

ISSUE 16 // SEPTEMBER 2021

THE ECHO

ASD
ASSOCIATION *of* SOUND DESIGNERS



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

PLUS Interview with Tingying Dong // Bouncing forward // Industry Mental Health Survey Report // Alexandra Faye Braithwaite

THE ECHO

Issue #16
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Duke of York's auditorium
(Nina Dunn, Dark Theatres Project,
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CURTAINS UP

WE'VE MISSED YOU



We're on the road again and it's great to be back!

Come and see us at PLASA on stand G15 and see what we've been up to for the last 18 months.

Drop by to re-introduce yourselves to Axient Digital and the Shure team.

We'll have talks and activities on the stand across all three days. We've been working behind the scenes to bring you new products and updates. We can't wait to share them with you.



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Introduction

Welcome to the sixteenth edition of *The Echo*. I hope you are all finding your way to some measure of buoyancy, this early autumn.

I'm so pleased to be able to kick off this edition in my turn as the new ASD Chairperson, and immediately give huge congratulations to Vicki Hill for leading on this *Echo*. Vicki has curated a brilliantly thoughtful collection of articles, which reflect on our journeys through the past 18 months and the places we've arrived at now.

The themes of community and resilience thread through this *Echo*. For all the challenges we've faced recently, there are also positive examples of how communities coming together make change.

Collective organising through AAPTLE and Freelancers Make Theatre Work has acknowledged and is reforming the precarity of freelance theatre workers, shaping important new guidelines for how we want to work. The global movements of Black Lives Matter and Me

Too have given us new space and courage to call out and speak up about the ways in which many of us are excluded from or harmed by the work we want to do. And the expansion of BECTU to include more freelance theatre workers, including sound designers, gives more of us the option of accessing real leverage in ensuring fair work and pay.

There is still more to do of course. My hopes for our own community over the next year lie in widening the path and access points for those coming through into the sound industry, and to reveal this community of talented, hard working peers as a place that beckons people in and champions them when they get here. I want us to walk alongside each other with kindness and stamina, to celebrate each other, and to look for those that aren't yet here.

Looking wider still, I would like our community to work together to find ways in which we can be inventive allies to other communities in the fight back against the climate crisis, and swift in

our own actions to cut carbon emissions.

As a last communal thought, I want to sow in your minds the possibility of playing a part in strengthening the ASD. Before we know it, more Board places will be up for renewal, and this really is a spot any one of us can occupy. We can and will continue to benefit from each others voices and supporting arms over the coming year, and whatever you have to give, whatever you are strengthens the fibres of our association as we set sail for the next stretch.

Happy reading!

Melanie Wilson, ASD Chairperson



Remembering R. Murray Schafer

R. Murray Schafer, the much admired Canadian composer, writer and acoustic ecologist died aged 88 on 14 August 2021, following a long period of illness with Alzheimer's disease.

Amongst many other sonic achievements, and perhaps most pertinent for us, Schafer took the nascent concept of the term 'soundscape' and popularised it, publishing his research and theories in 1977 in *The Tuning of the World*. In so doing, Schafer brought clear, imaginative focus to the fabric and experience of the sonic landscapes we inhabit, and their precious nature. His work ranged across genres including symphonies, operas and chamber works, but he was best known and cherished for his trailblazing pieces for the outdoors, in which he wove the live sounds of nature into his music.

His ethos sustains, and attests to the vivid power of a life lived well through listening: "We are the composers of this huge, miraculous composition that's going on around us, and we can improve it or we can destroy it."

For more information on acoustic ecology, check out the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology: wfae.net



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Alexandra Faye Braithwaite



VICKI HILL

Alexandra Faye Braithwaite and I trained at LAMDA together and we've been pals ever since. She hasn't ever let me mix one of her shows, but I won't hold that against her. Despite knowing her for nearly a decade, I was nevertheless transfixed when I listened to a podcast episode that she featured in. It was an episode of *My Shitty Actor Boyfriend* and she spoke so eloquently and openly about mental health and working in sound. So I asked her if she wouldn't mind talking about it again with me, along with collaboration, her musical influences and working outside of London.

