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# THE ECHO

**ASD**  
ASSOCIATION *of* SOUND DESIGNERS

## SHOWCASE: THE TWILIGHT ZONE



**PLUS** Legends of Sound: Martin Levan // Working in the USA // Mental Health Resources // Review: Sound Design for the Stage

# THE ECHO

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COVER  
Dyfan Dwyfor, Oliver Alvin-Wilson & Alisha Bailey  
in *The Twilight Zone* (© Matt Crockett)

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# The New Normal



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# Showcase: The Twilight Zone



ZOE MILTON

**Sound Designer and Composer:** Sarah Angliss  
**Sound Design:** Chris Shutt  
**Associate Designer:** Zoe Milton

**Almeida Theatre**  
**No.1 and Head of Sound:** George Lumkin  
**No.2:** Katherine Hodgson

**Ambassadors Theatre revival**  
**No.1:** Mat Williams  
**No.2:** Andy Evans

Daniel Crossley in *The Twilight Zone*  
(© Matt Crockett)

**I met up with Sarah Angliss and Chris Shutt, the sound designers for *The Twilight Zone* at the Almeida Theatre, and chatted with them about the process of designing such an iconic show.**

**Hi Sarah, tell me a little bit about yourself:**

**Sarah:** I'm a composer, specialising in bespoke electroacoustic techniques. I work with acoustic instruments, archaic electronics (including the Theremin) and field recordings. I also work extensively with software such as Max MSP and sometimes with robotics. I've been performing live on the experimental music circuit for many years and in the last few years have taken on a few theatre projects.

**What was your route into theatre sound design?**

**Sarah:** My first theatre project came around five years ago, accidentally. One evening, I was upstairs in a pub in London, playing the Theremin for a salon evening about space. By chance the playwright Lucy Prebble was in the audience and was looking for a composer for her new play *The Effect* which was opening at the Cottesloe [Ed: now known as the Dorfman,

at the National Theatre]. It's a play about a love affair that unfolds during a clinical drugs trial. In her mind, something about my music felt right for her play. A few days later I had a call inviting me to meet Rupert Goold who was directing. I got the gig and found myself working alongside Chris Shutt. He'd been assigned the job of sound designer, I was composer – but we soon discovered the most interesting thing about the play was our scope to collaborate and create a sound-world where you didn't know where the music ended and the sound effects began.

**How did you come to be designing *The Twilight Zone*?**

**Sarah:** After *The Effect*, I went back to live performance but a couple of years later, found myself at The Old Vic, London, working with Richard Jones. I'd been asked to compose a musique concrète score for Eugene O'Neill's expressionist play *The Hairy Ape*. That was the first time I'd been designated a sound designer – although I was there to create the entire sound-world, including all the music (and would still think of myself primarily as a composer). Early on, Richard and I were on a bus

ride together, sharing stories and I told him about a superb exhibition I'd seen in the Jewish Museum in New York. It was *Revolution of the Eye*, an exhibition exploring the influence of European Dadaism and expressionism on the aesthetic of CBS television shows. This prompted him to tell me he had his own *Twilight Zone* project in the works. I signed up as composer and sound designer as soon as the project was up and running. It was a huge undertaking, encompassing sound design, reworking of the original series' underscore and original composition, including a couple of Broadway-style show tunes.

### **Chris, how did you get involved?**

**Chris:** I bumped into Sarah and Richard in a rehearsal room, and as soon as they told me what they were workshoping the excitement must have shown on my face. When Sarah asked me if I wanted to be involved, I jumped at the chance. The combination of Sarah, director Richard Jones and that crazy 50s TV series with the aliens with massive heads and the smoking narrator was too tantalising. Sarah and I had previously collaborated closely on *The Effect* to great ...erm... effect so I knew we'd get on fine. Her process is endlessly fascinating because it's so original and meticulous, and I always learn a lot from working with her that finds its way into other projects.

### **Sarah, how did your relationship with Richard help when it came to embark on this project?**

**Sarah:** It's always a negotiation of aesthetics, logistics and so on, when working with a director. Richard and I have similar musical interests which helps. When we work together we can both get quite obsessive about sound and music. I'd find it harder to work with a director who didn't get music.

Richard and I had to navigate the aesthetic choices of the original incidental music composers. They were a cut above other American TV music at the time, the music was plush and orchestral. It was scored by some of the finest film composers of the era, among them Bernard Herrmann who famously composed the music for Hitchcock's *Psycho* and *North by Northwest* – and for *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. You could hear the influence of Stravinsky, Shostakovich and Messiaen in their work – it's so sophisticated. There's also the series' unforgettable twangy-guitar intro, composed by Marius Constant. We made a point of not playing that until the final moments of the play.

We agreed early on that any rendition of *The Twilight Zone* would feel incomplete without this score. This was about more than meeting the desires of the super fans. When you watch

the series, it soon becomes apparent the underscore is central to the narrative – it feels like a disruptive extra character. The music transforms ordinary scenes into otherworldly melodrama. It undercuts seemingly everyday interactions suggesting a discomforting subtext, a nagging worry that something is amiss. It's wonderful stuff.

Our producer Ron Fogelman managed to secure the rights from Sony CBS to use almost all the original music from the series. On day one of my work on the project, I was given four hours or so of material. I felt it essential to make my own cuts of the music if we wanted to avoid pastiche and find an adaptation that suited the staging. It also gave me the freedom to sample and process material, augmenting it in Max to create new music that really belonged to the show.

Richard and I agreed early on that the underscore had to be present throughout the show. It also had to work in counterpoint to the spoken dialogue, weaving in and out as closely as it does in the TV show.

I made very intricate cuts of the original music so that cues can follow dialogue. Weeks before any actors were in the room, Richard and I sat around the table, he read dialogue while I cued



in rough edits in QLab. This was incredibly labour intensive and I spent an inordinate amount of time making vamps by cutting and pasting, pitch shifting or otherwise fiddling with disparate elements of original material to make a seamless underscore. Just a two-minute scene might have twenty or thirty separate files dovetailing to create a seamless effect.

Listening to the music so intensely had a very weird effect on both of us, every activity becomes imbued with a dark or otherworldly terror. It was very strange time and it was striking we both had the same reaction.

During the workshop we discovered how sensitive the dialogue was to the subtlest editorial decisions, a tiny change could completely change the feeling of a scene. It made me appreciate the craft of those original composers all the more. There were quite a few scenes where we threw out music two or three times because it felt too heavy handed. Refinement was almost always a process of stripping back. We'd find the sound-world for the scene, overdo it, then remove material until we'd found the minimal number of musical gestures that summed up the psychological essence of the scene – just enough to create a sense of unease or wonder, without letting people know how the strings were being pulled.





I love that kind of detailed design work.

**The sound world is an ever-present influence on the performance, how did you navigate this?**

**Sarah:** Richard and I spoke together about the music operating like another character in the play. We wanted this character to be present but not overbearing. We also knew it would be a huge time-suck in the rehearsal room if we were still debating the details of this intricate edit when actors were in the room. But it also became apparent that the actors needed to work to the music, almost treating it like operatic recitative – an unusual approach. This left us with only one option: I had to do an entire draft of the show before day one in the rehearsal room. And that's what I turned up with – although the stripping back and re-editing continued right up until press night (as did some of the deliberating).

Other substantial elements of the show were the transitions between scenes. The stage version of *The Twilight Zone* has been adapted from the original TV scripts by Anne Washburn. It was unusual as several stories were cut up and inter-spliced, resulting in a dozen or so elaborate scene changes. Almost all of these scene changes were conducted by the cast themselves in front of the audience. At these moments I was able to move beyond or



augment the original material and use stretching, retrograding and many other techniques in Max to pull the sound around. This created sense of giddiness and time distortion.

