Episode 159: Reeves Shulstad

# KL: Katie Linder

**RS:** Reeves Shulstad

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# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast about topics and issues related to research in higher education featuring experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, research director at Oregon State University Ecampus, a national leader in online education. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Visit our website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

**KL:** On this episode, I'm joined by Dr. Reeves Shulstad, an associate professor in the Hayes School of Music at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. She's a musicologist and is currently working on a book about micro-tonalist composer and early music performer Tui St. George Tucker. She teaches music history and special topics courses at ASU and has published on pedagogy.

Reeves, thanks so much for joining me on the podcast today.

**RS:** Thanks for having me Katie. I'm glad to be here.

**KL:** So I'm really interested in hearing a little bit more about your research with music. Can you give us some idea of the general areas that you focus on in your research?

**RS:** Sure. Currently I’m focused on telling stories of women musicians who've been left out of music history narratives or have been marginalized, and I'm currently writing the first cohesive biography of a micro-tonalist composer named Tui St. George Tucker, um and her time was - her dates are 1924 to 2004. And she is a woman whose name often appears as the side or as a footnote which often leaves the reader wondering about her. And one example of that is in a 1980s New York Times article I found, the music critic claims that Tucker was one of the most established micro-tonalist composers in New York, and then I started asking myself, you know, if she's so established then why has there – why has there been nothing published on her? So - and it becomes more challenging to find information out about her and her work. And working on Tui’s story has also led me to understand more about other women in her spear, like another composer named Suzanne Bloch. Suzanne Bloch was the daughter of a very famous composer Ernest Bloch, and her contributions to the early music seen before - before and after World War II have been overlooked because she's often only thought of in connection to her father. So I'm really interested in finding, you know, these - these really rich musical stories that often are just, you know, have just been put off to the side.

**KL:** Reeve’s, I’m wondering first of all if you can explain what do you mean by a micro-tonalist, because this is a word that I've never heard before.

**RS:** Cool. Yes. Well microtonal - microtonal music is a style of music where composers are interested in experimenting with pitches that are not usually in a diatonic or chromatic scale. And what I mean by diatonic and chromatic diatonic, you know, it's like the normal Do-Re-Mi-Fa-So-La-Ti-Do, right? That sort of normal scale. A micro-tonalist likes to work with the pitches that are in between those pitches, so they like to sort of move up instead of a half step, a quarter of a step, and sometimes microtonal music is called quarter tone music because it deals with pitches that are quarter tone apart. So sometimes that can sound a bit off-putting to people that aren't used to it. But what. What it does for a composer is open up a whole plethora of other sounds that they can incorporate into their musical composition.

**KL:** Okay, that's really fascinating. So I know that you are doing this research on a historical figure, and we're going to dive into that a little bit more in the next segment, but I also know you work on critical editions of a musician's work and I'm curious what it means to do that exactly. What does it mean to create a critical edition of a particular musicians work?

**RS:** Sure. To - to do that you need to have access to the original manuscripts of the composer's work. And so in Tui’s instance, we have - the Appalachian State has all of her handwritten music in our archives, and that can make it really challenging sometimes for performers to - to read the notation. So - so what an editor will do will take that music and study all of that music, and put it into some music self-righting notation, like sibelius or finale, and put it in a form that's easier for performers to read. But also, like in some places where the handwriting might be challenging to decipher or there's some things that might be like someone made a mistake, you know, in writing out the music or something like that, the editor will make a decision, you know, “Based on what I understand about this performers work, this is how I think this music should go.” So you make all of those decisions and you can include like footnotes kind of, you know, at the end that explain why you made those decisions, and then usually a critical edition will also include some kind of introductory essay at the beginning as well to describe the composer's background and style.

**KL:** Okay, so it sounds like your work, Reeves, is pretty interdisciplinary. Like you're focusing on the music pieces for sure, but also history and other elements. Can you talk a little bit about the interdisciplinarity of your work and what else you're drawing on?