Alexandra Faye Braithwaite: I'm just going to pretend that you don't know me, because it makes it a bit less weird. I'm Alexandra Faye Braithwaite and I'm a sound designer and composer.

Vicki Hill: How did you get into sound?

AFB: I got into sound initially when I went to university at the University of Northampton. I thought I wanted to be an actor but turns out I wasn't very good at all. And all the staff there basically pointed me in the way of sound and speakers, so I spent a lot of time with the production staff there instead of doing the what the actual course was. And then they kind of pointed me in the direction of LAMDA to do Stage Management and Technical Theatre to learn the technical elements of sound. I've always been in bands, since I was really little. So, music has always been really important to me. Training at LAMDA cemented the technical aspects of sound for me and then, obviously, I wanted to move a little bit further and start writing music and sound effects and playing a

bit more with sound and soundscapes.

You've worked in so many theatres and collaborated on so many shows, can you pick a highlight?

AFB: I did a show in Beirut, in Lebanon, which was absolutely incredible called *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, with a company called The Faction. We spent just over 10 days in Lebanon, we did it in two different venues over there, which felt really important, and it was really well received. And yeah, that's definitely a highlight. Flying to Lebanon for work was pretty incredible.

What are your musical influences?

AFB: Musical influences?.. I mean so many to choose from. I'll need to look at my Spotify. (She did: 'Noga Erez, Radiohead, Banks, Avro Pärt and more experimental sound based music like Amulets, Tim Hecker, Ben Frost.')

What would you like to see normalised in our industry?

AFB: I think in terms of what we, as people

I'm absolutely obsessed with learning as much as I can about everything, which is really useful but also means that I won't sleep until 6am

working in theatre and in this industry should normalise, or at least try to make a start towards normalising is acknowledging the fact that we work really long hours, and it's really hard to have a routine in the day, unless you're a superhero. It's really hard to have a routine in a week. It's really hard to hold down relationships and be around for family events, and weddings and funerals because ultimately, you know that one wedding in the middle of October, is actually my entire tech and then you'd have to turn down an entire job, which is essentially your wage for the entire month. In order to go to that one wedding in one month.

These are things that I don't feel that we talk about enough, because it can take a lot from us and I can only speak for myself and the people that I know but there are a lot of dark moments and a lot of moments that you wish you were there for and you wish you had showed up for and that can pile in on you and fill your glass up, so you don't really have much room to be good, not only at your job, but to your friends and your family.



You spoke really brilliantly on the podcast about learning from getting things wrong. Do you think that it's part of being a creative?

AFB: You can read all the books in the world but our work as sound technicians or sound engineers or sound designers is very practical. It's very experimental, and there's no right or wrong because it's all human experience and human error in a way. Even mixing the show, it's how that human feels, how that human feels in response to the music, how it feels with people on stage.

You also can very easily get it wrong; you can slip or you can forget because it is all human error and I think that getting things wrong is really really important because you can then grow and learn and you can think 'oh god I wouldn't do like that again!' or 'I won't do it like that because that didn't work that time' and I think that's really important. I don't think that any of us should expect to be at the top of our game at any point. We should try. That's all we can do... try. But yeah, I think that getting things wrong is really important, as is learning from mistakes. And actually, sometimes the moments where things go wrong are the most exciting moments in our industry.

The other thing that I really loved hearing about in the podcast was you talking about

your own experiences with your mental health. How do you feel about talking about it? How do you feel that your mental health affects your creativity? Is it hard to work on a comedy if you're feeling low?

AFB: It's obviously quite hard to speak about my own personal mental health but I'm hoping that in doing that, it will make others feel more comfortable. Personally, it definitely affects my creative output when I'm feeling low; I tend to hide away and not speak to anybody for a really long time and it's really hard to manage that especially doing this job. Everybody wants a piece of your time, everybody needs you. Everybody needs it yesterday. Everybody needs to have a conversation, everyone needs to have a meeting. And having mental health difficulties, depression and anxiety, can be really difficult because it's the exact opposite thing that you want to do and you want to just kind of be quiet in a dark room on your own.