I like to think I was taking a Radiophonic approach to the sound with these augmentations, which often denatured the music to the point you'd barely recognise the source. In the late 50s and early 60s, while CBC were creating plush, orchestral depictions of the future, the BBC Radiophonic Workshop was using these kinds of techniques (on tape) and much smaller instrumental resources to create a very British sonic imagination of the future. I like to think our *Twilight Zone* somehow brought these approaches on each side of the Atlantic together. It was an homage to both.

**Chris, did you have a relationship with Richard when you started on this project?**

**Chris:** I didn't have an existing relationship with any of the creative team. The set designer, who I'd never worked with before, seemed convinced I was out to sabotage his set, and the lighting designer (ditto) had specified lights with some of the noisiest fans I have ever heard, but eventually you realise you're all there to make the same magic happen, and sometimes you just have to accept that you are going to be

everyone's least favourite department for a while. Hopefully, they understood why by the end! Even though the set was very small and reflective we wanted to mic the cast so that at times we could EQ the bejesus out of them so that it felt like you were watching an old black and white TV, then at the next moment do an in-your-face musical theatre number so the audience didn't know what was going to happen next.

We had expert help from George Lumkin, who had just taken over as Head of Sound at the Almeida. I was nervous about having to start another new relationship with someone I'd never met and I knew this was going to be big, but he showed tireless enthusiasm throughout the whole crazy process and without him the show would have fallen on its ass at a very early stage. In the end the show was entirely the sum of its parts and Richard really got the best out of the cast, creatives and technical team. I found him generous, inclusive, fun and very collaborative, just like Sarah. Two peas in the proverbial pod. And whatever crazy process they use to make it, the final show is worth every second. I hope we get the chance to do it again...

**Sarah:** As someone who comes from a live music performance background, it's been quite an adjustment to work in theatre where sound

is too often seen as ancillary. I noticed this most acutely, when I'm trying to create an eerie moment in a scene change. My instinct is to let a sound of some kind fill the auditorium with no beat, no need for undue hurriedness. We're sitting in the moment, relishing the feeling, or the feeling of a previous event whose embers are still in the room. The sound and music is the theatre, the means of expression. It has immense affective potential.

However, for a director and a choreographer who want to move several actors and pieces of furniture across the stage, such musical gestures are troublesome – if there's nothing obvious to move to, they're seen as something that's holding up the show. To keep our many scene changes moving, I spent a lot of time working against my instincts in this regard, leaving out musical gestures that would require transitions to slow down. But I do think in doing so, I was missing a trick.

**George Lumkin had just come on board as HOD sound for the Almeida as the *Twilight Zone* fitted up. George; that must have been quite a first show for you?**

**George:** Working with Sarah and Chris as they wove the suspense and mystery into the show was a dream. *The Twilight Zone* is one of those shows where, as an operator, you have a real

connection to what's happening on stage from start to end; the timing of every fader move and sound effect is critical, often in response to something inexplicably happening, moving, appearing or disappearing.

You really have to work with the cast, anticipating their actions so that every moment lands perfectly and is completely believable - not every play challenges you like that.

Witnessing the audience react to these unexplained happenings unfolding in front of them, night after night, is incredibly rewarding.

### **Was there a favourite moment for you in the show?**

**Chris:** The episodes that were adapted for our performance required some bonkers things like the voice of a child trapped in the 4th dimension or war planes being scrambled overhead during a nuclear alert, and it was a lot of fun working out how to get the best out of the Almeida to achieve those things in an exciting way with limited resources. We hid speakers in roof voids and moved voices around the room to disorientate the audience, one stage direction called for a voice to come from 'an impossible place'. There is a scene set in a snow-bound diner on a dark night in which one of the customers may or not be a Martian, so we had great fun (who wouldn't?) creating the icy wind every time the door blew open and

another potential suspect walked in, while the aliens would communicate to the earthlings through the jukebox.

**Sarah:** I'd say I enjoyed some of the scene changes. There are some very satisfying ones where we were able to run a sequence forward on the way into a scene then (almost) perfectly reverse the actions and the music on the way out. It had a symmetry and a correspondence between actions and sounds that I found very pleasing. I also enjoyed the scenes where music could be used with an incredibly delicate touch to completely ramp up the tension. One in particular was Markie – about an eerie and strangely perceptive little girl who warns of an attempted murder. We cut it down to just three icy string-like gestures – any more and it felt like pastiche. We settled on just the right gestures, at just the right time, to create a sense of unease. Again, it made you realise those CBS composers really knew how to write for these kinds of scenarios.

### **How did the transfer to the West End go?**

**Sarah:** With a move to the West End, the onus was to tighten everything up, to make the show slicker. This is a hard aesthetic to resist as a sound designer, the opportunity to allow the sound to sit and resonate disappears, especially with a show that is visually led. Opportunities

for the show to sit in a moment and give sound the time it needs to bloom and have its full emotional heft are scarce.

As a performing musician, I know how sound alone can hold a room and articulate something that can be expressed through text, lighting or tangible objects. Sound and music can articulate ideas that can't be expressed in text, lighting, scenery or any other medium. It's not something ancillary. Just as a show needs adequate dimensional space for scenery, lighting and actors, I also think it needs sufficient temporal space. I'd love theatres to be more courageous in their use of sound and music.

It's been a privilege to work with directors the calibre of Richard Jones and on productions which invariably start with text and scenic design. But I'm itching to work on a show that's sonically led, without being expressly about sound. I've realised this will only happen if I co-devise and co-direct my own theatre work. With funds from Hamlyn Award, I intend to do just that. This summer, for example, I'm working with Sarah Fahie, opera director and choreographer – we're workshopping a sonically rich, contemporary ghost story at Wilton's Music Hall.

**MORE INFO**  
[twilightzonetheplay.com](http://twilightzonetheplay.com)

# ABTT THEATRE SHOW 2019

Audio features strongly at the show this year.

The Alexandra Palace Theatre has now re-opened and HD Pro Audio will be demonstrating the L'Acoustics Kara system on the 5th.

On both days, Sound Technology will be presenting a Timax/JBL demonstration in The Londesborough Room.

Clear-Com will be presenting sessions on digital comm's, in particular with relevance to their use on large scale musicals.

More audio seminars to be announced nearer the time.

Register now on:  
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# Legends of sound: Martin Levan



GARETH OWEN

**Martin Levan, there can be few people who can lay claim to inventing an art form, particularly one as all-encompassing as theatrical sound design. How did you get started in the industry?** I'm not sure I can justify adding 'inventing an art form' to my CV! All I really did was pick a few microphones, put up a few speakers and twiddle some knobs until I liked it!

How did I get started? Most people will know that I began my career as an engineer in the recording world. I worked at Morgan Studios in London during the 70s and it was there, I recorded an album with Andrew Lloyd Webber and his brother and cellist Julian, called *Variations*. The backing band for the project was a rock band called Colosseum II, with whom I had previously recorded an album. The guitarist

from the band, Gary Moore, had just asked me to record his solo album which I was keen to do but the timing clashed with Andrew's project. Even though I was keen to record Gary's album, my boss wouldn't allow it and insisted that I worked with Andrew. Had I got my way, I probably would never have been introduced to the theatre world at all!

After recording *Variations* I continued to record and produce albums over the next few years and then around Christmas of 1981, I received a surprise phone call from Andrew. He said... have you ever thought about getting involved in the theatre...? I replied 'what's that, what do you mean?' *Cats* was already running at the New London theatre and he said... meet me there tomorrow evening and I'll show you...





