a museum like what is that impulse that wants to like, hang on, you know, and you look at this

54:43

kind of why this museum project maybe started specifically around indigenous people was in the early 19 hundred's they were basically slaughter you know, they were just we were dying from disease. They were like, Well, you know, and it looks like many people are gonna die out in the next century are a next generation. So it's, it's our benevolent, you know, goal to make sure that we protect their culture and preserve it right? not acknowledging that, you know, you know, maybe this like, slow genocide that they were trying to propagate against indigenous peoples in North America wasn't going to work that we were going to be here before Canada and after. So I think Yeah, what I cut out more and more understand why they would burn it, you know, because it is a symbol of we are objects and we are owned and we are possessed by a settler colonial state rather than we are sovereign. And we are continual, you know what I'm saying, it's like, we're still here, our songs are still Sung, our languages are still spoken. And now's the time when we need to really turn to ourselves and get strong, because we just experienced this really long path of, of trauma and healing. And now we got to really get right. So that's why I think our languages are so important to bring forward in our songs to because they tell us who we are.

Victoria Pham 56:17

I always have nothing to say, and it was so beautiful. It goes back to what you said before about a culture of being living. And I think museum traditions and the need to kind of like collect things and preserve them is because very much I was trained as an archaeologist. And when I was working in archaeology, we're often told that objects have a single function, because maybe in Western culture or a long period of time, Western culture they do, it's just, you know, a spoon or a kitchen. And they'd like to impose that notion of an object having a single function on to every other culture that we study. And it doesn't operate like that anywhere else. So when you go to a museum, everything has one label one function, it comes from one culture, and then there's this wonderful thing they like to do, and they presume that culture is static. And that's just not reality. So you're definitely challenging that through through action with their music.

57:06

And it sounds like you are too I'm so glad to hear it as we all got to because we have to insist on our humanity and insist on our contemporary ality right, because I think all the time, they're, like, we're trying to we're being denied that. Or we're saying, well, all you're being an identity arian, or like, you'd need to just like, you know, stick to the stick to the classics, you know, but it's like, No, no, no, we got something

special here. And we need to insist on it, you know, because it is going to change the landscape of Western art, music and Western society, you know, and I think we're listening to each other in a new way that we've never before. You know, and I'm really encouraged by this moment, because I think so many different voices, you know, whether it's in the cultural space, but even in you know, gender and sexuality space, in, in, in in socio economic space, I think there's so many different ways in which we have access to narratives that are not our own. And I think that's going to create a society of super empathetic people. Because we're also going to have to fight those not super empathetic people and show them that it's really nice over here, it's nice to be this way. And we got to insist on that, too. So

Victoria Pham 58:21

and welcome them, it's not scary on this side.

58:24

We're not trying to fight that I shouldn't even frame that as a battle, you know, we just, we want to offer them the lens that we see, and I think maybe that's what music does, too, right? Like it really, it provides somebody a window into a world that is vastly different from their own, but also can look really beautiful, and can be an invitation, you know, and so I hope, you know, even though I created this record, and my first project around, really trying to speak to my people, and hopefully, you know, creating a fire so that they may bask in the warmth of that glow. But also understanding that lots of other people gathered around that fire too, and they want to hear people from outside of our community, people that don't speak well listen to were people that people that want a new way of relating to each other. And I think as indigenous people, we have something to offer in that way that has not been listened to, or has not been a valid way up until recently. And so I'm you know, but up until you know, people started to insist on it people like you know, not sure if your listeners will be familiar with people like Buffy Sainte Marie, who is like an amazing indigenous singer songwriter from over this way who really for a long time was the only one of us in the room and and you know, she took up a lot of important space and really talked about our ways to the wider public. And then you know, more recent examples, like DJ group, A Tribe Called red here in Canada, really, really pushed the conversation and insistent on our temporality and on our contemporary pneus not a word. But yeah, so I guess I'm just I'm just walking the pathway that's kind of been cleared for me and hopefully in my tailwind, I can, I can create a little more space for people that, you know, see what I see and want to want to create positive change for, for our people and for all people.

Victoria Pham 1:00:34

Do you think us reframing what it means to listen to one another? will help?

1:00:40

Totally. Yeah. And I go all the time to Pauline Oliveros, you know, talking about deep listening and what that actually requires of us. Because I think empathy is actually a really big part of that, you know, and the fact that when I truly listen to you, or to anyone, you know them in a new way, because it's not just about what you're hearing in an auditory way, but you're sensing so much from that person as well. So yeah, we got to listen to each other. It's the only way you're right, and we got to reframe about. I just, I guess we got it, we got to know that, that that everyone's got a song, you know, and everyone's bringing a really beautiful song. And it might not sound like our song. And it might be totally something we never heard before, and maybe something we never want to hear again. But it doesn't change the fact that they sing that song so beautifully in the way that they were taught to sing that song. And I mean, that across the board, everybody, you know, whether we think we're a singer or not, we're still singing a song. So

yeah, I guess just we got to know that and know that, you know, our elders, they teach that like, we're all we're all kid. We're all brothers and sisters. You know, no matter where we come from, or even what we carry in our heart, we're still brothers and sisters. And as a family, we need to really think about coming together in this moment, right? Because, you know, we look at the ways our environment is shaking us and trying to tell us something, you know, the world's going to be fine. I'm not worried for the world. I'm worried for us. And so I think we got to come together. And we got to understand broader ways, right? Because I think the logics and the, the the worldviews that God is into this place are not going to be the logics that get us out of it, you know, so we need to be listening to other kinds of voices so that we can get a better way. Anyway, I'm going on and on and on my god ossifies. We're just talking about music.