It has taken me quite a long time to find that middle ground and I think that it's about being kind to yourself; not burning yourself out and setting boundaries. It has taken me years to find that. I think what's difficult is that the pandemic has had all of us locked in for a while and not doing our jobs. It feels like it's kind of interrupted all those coping mechanisms that we all had in place and that we're all able to

utilise and kind of go to, you know, we kind of unlearn because we're scared and you know we're scared for our families and we're scared for our friends, and then, yeah, I think it's gonna take him a while again to get to get back to where we were and get back to looking after ourselves and each other. We've all been through something. I think it's really important, especially right now, to look after each other.

In terms of working on a play that will be happy when I'm having a shit time, I guess it's actually really useful because, you know, everybody likes to laugh. So sometimes I will sway more towards a play that's kind of less, let's say head-y because it does cost a lot.

So many projects can be about mental health and it's great to work on something that you're feeling inside and that's when you get the best creativity, because you're digging deep into something that you feel. And then, you know, putting it out there. But, I find it quite useful sometimes to just kind of stop and do a more or less head-y projects and that doesn't mean the quality is in different. Hopefully, it just means that it doesn't cost as much emotionally.

Do you think that representation is important?

AFB: I think it's really important. I think it's really important that we can look sideways and up

and down and see people that look like us. For me: queer, identifying as a woman, I think that's really important. But I also think it's really important to be challenged and and inspired by people that don't look like me. I think that's just as important as well. I think that we can all learn from each other.

In a time when drama school fees are so expensive, do you think that it's the only path into sound design?

AFB: It's difficult because I went to drama school at a time when the fees weren't so high, so I could work for the entire year up to it, in order to afford it. I lived at home with my dad and actually worked for my dad too. Which was really shit and boring but I had six months in order to make as much money as I physically could doing absolutely everything. I worked in car parks as well; I got up really early in the mornings and helped people park their cars for major events. Basically I just did every job under the sun, to pay for fees. And then beyond that, I just rented a really tiny place in London and then as long as I could make rent and pay for a travel card every month, then I knew that I would be okay.

Food wasn't really a necessity and I definitely lost a lot of weight. I didn't have soles on the bottom of my shoes which my mum found

you can slip or you can forget because it is all human error and I think that getting things wrong is really really important because you can then grow and learn

hilarious but she couldn't really help me out. She sent down tins of beans that used to be split up.

It got a bit easier after my first year of training because I could work in the industry so used to do overnight get ins at the Hampstead, which actually paid really well which covered my travel and a bit of my rent, which was great. So then I became a little bit more stable. And I used to work as a technician at the Lyric Hammersmith and I was coming in to LAMDA for the day and going there in the evening which made things a lot easier.

So, I mean, I'm an advocate for both. I don't think you have to go to drama school especially with the fees being so high. I would implore anybody that wants to go into sound design to contact sound designers that you admire, and that you've heard about and ask if you can go have a chat and go work with them. Go shadow them.

It is difficult when you have to work alongside that, but then you can hopefully get your first show or your first opportunity or they will potentially give you a first opportunity and that's how things grow. That's how you get your name out there.

If you could change anything about tech periods, what would it be?

AFB: I mean it's really difficult because obviously buildings have to operate in a certain way and they have to operate in a way that's sustainable.

But I think it's important that you look at the creatives and the production staff that are on that specific project, and you look at what needs they have. I think maybe more of an open conversation at the beginning of the project. And to feel like an open conversation can be had might be useful because you know, obviously some people have childcare responsibilities and things like that.

I think even just to moving rehearsals to eleven 'til seven could really really help. I was in a tech recently where the tech ended at six o'clock so we had our evenings, which was actually really nice because it meant that there was actual time to go home and work for the next day.

I personally do like working through because when I'm there I absolutely love it so much and I just want to be there all the time so I'm kind of excited for the next morning, but I think probably I was more productive because I had that evening off.

What advice would you give to yourself ten years ago?

AFB: Well number one: It *is* possible.