Andrew was planning to launch a new show in London early in 1982 called *Song & Dance*. The music was based on the *Variations* album and he was interested in having me set the show up and mix the opening. The sound of the show met with excellent reviews and I guess you can say it went pretty well!

My appetite had been wetted!

**What was the pivotal moment at which you became a sound designer? When did you realize you were in it for the long-term?**

After opening *Song & Dance* in London, Andrew asked me to re-work the sound of *Cats* that had opened at The New London Theatre the year before. Seemingly, he had been unhappy with it for a while. Understandably, it's quite tricky to make big adjustments to a show while it's running eight performances a week so, spread over a period of several weeks during the summer of 1982 and with the approval of the sound designer, Abe Jacob, I made lots of adjustments to the system and operation of the show. Andrew was happy with the result. Later that year, *Cats* was due to open on Broadway. Abe was already contracted as the sound designer and Andrew asked if I would go to New York as his consultant. I was of course, thrilled to be asked and I went to New York to meet with Abe and see what was being planned. I

attended the load in and rehearsal process throwing in the odd suggestion here and there. Little be known to me, all this was about to change!

When it came to the band call, Andrew didn't like the sound of the orchestra at all and four days before the first preview, Abe and Andrew had, what can only be called, 'a bit of a disagreement!'. Cameron then approached me that evening and asked if I would like to become the Sound Designer.... after about a nanosecond of thought, I accepted.

We worked day and night over the next four days to re-build the sound system in order to give Andrew the sound he was after. I just rolled my sleeves up and got on with it.

To be honest, the next two weeks of previews were a bit of a whirlwind culminating in me standing by the sound desk on opening night, taking a deep breath and saying to myself; 'I think this has changed my life!'

**Is there a moment you can point to where sound design for theatre became a real thing? An event or a show that made the world sit up and acknowledge theatre sound design as the art form it is today?**

Not really, I always felt it was a 'real thing'. Right

from the first moment I became involved in *Song & Dance* in 1982, I believed in the powerful emotive effect sound can bring to the audience. Of course, this can work both ways – good sound can communicate the compositional and performance aspects of the show in a positive and helpful way or if done badly, become a barrier between the performer and the audience. If it's symbiotic with the performance, the listener doesn't see it coming, at which point, you're on to a good thing!

I'm sure that when sound was first used in the theatre, it was considered a purely technical element to 'enable' the audience to simply hear what was going on. I've always felt that if done well creatively, you can 'move' the audience in a positive way. After all, once you've enabled that direct connection between the performer and the listener, the shaping of the sound is effectively invisible to the listener and they don't put up a barrier, allowing all the nuances of the performance to emotionally move them.

**You are credited with leading the pack with a number of sound design principles that today are considered standard practice – which concepts are you most proud of and can you tell us how you arrived there?**

If I were to pick a couple of things, I guess it would be wearing microphones on the head of



*Starlight Express Arena Tour, Japan*  
*Phantom of the Opera, Her Majesty's Theatre, London, 1986*  
Richard Sharratt, Martin and Jane Bloomfield, *Starlight Express*, Tokyo



a performer and of course, the A/B system.

It seems such an obvious thing now for performers to wear microphones somewhere about their head. This was not possible with the rather large microphone capsules that were available when I started in the theatre but with the advent of the MKE2 in the early 80s, that all changed. There were many problems with wearing microphones on the chest and it struck me that if one could find a suitable position somewhere around the head, they would not only be closer, they would benefit hugely by being a consistent distance from the sound source. I'm sure if I hadn't had the idea, someone else would have come up with it before long.

The idea of the A/B system happened when I was designing the sound for a show called *Carrie*, a joint RSC/Fritz Kurtz production opening in Stratford in the late 80s. The music of the show constantly flowed back and forth between a rock/pop sound and an extremely intimate 'acoustic' sound for some of the scenes between the mother and daughter. To deal with this, I set it up with two systems, a high powered boxed type system for the rock stuff and an open Tannoy system for the more acoustic scenes. The idea was to crossfade between the two and morph the whole

dynamic and feel between the two styles. Well, what happened next was interesting! During the rehearsals, my colleague and good friend Graham Carmichael was mixing and I was at the sound desk with him. An early computer system was used to route the radio mics to one system or the other depending on what scene we were in. As I'm sure your readers are aware, one of the problems when using two omnidirectional mics in close proximity with each other on stage is phasing. The traditional way to avoid this was for the operator to duck whichever mic is not needed as lines are flipped back and forth between the performers. Anyway, we were in an intimate scene between the mother and daughter and by chance, one of the mics, I can't remember which one now, hadn't been switched from the 'rock' system to the 'acoustic' system meaning that there was one mic in each system.

At the same time, and as the duet started, Graham had accidentally left both mics live. Immediately, we both turned and looked at each other with amazement – there was virtually no phasing and each voice was clear and uncoloured! It became apparent very quickly that when you present the two sounds into the air from different places in space, they mix in a very different way from when they're mixed electronically. It's such an obvious thing really

and I knew it from my many years in the studio but it never occurred to me until this day that the concept could be applied in this way in the theatre.

Inventions always seem unbelievably obvious after the event!

**Of all the shows you have designed, which presented the biggest challenge, and why? Knowing what you know today, how could you have made life easier for yourself?**

Every show I worked on presented its own new challenge and anyway, however simple a show might appear at the outset, it was in my nature to always 'stretch myself' and create my own challenges. I'm not sure that what I know today would make things much easier either. With the advent of more and more digital technology and computerisation, it appears on first reflection that so many things are more easily attainable. The question is – will they all make music?

We should remember that digital isn't a 'cure all' and there are significant sounds achievable when using 'analogue' technology that are currently, just not possible using the digital form. I'm not at all against digital technology and there are many situations where it is the technology of choice, often because of it's

greater functionality. However, we should remain cautious of the temptation to jump into the 'digital soup' and do everything that way just as a matter of course.

**Can you point to a moment that you think of as the pinnacle of your career?**

I don't really think of my career in that way. Life's always a constantly evolving process that takes many turns, rarely knowing what's around the corner. The trick is not being afraid to make the turn! After all, once you start thinking of a moment in one's life as a pinnacle, it can only be downhill after that!

**What technological innovation has had the most dramatic impact on your work over the years?**

One of the most dramatic has to have been the miniaturisation of wearable microphone capsules that happened in the early 80s.

Also, the advent of clean digital delay technology made the focusing and imaging of the performers sound possible and of course, the computerisation of sound desks hugely aids the scene to scene management of a show.

Although there has been some progress with loudspeaker technology, in the grand scheme of things, my feeling is that it's still in the dark

ages! Hopefully, in the foreseeable future, someone will be able to 'step outside the box' and imagine some new and better way of converting electrical energy into air movement. Now, that's what I would call making a dramatic impact!

**Twenty-twenty hindsight is a wonderful thing. Looking back, if there is one thing you could have done differently, what would it have been? I'd have done it better!**







# A few of my favourite things



TONY GAYLE

Tony's productions as Sound Designer include: *Jersey Boys* (UK tour), *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical* (UK tour), *Songs For Nobodies* (Wilton's Music Hall/Ambassador's Theatre), *The Wild Party* (The Other Palace), *Lazarus* (King's Cross Theatre), *Candide* (Bridewell), *Salad Days* (UK tour), *West Side Story* (Bishopsgate Institute), *Floyd Collins* (Wilton's Music Hall), *Bumblescratch* (Adelphi Theatre), *First Lady Suite* (K-Club), *Grand Hotel*, *Billy*, *Legally Blonde*, *Into the Woods*, *Ballad of Little Jo*, *Nymph Errant* (Bridewell Theatre), *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (Guildhall), *American Idiot* (UK tour), *Godspell* (Lyric Theatre), *Little Women* and *A Man of No Importance* (Royal Academy of Music).