**RS:** I want to say that from my personal perspective, the interdisciplinarity of musicology was one of the reasons that I was interested in the first place. I realized that there was a way I could combine my interest in literature, and in music, and in art, and in philosophy and - and said it was a discipline and music would be the lens to do that. So it was one of the hooks that got me involved in this discipline in the first place. So to give an example of the interdisciplinarity of this, in order to piece together her biography, which I've had to go to a variety of different places - when I'm looking at her career in New York City after World War II, I don't just look at the music scene I'm also looking at the literary scene, the visual art scene, and political scene because those were the places where she was involved and those were the where she found circles of people that influenced her ideas and also her music. So - an even more specific example of that, is one of her pieces was included as an insert in a magazine called Wynn magazine, which was connected to the committee on nonviolent action during the 1960s. And the editor of that magazine was Jackson Mac Low, who was a prominent writer for the fluxus movement, and he was a very close friend and student of Tui’s. So in order to better understand how - what her political ideologies were and how that piece that's included sort of functions in that protest ideology I'm, you know, looking at the history of that magazine, her relationship to Jackson Mac Low, and how the fluxus attitude influenced her and the rest of her career.

**KL:** So Reeves, I'm curious about when you're looking at someone's life like this, there are so many details and so many potential sources that you could be looking at. I would imagine it can be incredibly overwhelming. How do you even go about, you know, researching music in this way? What are some of the steps that you take to get started and to kind of delve through the level of detail to the kernels that you think are going to be really important to share?

**RS:** Yeah, that's a really good question, and for me, it's the way I do research and it's also the way that I teach as I always start with the music first. So it was really important for me to, you know - in looking at all of her music, to understand - to try to put her music in sort of a timeline, know where she was when she was composing it, and who she might be composing it for, and getting to know something about those people, and what situations that music might have been performed in. Whether it was the concert hall or a specific festival or something like that**.** Then my research sort of branches out from there, and what - that's kind of the cool thing about it, because it leads me in a variety of different directions. So, you know, there are some pieces in New York City that are very connected to the New York scene, but she was also in North Carolina and there are some really - I'm in Boone, North Carolina - there's some really local connections that are here that lead me to my - to my colleagues and people that live, you know, close to where I work. So - but it really always starts with the music. So that's - that's sort of the grounding point and and where branches off.

**KL:** So of the amount of things that you're currently looking at to prepare for this book project, what percentage do you think are actually ending up in the book? I'm just curious.

**RS:** That I – that's such a good question. You know, I would say probably about fifty percent, you know, because there are some trips I've made to archives where it's been fascinating reading, but not necessarily, you know - not necessarily useful. And there's also - there have also been some interviews that I've done with people where I have found some interesting tidbits and they have some - some interesting perspectives about her, but aren't necessarily going to be useful in the kind of book that I'm trying to write. So the cool thing about that is that I've gotten to go to some really interesting archives and talked to some really interesting people. And then the downside is that it that is that I have all of this very cool information that I can't quite use yet, but I want to, you know, hold on to it for maybe something later.

**KL:** Mhm. Mhm. Well, I want to delve deeper into this idea of researching a historical figure. So we're going to take a brief break and when we come back, we'll hear more from Reeves about her current book project. Back in a moment.

The “Research in Action” podcast is just one of many projects we work on here at the Oregon State University Ecampus Research Unit. A project I'm particularly excited about is our OSU Ecampus Research Fellows Program, which funds research for Oregon State faculty that is actionable, impacts student learning online, and encourages the development of a robust research pipeline on online teaching and learning at OSU. Learn more about the fellows program and download a series of white papers on methods and designs for distance education developed by our OSU fellows at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/research/fellows.

# Segment 2:

**KL:** Reeves, in segment one we talked a little bit about your most recent book project on the historical figure, Tui St. George Tucker, but I'd love to hear a little bit more about how you chose the subject of this most recent book for you. What really drew you to wanting to research this particular historical figure?