Nobody knows this except my partner, but I used to come home from LAMDA and cry because I wanted to be a sound designer so much, and I didn't know how to do it. And I used to watch shows and just be... I don't think jealous, but I just wanted it so badly.

I used to live with someone, and if they read this they'll know who they are, but they came into my bedroom once and I was on the floor crying because I didn't know how to do it, I didn't think I was good enough but I really want I really wanted to be a sound designer. So I guess the

piece of advice would be just keep going.

I think life in general, regardless of work, has so many ups and downs and twists and turns and we will have to fight through so much. So just keep going. Keep working hard and keep being nice to people and just do your best, and keep learning.

I'm absolutely obsessed with learning as much as I can about everything, which is really useful but also means that I won't sleep until 6am. I recently got obsessed with modular synthesis and I basically watched every single video that YouTube had to offer.

Do you have an agent? Can you tell me about that process?

AFB: Yeah, I do have an agent. I don't think it's necessary, but it's very useful. I guess it's like having an accountant, just doing a different job. It's just that little bit of help, especially being a freelancer, mostly to sort out contracts. My agent also helps by looking at my diary and letting me know if it's too much. Just that extra support is super helpful.

In terms of getting an agent, I got to a point where I'd had so many contracts and there was a contract issue I think on a job, and I felt like my best interests were not at heart and I needed

some advice. So I just emailed a couple of people about. At this point I'd had a few associate gigs and I'd done a few things and I had a little bit of work coming in, and I think I just needed that support.

And there's definitely a difference between wanting it and needing it for sure. I think you'll know that moment. And when you get to that moment, then I think agents will be hopefully greet you with open arms.

You started your career being London-based and have since moved back up North. Do you feel a pressure to be in London? Do you think that theatre is London-centric?

AFB: I guess there was a lot of pressure at the beginning to be in London. I was born in Preston, and grew up 'up North' and I always wanted to come back. I never saw myself staying [in London] forever. You know, I might eventually end up coming back because I do love London and a lot of my friends live there. But I love working in theatres outside of London, I love all the different cities and places and all the adventures that can be had. I also love the different range of audiences outside of London and how different audiences react to plays... it is very different.

As you start to leave London, theatres become

more important for the communities that live around those theatres, and, you know, there are some people who've been going to the theatres for like 30/40 years so it's important to serve them.

But, I don't necessarily want to put down theatres in London and maybe theatre is London-centric because of the sheer number of theatres in London. I do love making work in London, it's just, for me I love working up north and it's better for my mental health; it feels like I can have a little bit more of a life as well as working in theatre which was really important to me and my mental health.

What have you got coming up that we can keep an eye (or ear) open for?

AFB: I'm doing a show at Stratford East called *Shining City* by Conor McPherson, directed by Nadia Fall, which I'm really excited about. I've actually only done one show there but I love the space, and I really love working with Nadia, so I'm really excited about that. And then as soon as I finished that, I have a flight to Dublin and go back to the Abbey Theatre and I'm opening the show called *Purple Snowflakes and Titty Wanks*, which I can't wait to see you write in this interview. It's a co-production with the Abbey Theatre and The Royal Court, which was supposed to happen during the pandemic. So we'll do it a different

way around – we're doing it at the Abbey first, and then taking it to the Court.

I might do a Christmas show and then maybe take a little bit of a break – I feel like the White Cliffs of Dover... in a storm. So it'd be nice if I can have a little bit of a break towards the end of the year.

Do you enjoy collaborating? Who are your favourite collaborators and what makes it work?

AFB: I love collaborating. It's really hard to pick what are all the ingredients that make that work really beautifully, because sometimes it just happens to you when you least expect to.

The best collaborations are with people that push you, with people that sometimes push you to do things that you wouldn't; to work beyond your instincts. They're not telling you to do something, they're opening up a world that you've never even thought of and then you can explore, it's like they've opened a door that was locked and then you go into that room and start exploring and start picking stuff out within your own experiences in that room.

Some of my greatest collaborations have actually been with lighting designers. There are quite a lot of lighting designers that I love

working with because... you know when you get those cues right or you get that long sequence right together and you've planned it for ages? It's so, so satisfying.