Clockwise from top left:  
Sony MDR7506 headphones; Blackberry Keyone; TUMI Alpha Bravo Sheppard rucksack; and Sennheiser HD25 headphones

## Blackberry phone

Being connected is crucial to my workflow and filling my calendar!

Being able to respond to emails, messages, social media etc. on the go is just part and parcel of being freelance in the modern age. It also allows me to amend and view drawings or spreadsheets. With the added security Blackberry offers, I tend to keep a lot more on the phone than I should but with the likes of Dropbox and Google Drive backing up happens seamlessly.

It's also great for actually speaking to people, like a traditional phone!

## Headphones

If you consider yourself to be a Sound Engineer, the one thing to have with you at all times while working is a pair of headphones.

I own four pairs; Sony MDR7506, Sennheiser HD25, Ultimate Ears 5 Pro and Bose QuietComfort 35. It depends on what I'm doing as to what headphones I use. The Bose pair is for

travelling, whether by plane or train. If I'm auditioning SFX on my laptop, I tend to use the Sennheiser's and the Sony's for desk PFL or monitoring. The UE's only come out for monitor gigs.

## TUMI rucksack

I know what you're thinking...a bag?! Look at it this way, would you spend hundreds of pounds on a soundcard only to then transport it in a cardboard box? I always carry a PC laptop, MacBook, Ipad, headphones and my all-important black A5 notebook (I have several).

Without being too geeky, the TUMI offers great value for money and useful RFID blocking. It also holds my stationery and USB keys.

# Mini profiles



JACK DREWRY

## What are you working on currently?

I'm composing and performing in *The Deep Sea Seekers* with The Wardrobe Ensemble. It's a sequel to *The Star Seekers* and *The Time Seekers*, the first of which we took to the National Theatre last summer. It's a semi-improvised immersive deep-sea adventure for 3- to 8-year olds, with a funk and disco soundtrack.

I'm about to start as co-sound designer on *Robinson: The Other Island*, a new adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe*. It'll use wireless binaural audio to tell a story about loneliness and the joy of being immersed in reading a good book.

I'm in two bands, a downtempo ambient electro pop trio called 4th Project, and cLuMsY, a reggae fusion band. I also compose live for an improvised soap opera called *Closer Each Day*, performed fortnightly in Bristol.

## What is the favourite part of your work?

I like the early stages of a rehearsal when there are a million possibilities. I do a lot of devised shows and occasionally you have a breakthrough moment when someone says, or does, something unexpected, or even accidentally, and it makes sense of a load of unanswered questions. After the first night, I love thinking back to those watershed moments when the show started to come together.

## What would you change about the industry?

I wish the theatre industry could engage with a wider range of people. There are so many stories that don't get told on stage because a relatively small pool of

society has the means to make it happen.

I'd like to see more funding towards well managed community theatre projects and outreach programmes in regional venues as well as more support for new writing schemes.

## What's your top tip?

When creativity strikes you've got to ride that wave. If you have a good idea and you think you know how to execute it, don't hesitate, just do it now.

Also, always get a good case when you buy a new piece of hardware, or an instrument, you'll use it more and break it less.

## What are you listening to at the moment?

I can't get enough of the minimalist funk band Vulfpeck. They have a retro aesthetic and a very silly attitude. It's a mix of lo-fi videos, ridiculous lyrics, heavily compressed mixes and amazing musicianship. What really wins it for me is that they use so few instruments to make the most face scrunchingly funky grooves. I love all of their music but I'd say a good place to start is with their album *Thrill Of The Arts*.





SIMON ARROWSMITH

#### **What are you working on currently?**

I've just finished sound designing a production of *Thrill Me* at The Hope Theatre in Islington. It's a musical and so I had to build a sound world that blended with the composer's score as well as fuse live and recorded elements. My next project is another theatre piece that is in pre-production where sound plays a major part of the plot, and I'm really excited about the scale of the project.

#### **What is the favourite part of your work?**

I like the whole process. I love working with a director and creative team to shape key storytelling elements through sound – either sound effects, 'scapes or composition. Working with sounds in a space and hearing them in context never gets boring.

#### **What would you change about the industry?**

I feel sound design is often an overlooked part of the process. We know how important it is, but it's often something taken for granted. I've seen a lot of theatre where sound (be it music or effects) is just thrown together by a stage manager. If it's not done right it can really take you out of the world of a show. Good sound can change the entire way a play is received and understood.

#### **What's your top tip?**

If a cue isn't working, I've found that more often than not it's a volume or EQ issue rather than a problem with the cue's content. I'll just turn the cue down or create a slower fade time and it changes everything. It sounds simple, but it seems to work for me.

#### **What are you listening to at the moment?**

I really like ambient and atmospheric electronic music. Right now, I'm listening to a lot of stuff coming from Burning Witches Records or stuff from Erased Tapes. Rival Consoles last album is getting a lot of my listening time at the moment.

[soundofstories.com](http://soundofstories.com)  
[brokencabaret.com](http://brokencabaret.com)

# Mental health resources



DOMINIC BILKEY

‘There’s no business like show business’ is a cliché we probably all overindulge in. But, theatre is certainly a workplace that differs radically from an office or retail setting. We have deadlines to hit at 7:30pm each evening. Mistakes can be extremely costly. Often if a show doesn’t do well, it closes at short notice and the result is job and income loss.

Our future reputations and employability can be affected by how well our current show is doing. This can lead to immense pressure, if not always directly on us, it is certainly on those we are working with. The pressure is often felt just as

acutely when a show is doing well as when it is doing badly.

As freelancers, many of us are facing an almost constant search for work, meeting deadlines for current projects, managing our finances and juggling family life. These, and many other factors, can make theatre a high-pressure environment to work in.

The umbrella term ‘mental health’ is used to encompass a wide range of identified conditions that can affect an individual. Depression and anxiety are the most commonly experienced; and overall it is estimated that one in six people will have experienced a common mental health issue within the last week.

Traditionally, there has been a stigma attached to poor mental health, resulting in many people suffering in silence, afraid of the consequence of revealing how they are feeling and concerned that their career could be adversely affected should they present with a mental health

illness. Fortunately, in the last couple of years there has been an increasing willingness to talk about mental health, the circumstances that can have an effect on the individual, and how to create a more positive working environment.

At our 2019 AGM, members expressed that their mental health, and that of their colleagues was one of their main concerns. As an association whose existence is dedicated to supporting theatre sound professionals, the necessity to provide aid, understanding and resource has never been greater.

Through seeking a greater awareness, understanding and the creation of a support network, the ASD is seeking to promote better mental wellbeing within the workplace and support for those with mental ill-health. There has been an increase in the number of organisations offering support across a range of areas who can offer specialist support. We felt it would be useful to compile a guide to some of the best resources around (see overleaf).