Victoria Pham 1:02:58

Well, I think we should listen to the earth more. Now that you have mentioned the Well, actually, I only have one more question, because you actually answered it without any prompting? Well, my last question is actually quite a broad one. Broad ish, I suppose. And mildly self serving, which is, do you have any advice for any up and coming young musicians classical, not classical about how to navigate this space, especially if they're interested in becoming activists and reclaiming their culture in this space?

1:03:31

Yeah, no, that's, that's wonderful. And I'm, I'm a little allergic to advice, I'll be honest with you, just because I think we're all just so we're so individual, in our experience. And all of our contexts are so nuanced, that, you know, what led to my ability to do music for a full time job or to, to, to speak something into a musical space that is different than what's come before, I think we all have that possibility. And we all have something that we care about as much as the subway language, or, you know, as ancestor songs, you know, that might not be everybody's site, you know, it might not be about you know, thinking about your ancestors, it might not be about thinking about your language, but I think we've all got based on our, our true passion and our gift, there's always a, an angle in which we can make that the best that it can be. And I think whatever you do, it has to be the best. And I don't mean that in like a way to pressure anybody because I think because even what we call the best has to be our own metric. Right? So for example, when when I say the best we're in a conversation about classical music that might you No need to thinking I'm talking about which last city, you know, or the speed at which you can play your piece or the beauty in which you can pull out those notes. That's not really it. You know, for me, I think a metric is your own, to set and to and to honour and or to not write. And so I guess my piece of advice if I'm, if I'm forced to give one is that know your metrics, know what, know what success is going to be for you? And and know that it's okay, if it's not what it looks like for other people. You know, another interview asked me the other day, you know, what's your biggest accomplishments in this? You know? Are you doing these things? And what's your What do you, what do you think of your biggest accomplishments? And I said, Well, I have to actually, I think they had, they had done their research, and they kind of expected me to say one thing, you know, these awards that I won, or whatever, you know, but but for me, or who I worked with, but it's like, for me, there's two moments there's, I was sent a video, maybe a couple months after my album came out. And there was a group of young girls in the community here, that had gotten together and choreographed a dance in their traditional regalia to one of my songs, and to understand that that, like real act of repatriation of really like bringing it back, so that our young people can actually engage it was happening, there was no better, there's no better reward for me. So that, you know, that and that was my metric was to say, like, I want this to live among my people, I want to you know, it's great if it, you know, gets on the radio, or like, has a little bit of success, I want an award, whatever, that's fine. But I wanted to live with people here, you know, and when that kind of came clear that okay, he was doing that. That was

a, that was a really nice moment of like, yeah, cool. I did it. And then the other one was like, my elder, who kind of encouraged me to go to the museum and Maggie who I was talking about earlier, she, you know, really was a huge mentor, and encouraged me a lot to go on this journey. And I saw that she put on Facebook. So after I sent her the album, I listened to her for the first time, and she said, she was just going off, you know, I can't believe it, this is one of the best things I ever heard, I can't believe what he's doing. Anyway, I saved it in my computer, because that kind of, you know, to lift to go from that idea that germination. Oh, here's my other piece of advice, too. So this is making me think of something, which is to say that we got to move on your own timeline, too. I think we get really tripped up because especially the schools that that we get taught music through are really oriented on a particular kind of path. Which is to say that, you know, your four year thing, and then you do your two year thing, and then you're auditioning, and then you do all that. And it's like,

1:08:29

if you want to create something in this world, and you have a vision for it, we gotta step out of that lane a little bit, and, and insist on your own timeframe. Because good work takes time. And it doesn't happen in a granting cycle or on a season basis, or, you know, it takes real, like deep planning, you know, this record that I did, it took me five years from the research, development, the composition, recording the package, everything, you know, it's like, is a real, large process, you know, and, and got to talk about process, you know, because I think often, you know, like, classical musicians kind of, like try to play this illusion of like the duck on the water, which is to say that there's, there's a lot happening down here, below the surface, but we just try to glide along and make it look effortless. But I think that actually does us a disservice. Right? Because, because it is effort, you know, and we got to acknowledge that and we got to honour the work that it takes to to make music in these ways. And so take the time it takes and honour the process. Anyway, are you I was like, I hate giving advice. Here's 10 pieces of advice. Right? Yeah,