**RS:** that is such an interesting question. When I first started at Appalachian State in 2009, about the second year that I was here my music librarian, Gary Boye, came to me and said “Well, you know, this composer has just recently passed away, and all of her music was at this cabin that she had in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, and we now have all of it in our in our special collections and nobody's done anything with it.” And I was like, “Hm. well, that's really interesting.” And then I started to hear more about what this composer's life was like and the kinds of things that she was involved in, and I just became hooked. The cabin that she lived in was on an old summer camp called Camp Catawba, and she and her partner Vera Lachmann ran that camp for boys from 1946 until 1970. And when they were running it, it was a very unique kind of summer camp, you know. It was intended for boys that were in the city to come and go horseback riding, and hiking, and all that stuff, but they also performed music by Mozart, and Beethoven, and did Medieval music, and Baroque music, music by Bach and - that that Tui sort of orchestrated for them. And Vera, who was a Classics teacher at Brooklyn College, had them doing plays by Shakespeare, and Moliere, and Christopher Marlowe, and at the end of the summer, they would do performances of these and they - and - of these works. And so it was like a fascinating interweaving of this really high art stuff with, you know, capture the flag and roasting marshmallows, and every night around the campfire Vera would tell stories – would - would retell the stories of Odysseus. And that was how they went through the summertime, was going through the Odyssey sort of story by story - and it was just a fascinating thing to be tucked up here in the - out in the woods, in the mountains. So I just needed to know more about that, and so I started looking at her music and finding out about our life and in New York - um that she sort of split her time between New York and North Carolina, and - and then realized, as I said before, that her story had just not been told with - with any sort of depth. The stories that were out there were kind of one-dimensional and - and not very useful, so I wanted to - I wanted to really tell her story.

**KL:** So you mentioned, Reeves that you have these archives that you can draw from. What are the -what are the kinds of data that are in the archives that you can be looking at as you're writing about this person, and are there other sources of data that you're also pulling from so that you can tell that more complete picture?

**RS:** Yes, yes, most definitely. So Appalachian State's archives have Tui’s music as I mentioned, and also some letters and - that she wrote, she didn't write a lot, so that makes it kind of - makes it an interesting puzzle to put together, but - but also programs from performances, and recordings, but we also have in our archives, the archives of Camp Catawba. And her partner – partner, Vera wrote everything down, and wrote letters. She wrote letters to parents every week that talked about the music that they did at the camp, and when Tui was traveling and was away from Vera, Vera wrote letters to her almost every day, which - they are just beautiful records of, you know, not only what was going on, but how deep the relationship was between Veera and Tui. So that's another piece of the archival research that I've done. The other archives that I have investigated are the recorder music archives at Regis University in Denver, Colorado. Tui, when she moved to New York, got involved in the early music scene playing recorder, and she was part of the resurgence of that after World War 2, because it kind of went on Hiatus during the war. So one of her teachers when she got to New York was a man named Eric Cats, and she was one of his students, and also did a lot of gigs with him, so all of his materials are there and he was another wonderful record keeper. So I found out a great deal about her life that not a lot of people knew, by going to those recorder music archives. I also went back to the town where she grew up which is Eagle Rock, California, which is a suburb of Los Angeles. And through the Occidental University archive and the Eagle Rock Historical Society, I found out a lot about her High School career and have some really great pictures of her with instruments, so that was really a fun and useful trip to make. I view Census records to help figure out when our parents came to the United States. Her parents came from New Zealand and from England, so that's - that has been some useful records that I've used. And also have gone to UNC Chapel Hill archives for finding more information out about Vera, because Vera taught in North Carolina and had some connections to faculty at Chapel Hill, which helped her find the land for the camp. So those are just a few that I've used.

**KL:** Okay, so that sounds like a ton of work, Reeves. I'm wondering if you need any kind of permissions to publish on a historical figure like this. Once you've collected this information, do you have to ask, you know, family members or others for permission? How does that work?

**RS:** She doesn't - she didn't really have any family. So she and Vera - they never had children. She has one nephew that is still alive, and when I first started this, I got in contact with him - just letting him know that I was doing this. And he along with another camper named Robert [*indiscernible*], who had - has been so generous and giving me materials. They're just so excited to have her story told that, you know, it's - I didn't really need permission. I just let them know that I was doing it.

**KL:** So what are some of the challenges that you've encountered with this kind of research as you're collecting this data and trying to write up this more complete picture of this historical figure?