## **The Association of Sound Designers**

We're here for you if you need advice or support. Sometimes that support can be provided by other members, who you can reach out to via the email mailing list, or via our closed Facebook group. If you've a more confidential problem, or one not for public discussion, please do email us at [admin@associationofsounddesigners.com](mailto:admin@associationofsounddesigners.com). We can offer advice on subsistence and expenses, late and non-payment of monies, tax, VAT, agents, bullying and harassment, and any other issues in the workplace. If we can't answer a question we'll try and suggest someone who can.  
[associationofsounddesigners.com](http://associationofsounddesigners.com)

## **Backup**

Backup provides financial support to industry technical professionals working in live events, theatre, TV and film. If you, or a family member, is seriously ill or is suffering from an accident, Backup may be able to provide support. Backup is there to help to get you back on your feet.  
[backuptech.uk](http://backuptech.uk)

## **Theatre Helpline**

Theatre Helpline's 24-hour confidential service provides advice and support for any theatre professional. They specialise in dealing with: workplace bullying or harassment; career issues, including professional development & training; health issues, including mental health; injury &

mobility problems; retirement and care in later life; issues with employment or unemployment; and debt & financial issues. They can be reached on 0800 915 4617 or [advice@theatrehelpline.org](mailto:advice@theatrehelpline.org)  
[theatrehelpline.org](http://theatrehelpline.org)

## **ArtsMinds**

ArtsMinds offers advice and support on a range of topic, with numerous links to other support networks. ArtsMinds is a collaborative initiative from British Association of Performing Arts Medicine, Equity, Spotlight and The Stage to bring together into one place a raft of resources for performers and creative practitioners facing mental health issues. Their starting point was to try to uncover the scale of mental health issues within our industry by putting out a survey to which more than 5000 people responded. The website reflects their concerns, with links fanning out from central themes of your health, your career, your relationships, your finances, helping others, and resources for immediate help.  
[artsminds.co.uk](http://artsminds.co.uk)

## **NHS Choices Moodzone**

Whatever you need to know about coping with stress, anxiety or depression, or just the normal emotional ups and downs of life, the NHS Choices Moodzone is there to help. It offers practical advice, interactive tools, videos and audio guides to help you feel mentally and

emotionally better.

[nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression](http://nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression)

## **The Samaritans**

Samaritans offer a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way – about whatever's getting to you. You don't have to be suicidal. Call them on 116 123, or if you'd rather write down your thoughts and feelings, you can email them on [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) and they'll talk to you via email.  
[samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

## **Parent's in Performing Arts (PIPA)**

PIPA's vision is of a performing arts sector that is effectively inclusive of the parent and carer workforce. Their mission is to promote best practice employment and support for parents and carers in the performing arts sector through data collection, research, lobbying and working collaboratively to implement the PIPA Best Practice Charter and strategies for change. PIPA enables and empowers parents, carers and employers to achieve sustainable change in attitudes and practices in order to attract, support and retain a more diverse and flexible workforce. By working in partnership they raise awareness, find creative solutions and promote best practice in the UK Performing Arts. Email them at [pipacampaign@gmail.com](mailto:pipacampaign@gmail.com).  
[pipacampaign.com](http://pipacampaign.com)

**Backup, *The Technical Entertainment Charity*, provides financial support to industry technical professionals working in live events, theatre, TV and film.**

- Are you or a family member seriously ill, struggling to work and needing support?
- Is there someone you know who needs help?

Backup offers support and help to get you back on your feet. Grants are tailored to an individual's needs and can include essential living costs, medical related expenses, re-training and travel. We work with potential recipients to fully understand the support needed and ensure help is targeted effectively. Backup maintains contact with you and provides ongoing support.

Visit our website at [www.backuptech.uk](http://www.backuptech.uk) for more information about our support and how to get in touch.



# Review: Sound Design for the Stage



MAX PAPPENHEIM

The first new book on sound design in British theatre for quite a while, Gareth Fry's *Sound Design for the Stage* delivers not just a contemporary perspective on new and old technologies and techniques, but also a wealth of advice on the industry today.

The mystery here is how a designer as busy as Gareth Fry – holder of multiple Olivier and Tony awards, designer of countless shows including *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and Complicité's *The Encounter*, and inaugural chair

of the ASD – finds time to write such a substantial book. And the answer lies within: among the many topics covered in this wide-ranging study, Gareth writes about scheduling, optimising workflow, and generally keeping control when things get busy.

At the outset, there's thoughtful discussion of what sound design is, what a sound designer does, how to find work, and manage a career. There's up-to-date advice on maintaining a public profile through social media, fee negotiations, and the cost/benefit considerations of having an agent. The advice to avoid ever saying 'yes' to a job straight away rings very true: the author spells out what homework to do first. Occasionally the author's level of experience is in evidence – comments like 'sometimes the director will want to meet you before committing to employing you' may raise a wry smile! – but the discussion of the economics and practicalities of fringe theatre is thoughtful and never aloof.

The following chapters on script analysis, concept, music and 'pulling the ideas together'

will be of great interest to anyone working in theatre, especially directors and producers wanting to learn more about what we do and what we can offer. All is clearly expressed and the book assumes no prior knowledge, but isn't ever simplistic. It's also full of the joy of listening and discovery: something of a personal manifesto for theatre sound.

Especially valuable is the discussion of realism versus artistry – who hasn't struggled with the knowledge that no helicopter could approach that fast, or that the pistol Foley is in fact a stapler? – culminating in a rather startling admission about birdsong.

Further on, the book turns to content creation, sound reinforcement and system design. The author strikes a balance between theory and practice that keeps the book relevant to a wide variety of tools and should give it a long shelf-life.

For example, speaker placement and delay calculations are discussed in theoretical terms, but with practical examples too. Some readers might hope for a little more advice in (for example) selecting actual speaker models, but,



## FIRST CONTACT

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## NEGOTIATING A FEE

Occasionally a fee will be mentioned,  
check, but more often that information  
mentioned until they offer you the

Sound designers are typical  
fee to cover their work. They're  
self-employed contractors who  
company to separate their  
the general fee and their  
percentage of revenue, and  
and then some. In certain  
projects they can work  
and the project is over.



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Return B Music FOH Volume | Ch 1 | CC 86 | TO: 27 (-32.9 dB)  
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Launch Mode Trigger

Signature 5 / 4

Groove None

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Vel. 0.0%

Follow Action 0.4 0

Save Fade RAM

Transpose

Dist

Detune



as Gareth points out, too much detail about specific pieces of equipment or software can easily make a book obsolete before it comes off the press. And much of this of course is largely only learnable by experience, and the book includes a good discussion about building relationships with hire companies.

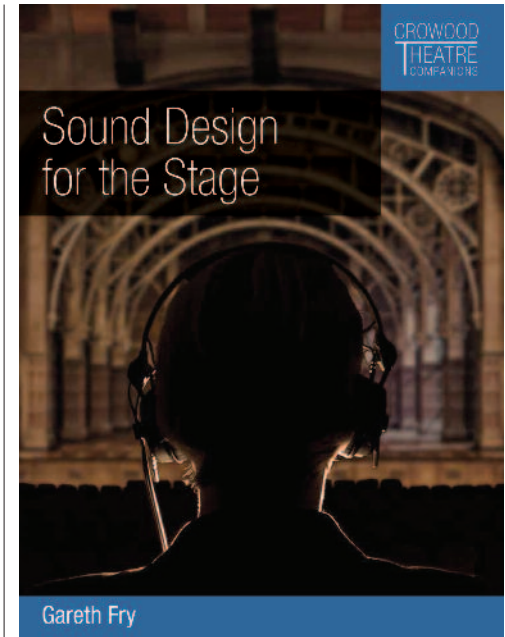
Indeed, true to the title, this is a broad survey of the designer's craft, key considerations, and thought processes, rather than a detailed technical manual. Those hoping for detailed instruction on gain structure, or EQ'ing speakers during a sound check may be disappointed, and there's limited advice for a Sound No.1 or PSE, even for a play; but these are topics not easily discussed in print – even Shannon Slaton's book *Mixing a Musical* contains surprisingly little about actually mixing.