Victoria Pham 1:09:50

that's no it's so true. Because I remember going I also did like the ultimate classical music training and I trained as a composer I went to the Conservatory, but they do make it look like this. Seeing this process and it's the only way that you can be you know credible in this line of work is if you follow the path that was drawn out 200 years ago and you know it's it's it doesn't work like that the classical music loves to frame it as like solo geniuses and that's the pathway you follow when it's not like that it's collaborative and there's a community and I have failed so many hundreds of times and we don't really talk about failure in this line of work

1:10:25

no but true too right? Yeah the whole like toxic success oh my gosh, yeah, it's like no, I'm I welcome a blunder. I welcome I welcome a weird tweet, I welcome a bad acceptance speech I welcome a wrong No, I welcome all of it, it's like, because it has to be part of it. And it's always like, well, I'm now that I'm not touring so much, I finally been able to like start growing plants. And so I'm a bit of a plant parent. And, you know, my friend kind of gave me a couple of his plants to look after, but kind of give to me, you know, and I went away and I did a gig for a couple weeks, and I came back and I killed it. And I called a call my friend and I said, Oh, you know, I'm so sorry. Like, I can't I'm kind of upset, you know, like I, I killed you play a game me. He says, cool, go and get a bottle of wine, go celebrate. You know, you did a good thing, you're just you're a little more on your way to becoming a proper plant parent. Because only through not being able to keep them alive. Will you know how to listen to them. And to really understand how to, to, you know, care in that way is through trial and error and getting it wrong until you get it right.

So that was a that's kind of what the pandemic was teaching me what plants were teaching me and kind of some lessons that came forward in this time was to say that like, yeah, getting it right is just is is nearly but a point on the spectrum of getting it wrong all the time. And we ought to be humbled by these instances, but not shaky. Because the continuance and the insistence on on our vision is what's going to create a beautiful final product. And then those mistakes which actually, you know, get kind of woven into our work in a beautiful way. And we get to contextualise them and we get to tell the story of them and heal the sickness that might be inside of them. Yeah, I we got to welcome these things, but it's hard. Oh, my goodness is hard. Yes. Well, I wish you many failures and many successes

Victoria Pham 1:13:03

to you. through listening what thank you so much for agreeing to this I so appreciated, taking the time out. And it's always feels weird for me, having seen you on stage so many times and listen to listening to music for so many years to speak to you in person,

1:13:23

we finally get to do it. And I hope it's not the last time I ever make it to Cambridge or we end up in Sydney together at the same time or who knows, you may get over here to Turtle Island.

Victoria Pham 1:13:36

Exactly, that would be wonderful. I will let you know if

1:13:40

you do let me know if you make it this way because I love to show you around this beautiful land. It really is. It's so special and it's worth singing for it is worth living for. And I guess you know, I think there's something really important happening right now. Culturally globally, and it's cool to be a part of it. And I think we can really run from the scariness of it and the unsure any of it or we can run right into it. You know, and and it's only the people that are creating right now that are running into it, you know, whether or not it's music or podcasts or it's the creatives that I think are either naive enough or are smart enough to run into this time of crisis and look at it through a magnifying glass. So thank you for doing the work you're doing and trying to problematize these spaces that have a lot of a lot of history and kind of a lot of darkness but but I think the more we shine light on these institutions and and think and celebrate the successes and celebrate times in which we've you know, done something really beautiful And change that space. I think we got to celebrate it and I think the work you're doing is that I hope the work I'm doing is that complication and and I hope we'll meet in the middle maybe in person someday Could you imagine?

Victoria Pham 1:15:13

Yes, I know it being critical. Well, I must thank you for the work you're doing because you were the first person who brought me into this space, just listening to music and listening to you talk. So it means an awful lot. Really test? Can you reminded me that through listening, we can find empathy. Thank you so much, Jeremy. I really appreciate it.

Jeremy Dutcher

Have a lovely day. Bye.

Victoria Pham: Once again, Jeremy thank you for speaking with me, for letting me listen to your story, your practice and your hope. I hope to speak with you and to see you perform one day soon, as I am sure everyone listening will be. If anyone wants to check out more of Jeremy's work and read up or access anything we've spoken about through the episode, everything will be available to you in the links below and in this episode's transcript. Thank you to Jeremy, again, and catch you all soon.

RESOURCES

Jeremy Dutcher: <https://jeremydutcher.com/about/>

Listen and Purchase to Jeremy's album 'Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonama' :
<https://jeremydutcher1.bandcamp.com/album/wolastoqiyik-lintuwakonawa>

Keeping Language Alive: <https://thewalrus.ca/how-jeremy-dutcher-keeps-his-ancestors-language-alive/>

An Interview with Jeremy Dutcher: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/mar/26/jeremy-dutcher-interview-canada-first-nation-indigenous-arias>

Pauline Oliveros 'Sonic Meditations' Downloadable here:
https://monoskop.org/images/0/09/Oliveros_Pauline_Sonic_Meditations_1974.pdf

Oliveros 'Listening as Activism': <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/listening-as-activism-the-sonic-meditations-of-pauline-oliveros>

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