**RS:** Well, I think my response to the archival discussion kind of reveals that, because I have had to go to a variety of different places to get just these little bits of information to help create the larger picture of Tui’s life, which has been fun and frustrating. And - and just to give you an example of that, in one of the histories of the camp there was a mention of this young woman named Erica Weigand, it was just sort of a flat story that was about a paragraph long, but she was a friend of Vera's, and she was a very intelligent woman, and she came to the camp sometime. But as I did more archival research, what I realized was that this young woman, Erica helped Vera come to the United States - helped her get out of Germany. Vera was a German Jewish woman. Got her a position at Vassar College – Vassar University, to - to help her get out of Germany, and when to we moved to New York, it was Erica that she met, and Erica sort of fell in love with Tui, and that relationship sort of really rocked Erica's world enough so that it sort of sent her, you know, into a tailspin and she ended up killing herself. And it's a really tragic sort of story, but it's that suicide that actually brought Tui and Vera together, and that their sort of grieving over Erica’s death brought them together not only sort of emotionally, but also creatively. And so two of the first pieces that Tui had published and performed in New York were songs that were settings of Vera’s poetry that were responses to Erica’s suicide, and it's just a really - it's a really heart-wrenching story that has not been written down in any other place, right? But I put together by looking at these Chapel Hill archives, and this recorder music archives, and the Camp Catawba archives, and some other publications connected to Vera, but I was able to put all of this together. And it took quite a while for me to realize what was actually, you know, what was actually going on, so it was so rewarding when I finally put it all together, but it did take a while.

**KL:** That is incredible. What a - what an amazing example from the work and what you found. We're going to take another brief break, when we come back we'll hear a little bit more from how Reeves is implementing some of this research into her classroom as well. Back in a moment.

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# Segment 3:

**KL:** Reeves, I'm wondering if you can share a little bit about how working on this book has impacted your classroom practices in your teaching.

**RS:** That is that is such an important question, and it's so connected to why I think this work Tui is important. One of the things that I really like about working on a subject that - where the archive is on my campus is that I get to share that archival research with students. So we have great undergraduate students here at Appalachians that I teach, and students that are interested will apply to be an undergraduate research assistant with me. And so they get to go to the archive with me, and I show them how it works, and give them sort of small projects they can do to help me. And some other students have also - some more advanced students and composition students, have worked with putting the music, Tui’s music, into the music software notation and doing some of the editing. So that has been a great experience for them and very helpful for me as well in terms of, you know, moving the work forward. I also get to talk to students about the research that I'm doing, and telling them where I am in the process. I teach a music history class that requires a research paper from students, and as you can imagine, undergraduates often moan and groan about that, but when I show them - them that I'm in there with them doing the work and - I think that they appreciate that my discussion about my own frustrations with things, you know, when I can say, you know, “I had this great source, but I can't find that citation and I spent three hours last night trying to find the citation.” You know, it kind of - it kind of makes them see something that everyone deals with, and that's why it's good to have good software for your notes. So I find that to be a useful thing as well. I also - I teach a class in music and gender at Appalachian, and I organize woman's music concerts in March for Women's History Month every year, and this - this year, we're going to feature the music of Tui. And so not only did the students know that I do research on this person, but they're also able to hear my colleagues, my performing colleagues, play her music and see how this sort of comes out and, you know, becomes a musical performance. And in my gender class I talk about marginalization, you know, not just of women, but of, you know, all kinds of marginalized musicians, and so it plays into my discussion in the classroom as well. So I'm really able to - to teach about my own practice and students are able to observe that, and I think it makes it a bit more powerful for them, and I think there are a few more ‘Aha’ moments about that when they see me doing this work, when they hear the performances of it, when they hear about my struggles with it. I think it becomes another dimension to my teaching at Appalachian.

**KL:** So I'm curious, Reeves if it also gives you something for you to think about from kind of a meta perspective as you're going through the reflection, sharing this with your students, thinking about how you can take your research and basically turn it into learning objectives. You know, what are you also learning about the process from the perspective of both a researcher and a teacher?

**RS:** Mmm, that's a really good question. Um it’s - it's interesting to think about sort of the I would say the organizational piece in the way that I put my information together, and how I express that to students. I think it sort of forces my hand on that a little bit more than if I was just working, you know, not sharing my by process with students – that - that it helps me get my things in order. You know, it helps me think about my own process and improve my own process, I think, because often when I say things aloud, I'm like “Man, you know, that doesn't sound very… I could do better than that.” So, and - and then also there I'm showing the students, you know, that I'm making mistakes, and learning from my mistakes, and improving the way that I do things - that I'm always improving it. So, I think that's - I think that's where that's I find that to be useful.

**KL:** What are the things that you're also hoping that this book project when it's done, what are you hoping that it will teach people? If it was to be used in a classroom or if people are coming and reading this book for the first time, you know, what are you hoping they're going to walk away with based on what you've already learned about Tui St. George Tucker, or about the process of doing this kind of historical research?