That said, there is plenty of practical advice, and with it come warnings of pitfalls, and anecdotes – sometimes hilarious, sometimes alarming, but always interesting. Especially in the later part of the book discussing the journey from rehearsals, through tech, to opening night, there's a refreshing honesty about what happens when things go wrong. It's a warts-and-all approach, reflected in the chapter headings: 'Why does it sound bad?', 'Dealing with disasters', 'Developing resilience', and so on.

There's great advice too on dealing with anger and disappointment. But most of all, what emerges is an infectious enthusiasm for communication, collaboration and being brave enough to try things out.

Communicative, wide-ranging, and cheerfully bursting with trade secrets, *Sound Design for the Stage* will surely be required reading for students. To those entering the profession from other directions, it perhaps has even more to offer. But far from 'just' a textbook, it's a very open window into a hugely successful and influential career, and as such will be of interest to any sound designer, regardless of their level of experience. Interviews with sound designers Ian Dickinson, David McSeveney, Gareth Owen and Melanie Wilson offer further perspectives.

The many photographs and illustrations are clear and offer some fascinating insights too. The book is well-organised, clearly laid out, but the index isn't especially thorough and there are a couple of typos. I would also have liked to have seen more focus on Gareth's extensive work with live Foley, binaural audio, and location recording in remote and unusual places. Mindful of the future, Gareth has a page on his website for further material, errata and updates, including a form to submit suggestions for the future editions.



#### MORE INFO

*Sound Design for the Stage* is published by Crowood Press and is available as a paperback and an e-book. [garethfry.co.uk/sound-design-for-the-stage](http://garethfry.co.uk/sound-design-for-the-stage)





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MUSICAL  
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ELLIOT**

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**MANNA  
MEAS**

HOW  
*do you relate?*  
**LUCY'S LEGACY**  
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THE LINK IDA  
Is her story Your story, too

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**Lifetime**

AMERICAN EAGLE OUTFITTERS

# Working in the USA



GARETH FRY

UK theatre practitioners are often surprised at the different practices when working in the USA. It is a peculiarity that because we have so much in common, the differences are all the more obvious. George Bernard Shaw described this as two countries “separated by a common language”. We thought we’d discuss some of those similarities and differences, and look at how to get the best out of working in the USA. Whilst a lot of this will focus on New York, much can be applied elsewhere.

## Visas and ESTA's

For most scenarios involving working in the USA, you’re going to need a work visa. These will often be arranged by your employer in conjunction with a partner organisation in the USA, typically either a co-producer or venue, specifically for the duration of your employment in the USA. Obtaining a work visa takes a few weeks to process, requires a lot of personal information, will require a morning at the US Embassy and is expensive. Usually the latter cost is borne by your employers or co-producers.

When you go to the US Embassy they have

strict rules about what you can bring in, which are either strict or very strict, depending on how heightened the security levels currently are. If you have an 8am appointment, don’t expect to leave before noon – you will go through five different queuing systems during your visit!

Even though you have a designated time slot, it is organised on a first come, first served process so there is a definite advantage to being at the front of the first queue. Arriving 30 mins early can mean an hour less waiting inside. The first queue is outside so if it’s raining or cold take a good coat. There are no refreshments available within the Embassy so take a bottle of water.

There are occasions when you can enter the US without a work visa. The ESTA scheme allows UK citizens to enter the US if you are going on holiday, or for certain types of business, which is rather vaguely defined. Essentially, if you’re going on a short trip and not ‘working’ the ESTA scheme may cover you. This might include going for a meeting, doing a recce, attending a conference or awards ceremony. In these examples, you are going on business but





**BROADWAY**



probably not working for a US employer and an ESTA should cover you – but always check with your US contact first.

### Visiting the USA

There are many tourist guides that can explain a lot of the quirks of visiting the US. Few however touch on working in the USA. Here are a few hints and tips from regular visitors:

- If you are going to be visiting a lot, you can sign up for the Global Entry scheme, which can reduce your time queuing in airport customs to seconds.
- Never catch an unlicensed taxi from the airport into NY. Yellow cabs are better, there is a flat fee plus tolls from the airports into Manhattan but they will often find ways to overcharge you. There are lots of shared minibus operators but because of the multiple pickups and drop offs you can waste hours in these buses. Uber or Lyft are currently the best options.
- Look at the MoneySavingExpert.com Credit Cards Abroad guide for advice on how to spend money abroad. Do not use your debit card abroad.
- Mobile phones can easily become expensive to use. Again, MoneySavingExpert has a very useful guide on Using Your Phone Abroad. Currently a PAYG Three SIM card is a very good option.
- If you're visiting often it can be worth taking

an old phone (remember to get it Unlocked at least a week before you travel) and buying a SIM card out there, to get a US number and data plan. There are some good PAYG options available, even some with unlimited free calling back to the UK.

- Previously many people bought Apple products in the US as it could work out cheaper (mostly this was because people dodged paying VAT when bringing it back to the UK). There are now cheaper ways and we wrote an article about it here:

[tinyurl.com/ASDmac](http://tinyurl.com/ASDmac)

- Over the last few years, the British pound has lost value against the US dollar. This makes it more expensive for you to buy things in the US using a UK bank account or credit card as a source. Inversely, if you are paid in US dollars then that fee is worth 5% more than it was pre-Brexit. If possible, get per-diems paid in cash, in US dollars. Don't use your per-diems to buy things that are tax-deductible, like laptops. Don't forget that you can spend money from your UK bank account on food, travel and accommodation when working abroad and that (or a proportion of it) may be tax deductible.

### Tax, Double Tax and VAT

#### Working in the US for a UK producer

This scenario is very common for touring shows, and typically you (or your company if you run

one) are employed by a UK producer, and you invoice and pay tax as if you were working in the UK. If you are VAT registered, you would charge the UK producer VAT for your work in the US even though the place of supply is outside the UK. You would be employed under a contract bound by UK law as if you were working in the UK.

#### Working for a US producer as an operator

If you are operating a show for a significant period of time you might be employed by the US producer on the payroll. In this case you would likely go on an IATSE Pink Contract (IATSE being the name of the union, Pink indicates that you are working for the producer rather than for the venue, and is printed on pink paper). You will have US taxes deducted from your pay and be expected to file a tax return with the US Internal Revenue Service in order to receive a rebate some months down the line. The tax deducted can easily be 30% of your wages once Federal, State, Social Security, Medicare and Disability taxes have been deducted. The exact amount you will be rebated can't be calculated precisely because, whereas in the UK, personal tax allowances and the income tax rates are issued in advance when the Budget is announced, in the US these figures are decided and announced at the end of each financial year. Any taxes that can't be rebated can be

claimed on your UK tax return though. Of course, if you don't pay tax in the US, you'll have to declare your US income to HMRC and pay tax on it in the UK.

Your employer may also pay into the IATSE vacation scheme, where 5% of your gross salary is added, not deducted, to your salary and paid into the scheme. The scheme is invested in the stock market and depending on how well it performs, you will be sent an amount back. You can find out how it works here:

[tinyurl.com/iatse-vacation-plan](https://tinyurl.com/iatse-vacation-plan)

### **Working for a US producer as a designer**

If you are designing a show you are more likely to go on a USA829 contract, with USA829 being the branch of IATSE that specifically represents designers, including sound designers. The USA829 contract specifies numerous standardised terms of employment. They also specify minimum fees for various types of design.

