

Colloquium October 3, 2025
Eric Drott (Butler School of Music – University of Texas at Austin)

Title: "Music and the Aesthetics of the Asset Form"

Abstract:

This paper examines the recent growth of music as an asset class and its implications for both music culture and music theory. After enumerating some of the distinctive features of the asset as a specific economic form, I turn to arguments advanced by scholars and cultural critics concerning assetization's effects on music, in particular the way it incentivizes the reuse of old properties over the production of new works. While concerns like these are not entirely misplaced, I argue that investors' need to maintain—or, better still, inflate—the value of the music assets they hold means that the latter are continually subject to strategies of remixing, repurposing, and recontextualization. To illustrate these dynamics I analyze the use of Blondie's 1979 hit "Dreaming" in the trailer for the 2024 film *Anora*. Of particular note is the way the song is reformatted to fit a number of distinct generic frames, bolstering its potential use, exchange, and/or asset values in the process. Then, in the conclusion, I consider some ways we might go about putting musical form in closer dialogue with matters of economic form, and some reasons why it might be worthwhile to do so.

Bio: Eric Drott is Virginia L. Murchison Regents Professor in Fine Arts at the University of Texas at Austin. His research spans a number of subjects: contemporary music cultures, streaming music platforms, music and protest, genre theory, digital music, and the political economy of music. He is the author of two books: *Music and the Elusive Revolution*, which examines music and politics in France after May '68, in particular how different music communities (jazz, rock, contemporary music) responded to the revolutionary ferment of the period; and *Streaming Music, Streaming Capital*, which examines the political economy of streaming music platforms. He is also co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Protest Music* with Noriko Manabe, which is now available online and will be coming out in print soon. In 2020, he received the Dent Medal from the Royal Musical Association.