

**Colloquium March 21, 2025**  
**Robin Attas (Independent Scholar)**

**Title:** “What is Music Theory?”

**Abstract:**

What is music theory? It might seem like a simple question, but depending on the response, the answer can open up possibilities for new and exciting approaches that bring new ideas and individuals into the field, or limit the field to a specific set of practices and repertoire in a way that is often colonial, racist, sexist, ableist, and just plain boring. In this talk, Dr. Robin Attas shares examples from music theorists inside and outside of academia to develop a more expansive and inclusive understanding of music theory and analysis. Having established possibilities, she then describes strategies for teaching this expansive definition to future generations of music theorists. Expect to think, laugh, and dance your way to finding your own broader understandings of what music theory is and could be.

**Bio: Robin Attas (she, her)** is a white settler academic currently living and working in Treaty 1 territory as an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Specialist in the Division of Extended Education at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. Robin’s primary role is to oversee and teach a four-course Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility program for staff, students and faculty at the U of M. However, she has not forgotten her longstanding affinity for music theory! This includes over ten years of teaching at Elon University, Mount Allison University, Queen’s University, and the University of British Columbia; and an extensive research agenda focused on popular music, pedagogy, social justice, and decolonization and Indigenization, with publications in journals including Music Theory Online, Music Theory Spectrum, the Canadian Journal of Higher Education, the Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy, Intersections, and MUSICultures. These days, Robin’s music theory activities mostly involve practical concerns like undermining Spotify’s algorithms, trying to effectively accompany traditional fiddle tunes, and making fundamentals relevant to her two children.

**Workshop March 21, 2025**

**Title:** “Possibilities for Decolonization and Indigenization of Music Theory”

**Description:**

In this workshop, we will talk about possible actions that relate to the goal of decolonizing and Indigenizing music theory. We’ll discuss both what decolonizing and Indigenizing can mean, and how to enact it.

NB: It may be helpful to read Robin’s 2019 Music Theory Online article “The Many Paths of Decolonization: Exploring Colonizing and Decolonizing Analyses of a Tribe Called Red’s ‘How I Feel’” before the workshop, but this is not a requirement. All levels of prior knowledge and experience are welcome!