Typically, a producer won't expect an invoice for your services as your contract obligates the employer to pay you. However, as these contracts don't meet HMRC's requirements for self-billing agreements you should generate invoices for your own records. You shouldn't have taxes deducted (so long as you fill out a W8BEN form from the IRS and give

it to your employer), but you will pay union dues, currently 2% of your earnings.

If your show is touring you are unlikely to be asked to join a union, but if you are creating an original show for Broadway then you may be required to join USA829. The terms of the Broadway Agreement (between Broadway producers and the union) require that you apply to join USA829 on being hired at any of the Tony Award eligible New York venues, or when you are hired for your fourth show across the 75 theatres of LORT (the League of Regional Theatres). As an associate you may be allowed to do a single show before joining USA829, but the house may still insist.

If you're working on Broadway, your contract will likely be based around the Collectively Bargained Agreement (CBA), negotiated by USA829. These contracts will include references to health-care and pensions, which we'll discuss later, but also define minimum fees and royalties for a range of venues, as well as revivals, tours, per diems, accommodation, copyright, billing, and many other aspects. You may just receive a cover-sheet rather than a full contract. Any contract you receive should be cross-checked to check it complies with the CBA terms and rates. These can all be found here: [tinyurl.com/asd-USA829-CBA](https://tinyurl.com/asd-USA829-CBA)

If you work abroad a lot, it can be worth setting up a limited company within the UK. In this scenario, the US employer contracts your company, for example Sam Jones Ltd, to provide your services. You are only ever employed by, and paid by, your company – in this case Sam Jones Ltd – so you don't personally have to file a US tax return or have taxes deducted.

Your company would invoice the US company, in either pounds or dollars as you agree between you, and they would pay your company. You would fill out and send your company's employer a W8-BEN-E form, who can then pay your company without withholding any tax (the W8-BEN and W8-BEN-E forms are part of the US/UK Double Tax treaty. There are talks of revised trade deals between the US and the UK, post-Brexit, but at this point nothing is clear). If you work in the US a lot you should seek further advice. This article contains useful advice:

[tinyurl.com/asd-us-tax](https://tinyurl.com/asd-us-tax)

Whether it works out financially beneficial to form a limited company depends on your personal circumstances and you should consult your accountant. We have a resource on the ASD website explaining some of the pros and cons of running a limited company here: [tinyurl.com/ASDbusiness](https://tinyurl.com/ASDbusiness)

If you, or your UK company, are VAT registered but working for a US producer, you would not typically charge VAT as both your employer and the place of supply are outside the UK.

Many UK designers work with a US associate designer, who can navigate many of the differences in working practices. There are often different expectations of what paperwork will be produced by who, for example, the design team are expected to provide rack drawings, and labels for racked equipment. And of course, other departments may have radically different delineations and practices, all of which can cause confusion. The US associate will normally be employed by the US producer.

With our visa and employment sorted, we can head off to the USA. Once you've landed, got an Uber to your hotel, tipped someone (keep \$1 and \$5 bills handy) and discovered the vagaries of US light switches, toilet cubicles and arcing electrical sockets, it's time to head to the theatre, where you'll notice that working practices are quite different too. Part of this lies within how differently theatre and the arts are funded in the US, versus the UK, and the consequences of that.

In the UK, we have a well-funded Arts Council that funds many venues and theatre companies. Most of our producing houses,

whether a regional studio theatre or behemoths like the National Theatre or Royal Opera House, receive a large proportion of their income from the Arts Council. Many of them produce shows that also transfer into the West End or commercially tour the country. Many independent theatre companies produce work using project specific grants, and/or have their administrative backbone and buildings funded by the Arts Council. We do have many theatres that produce work without Arts Council funding, such as the Old Vic, and of course many production companies who produce work without any subsidy. But the whole industry benefits from the Arts Council's investment in theatres, productions and people.

In the US, there is the National Endowment for the Arts, which operates similarly to the Arts Council, though tends to focus more on larger grants and organisations. Whereas the Arts Council will spend £622 million this year in the UK, the NEA only has \$150 million for the entire USA. And even that is under threat from the current President.

Without similar subsidies, US venues and theatre companies rely far more on box office ticket sales, and fund raising from private or corporate sponsorship for their income. Without secure, continuous funding, theatre companies

and producers are in a far more precarious or, at the least, unpredictable financial situation.

Most UK practitioners first impression when working in the US for the first time, is how influential US unions are on working practices, particularly in regard to schedules and delineations of jobs. And seen from an outside perspective these can seem more like restrictions that hinder, rather than help, create work. But as you begin to understand more about the industry you begin to understand more about why they are necessary, and often even desirable.

Let's look at Broadway as an example. Broadway venues operate with many similarities to the West End: typically, they are venues that a producer can hire from a theatre owner to put on a show, and typically they don't have any in-house sound system.

Compared to the West End, Broadway shows are costlier to mount, and run, in venue hire, labour and equipment costs. Ticket prices are consequently more expensive. You will see a lot more advertising for shows to gain the important tourist segment. You will see 'Winner of 7 Tony Awards' marketing being used heavily to pull in audience members, and awards do matter in that respect: The play *Indecent* posted





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NYC TAXI



closing notices in early 2017, then won a Tony award, and was then able to retract its closing notice and stay open because of the uptake in audience figures it received.

Broadway theatres publicly publish their box office figures each week, giving a degree of transparency to audience attendance and income, varying over time, per show. Reviews are also more influential, especially from the *New York Times*. A bad review can radically and rapidly affect ticket sales, and can often tip the balance of the success of a show.

The preview period is typically a week or two longer than for an equivalent West End show. This allows more fundamental conceptual changes to be made, if needed, or allows the show to bed in firmly before the theatre critics start coming. Famously *Spider-Man: Turn Off The Dark* had 182 preview performances before its opening night, whilst major changes were made, including bringing in a new creative team.

In the UK we tend to have Press Night, where the majority of critics come to see the show and file their reviews in the days after that. In NYC, at some point, the show will be 'locked', perhaps a week or two before opening night, and technical work will finish. From that point the critics will

come to see it over a range of performances, up until Opening Night. Opening night is when the party happens, and when the press embargo is lifted on reviews being published. It's not uncommon for all the reviews to be published simultaneously whilst the party is happening, and there are many tales of opening night parties turning sour and ending early on the publication of a bad review from the *New York Times*.

Fortunes can be made on Broadway, but losses can be heavier too. Loss-making shows are notoriously shut down rapidly, often with only a week's notice.

As well as differences within the theatre industry, there are also vast differences at a societal level between the UK and the USA.

There is no NHS in the USA, so individuals buy insurance to pay for their healthcare. If they are an individual, and not part of an employer- or union-run fund, these payments can average between \$219 and \$700 per month, assuming no pre-existing medical conditions. It will be more expensive to also cover your family, if you have one.

There is a state pension scheme, similar to National Insurance in the UK, but as in the UK,



# USA829 Special Offer

USA829 HAVE VERY KINDLY EXTENDED AN OFFER TO ASD MEMBERS TO JOIN THE UNION AT THE REDUCED RATE OF \$1,500, VERSUS THE REGULAR PRICE OF \$3,000.

UNTIL RECENTLY NON-USA DESIGNERS RECEIVED PAYMENTS INTO HEALTH-CARE PLANS, BUT INCREASINGLY THE AGREEMENTS ARE BEING RE-WORDED TO ALLOW ALL THESE FUNDS TO GO INTO THEIR PENSION AND ANNUITY FUNDS.

USA829 have provided the following details about the schemes they provide:

## Pension and Annuity

Members are not allowed to 'pay into' them. All the money goes directly from the employer to the Fund and is 'tax deferred' You do not pay taxes on it until retirement when you receive it.