**RS:** So I think the first thing that I want people to take away from this book is how pervasive Tui’s career was, and how many places that she had influence and how that influence is kind of a different kind of influence that's often - the influences often put up on a pedestal and that we often sort of focus on so much, uh because she was in a variety of different places and there were a variety of different people that had respect for what she was doing. I also think from a regional perspective, I think it's important for people to understand that, you know, even though this is Western North Carolina, there were other kinds of music that were, you know, very prominent and very celebrated happening, you know, in these mountains, like that were not bluegrass or country music. And I think that that sort of helps dispel some stereotypes associated with Appalachia, because these two women loved these mountains, and they brought all kinds of people, you know, to these mountains, and I think Camp Catawba can be thought of kind of, you know, it's not the Black Mountain College, but it's a similar kind of artistic experience. So I think it enhances an understanding of what - what kind of arts were and are still taking place in Western North Carolina. And I also think it tells an it really important unconventional women's composers story. So she - she really wasn't trying to fit in, she really wasn't trying to, you know, be any model of some other male composer’s career. She was very much interested in and creating her own path, and I think more of those stories need to be told, and the more that they're told I think the better able we will be to sort of break apart some patriarchal understandings of what it means to be a musician in the United States.

**KL:** So Reeves, I can't help but wonder as I'm hearing about, you know, the details of how you dug into the history of this woman's life and the context, if this has impacted at all your own documentation of your own life, you know? Like do you think about the kinds of things that you're creating like emails, or letters, or other kinds of ways that you're sharing about your own life details, has this impacted that at all? Because I would imagine when you go into these archives and you think about how much you can learn about a person from the kinds of, you know, the footprint that they leave behind, and now we have such a digital footprint. How is this impacting kind of your own perspective of your own life details and documentation?

**RS:** You know, that's - that's interesting too. I've always been someone that journals, and I have become more cognizant of dating the things that, you know – that I'm writing in my journals. Um not really - not really thinking so much about if someone else might read them, but in sort of thinking about my own ideas and things that I might want to do in the future and being able to go back and think about not only the idea, you know, what was happening in my life around that time. So that, you know, that's - that's one example. And you know, I - I've often thought to a lot about how I want to present myself, and my work, and my - you know, what I do in terms of research work and teaching in a way that's - that's specifically me. I think, you know, early on in my career like a lot of people do, you think about who your models are and how oh my gosh, it would just be so incredible if, you know, if my - if I had a website that looked like this, or if I had a curriculum vita that look like this. And now I'm much more interested in thinking about what it is that I really want to put out to the world, and if there's something that I don't want to do and I have really good reasons for not wanting to do that, then that's okay. So I think I think that might be one or several influences that doing this work as had on my own in thinking about my own career.

**KL:** I love that. Well Reeves, I want to thank you so much for taking the time to come on the show, share about this work with your new book, and - thank you so much for sharing about your experiences!

**RS:** Thank you for having me, Katie. I really enjoyed talking about it with you.

**KL:** Thanks also to our listeners for joining us for this week's episode of “Research in Action.” I'm Katie Linder, and we'll be back next week with a new episode.

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# Bonus Clip:

**KL:** In this bonus clip for episode 159 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Reeves Shulstad discusses how storytelling plays a role in her research. Take a listen.

Reeves, what are you learning about the process of storytelling in your own writing as you're trying to communicate what you're learning about to Tui St. George Tucker here?

**RS:** The thing that I'm really learning about - about telling these women's stories is that I really want to be as close as I possibly can to what their truth is. I feel a real responsibility for covering all of my bases and making sure that I am – am being true to what their own sort of creative paths were, because these are very creative women that are operating in ways that aren't always celebrated by popular culture. They were - they worked often - Tui often said that she was an underground composer, and - and I want to pay homage to that, and not try to make any part of her life or any part of her story seem like I'm trying to make it fit with something else, because she was very much an unconventional kind of person. She lived an unconventional life, and that's something that bleeds into her musical production. So trying to make sure that I find that balance of getting all the information in there, but at the same time letting the personality shine through is something that I have - I would say passion struggles with in front of the keyboard when I'm - when I'm writing these words down, because I want to make sure that that shines through.

**KL:** Well Reeves, I can't wait to read this book. Thanks for sharing about their process.

You've just heard a bonus clip from episode 159 of the “Research in Action” podcast with dr. Reeves Shulstad, discussing how storytelling plays a role in her research. Thanks for listening.