For USA829 we use; the IATSE National Annuity Plan and we have our own pension the United Scenic Artists, Local 829 Pension Fund. The IA Annuity is the same Fund that is required in the Pink Contracts.

In an Annuity the money is deposited in an account with your name on it and is immediately yours, although as tax deferred income it can not be removed until retirement age. There are exceptions which can be found at [tinyurl.com/iatseannuity](http://tinyurl.com/iatseannuity)

Anyone who has designed a show on Broadway since 2005 should check to see if they have an account at [www.IATSENB.org](http://www.IATSENB.org). You can register as a user and see any contributions you have, but you might have to call them to get the user account started if not a US resident, due to address issues.

Once the money is in the plan you are able to choose the investments from a range of funds. If you do nothing the money goes to a default fund chosen by the trustees. Once you reach retirement age you may receive the money all at once, or over time. How long it lasts is up to you. This is called a Defined Contribution Fund.

The USA 829 Pension is what is known as a Defined Benefit Fund, you earn credits in years in which you work enough to qualify, and if you 'vest', meaning get five qualifying years, you are guaranteed a pension for life when you reach retirement age. The amount of the pension is defined by your credits and the amount of employer contributions received, and the monthly pension amount determined is for life.







many people prefer to pay additional money into a pension scheme or annuity fund to allow for a more comfortable retirement.

Without safety nets like the NHS, and without frameworks like the EU working time directive, it falls more to the union to provide protections for its members than is necessary in the UK. The union typically works to ensure members have access to healthcare, work in a safe environment, and have protections on their current and retirement income in an industry environment that can be more turbulent than in the UK.

For individuals who work for just one employer, their employer may organise their healthcare and run a pension scheme to pay into. Freelances typically have many employers which make it impractical to be covered in this way. Instead a multi-employer plan is run by both the employers (the Broadway League and LORT, for example) and the Union, aggregating and maximising employer contributions into one scheme.

Contributions are made into this trust fund automatically, at a rate negotiated globally, and the employer is legally bound to pay them, so you cannot waive or negotiate them, even if you are not based in the USA. The new CBA coming

into effect means that UK designers can route monies that would once have gone to a not-so-useful health plan can now all route into a pension fund. Due to the success of many West End shows on Broadway, some UK designers will receive a good pension from USA829 when they retire!

The union dictates a strict framework for breaks and pay, to ensure their members aren't exploited. In the UK, we've become used to the EU Working Time Directive which has reduced working hours – technical rehearsals previously often started at 9am and finished at 11pm. We often benefit from actor's Equity and MU rules that may mean we may get reasonable breaks as a side effect, though often we work through our meal breaks by choice or necessity. In the US, a typical tech day will be a '10 out of 12', which refers to the actors working the Equity maximum of 10 hours in a 12 hour call.

Crew will often work longer hours still, with 8am to 11pm, being common. Working hours are generally longer than in the UK, and of course the EU working directive doesn't apply. To counter these long working hours, the unions ensure that their members get strict meal breaks within those calls. IATSE is the umbrella union for most theatre and motion picture workers in the USA and





Canada. It is made up of over 500 branches called Local Unions or 'Locals', each with jurisdiction over certain crafts and geographic areas. Local 1, for example, deals with backstage workers in New York. Local 2 is for Chicago, etc. Local USA829 represents live performance designers, on a nationwide basis.

Whilst these are all sub-divisions of IATSE, locals are separate organizations with different websites, staff, and separate Collectively Bargained Agreements establishing compensation, benefits contributions and work rules. Thus, different rules and working practises can apply in different states and cities. As previously mentioned, USA829 agreements and contracts establish a range of rates and rights for the designer, far more than an average UK design contract might contain.

In the West End it is typical for a venue to have a small standing crew, usually the lighting and stage department. Other staff are brought in on an ad hoc basis as needed by the production. Likewise, on Broadway there will be a House Carpenter, House Electrician, and House Props. Unofficially, there will usually be a House Sound person as well, but Local One doesn't recognise Sound as its own department, only as part of electricians. It is often up to the incoming production as to whether and how that in-house sound engineer

is utilised, but they will be employed regardless. For a play, that person might well be tasked as the sound operator, for a musical, they might be running the stage sound. And whilst you don't have control of who that person is, in the same way as an LD in the UK wouldn't normally have control over who operates the lighting, it does mean that you are guaranteed a sound operator – there are no DSM operated shows on Broadway.

It is worth bearing in mind, that as with an LX department operating lighting, the sound operator role will rota out as the in-house person takes holidays, and they will find and train dep's to cover their role. Without having the level of control and continuity of personnel that we are used to, some designers opt to make their shows easier for someone to come in and pick up. Some shows may have agreements in place where the production/producer employs perhaps the FOH mixer, allowing the designer some choice in staffing, and the in-house sound team might run the stage end of things.

We often blur our job descriptions and may work with our fellow departments to cover the odd cue here or there. But jobs are generally more strictly delineated in the USA, not just between departments, but within them too.



Whereas a UK designer might do a quick refocus of a speaker in a UK theatre, this isn't acceptable in a US house. If you are a member of the union, or if you are working on a Pink contract, you should be allowed to touch some equipment, to do programming on a computer for example, but you should negotiate with your local crew exactly what you can and can't do, and when you can and can't do it. It's worth spending time in each venue learning the responsibilities of each staff member so you can avoid treading on toes and know the best person to ask to get a job done.

If you are touring into a US venue, working for a UK producer, your producer may have come to an agreement for you to operate the show, but you will unlikely be able to rig or install it. And don't assume that if you are touring your own sound equipment that this means different rules apply. Your agreement may include that additional show staff might be employed to make up for the fact that your presence is taking away a job opportunity for a local person. You may find a sound engineer is employed to sit in the green room all day whilst you are working.

This can seem rather perverse, but it is about the union ensuring that their members stay in employment. Whilst it's undoubtedly frustrating

for that person sat in the green room, and costly to the production, it means they are still earning money, receiving contributions towards their retirement, and often more significantly, towards their healthcare coverage too.

Whilst the unions undoubtedly protect their members very well, they are not without controversy. For Americans who are starting out in the industry, joining a union is not necessarily easy. There have in the past been accusations of nepotism. Some venues work more strictly to-rule than others, which can make for a less collaborative feeling towards getting a show on.

For an insight into the unique workplace environment that can be Broadway, this stagehand's glossary makes very interesting reading:  
[tinyurl.com/Bway-Stagehand](https://tinyurl.com/Bway-Stagehand)

As with most people and places, if you go in respectfully and polite about the local practises you will have a far friendlier and more productive time than if you go in with the attitude that they are doing it all wrong, and that your ways are better. You may even find that as you show respect and trust for their ways of working, they will begin to trust you and make allowances for the odd occasion when a rule can be relaxed.

Beyond Broadway, there are many different types of venue in New York (and the rest of the USA) which operate differently and have different union relationships. St Ann's Warehouse, BAM and the Lincoln Centre are all regular NYC venues for receiving UK work, but they are all funded differently, and operate differently. You may find the rules are more relaxed at some venues than others. But generally, it is a good idea to go in assuming you will be working in full union conditions, respecting those conditions, and then finding out where things may be more relaxed as you go along.

This is a gross simplification of a complex and multi-faceted industry, and we can't hope to offer a fair representation of Broadway and the USA in a single article, but we hope you find this helpful. Whilst some of the working practices can feel very alien initially, the theatre industry in the US is equally as full of fun, creative and unique individuals as in the UK, who are working towards making incredible shows for our audiences to experience.

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