And also you can help each other out; if a lighting change happens and it needs to happen quickly, and there's no sound with it, then that can be feel quite empty. And it works the other way around too; if I score a certain section and the lighting doesn't move with me, then that can be quite laggy so I think it's really important that we're running in parallel to create the flow and rhythm of the show. Sometimes actually doing the opposite to each other can be useful to create a discombobulation.

And then beyond that, it's the director, and how much I can push them and they can push me. I really enjoy that. There was a show that I worked on before we went into the pandemic, in which I had written a song. It had live music in it and I had two live musicians, both my friends, Becky Wilkie from Rash Dash and Sophie Galpin who is a successful musician. I'd written it initially and then we kind of collaborated on the final product in rehearsals.

And there was one song that was about six minutes long, and I absolutely loved it. Honestly,



I would have run down the street naked to try and get this song in the show. And the director said that we couldn't put a six minute long song in the show without there being any action on stage. I was like, 'can we *try*?' And then, we cut it down a little bit; it wasn't six minutes in the end, but then in that moment in which the protagonist's anguish reached its heights, we played the song, with a movement sequence and again with the lighting design that was just beautiful, beautiful things that followed the music... it made the show. I think to this day and I don't know whether I'll ever surpass that feeling of what that felt like to take a lot of space. Not just musically but also as an artist to take up so much space. It's probably, and will remain forever the highlight of my life.

What was it like working during the pandemic?

AFB: More than anything, I was just grateful to have work. I worked for Hermes for a while which was ridiculous because I drive a Toyota Aygo.

You did some online work too? How was that? Do you think that that type of work will continue?

AFB: I was just so grateful to be able to do my job more than anything. In terms of that kind of work, I think it's really important that it continues in a way that's maybe not so

abundant because I think it's really useful for access – some people can't make it to the theatre, and I think it's really brilliant that they can then still be a part of that and still connect with the work.

But I guess what we all love about theatre is that it's live and things can go wrong, you know, an actor might corpse. I think the whole point of theatre is live, and that's what we all do it, because there is nothing like sitting in that audience on opening night and everybody buzzing around you in anticipation of the show, and what they might feel... and there's nothing like it.

But do you think that some of the things, like online production meetings, are useful?

AFB: I think production meetings being online is super useful. I mean, I used to do seven hour round trips just to attend a production meeting for an hour in which all I said was 'Nothing for me'. So, I think that a production meeting being online is really useful. And also, you don't have to be anywhere, you don't have to catch a train, you don't have to rush, you're not running up 17 flights of stairs before you get there so actually, you're on it. You can have everything that you need available in front of you, and you can really get in and ask the questions and you can also attend every production meeting which was

actually really hard to do when you're trying to juggle five projects.

I once had to get on a plane for production meeting, which is, thinking about now is just insane especially for the environment.

Also just on that, there were options throughout lockdown to be in rehearsals on Zoom. So you could kind of just log in and log out whenever you needed to and I found that really useful. I think probably a lot of people have a lot of things against that but I could just log into that rehearsal room and kind of check in or watch run or segment that so for a lot of projects, no matter where in the country I was. I managed to watch so many more runs than I normally would be able to.

How do you maintain good mental health?

What do you do when you're feeling like you're struggling?

AFB: In the first instance I just spend a day in bed watching films and watching documentaries, because my body just needs to rest. And then eating well, that's a huge thing for me. Making sure that I'm eating the correct things at the correct times and not just some chips at midnight with a beer. I also try not to drink at home because we drink a lot when we're away; making sure I'm drinking water. I

also try to make sure that I'm doing things that I love outside of work like watching the football and spending time with my partner. Just, just trying to reconnect myself and what I like. Because you can easily pour all your energy into a project and that becomes your entire world for that period of time and then it's all gone quite quickly so it's really important to reconnect. I feel quite a lot of anxiety about going outside now because we haven't been outside for so long and that's kind of sparked my anxiety in quite a lot of ways. I think that's just something I'm going to have to just work through and we're all going to have to work through.

Thank you so much for talking so openly about your mental health. I know that it's so personal and sometimes hard to talk about.

AFB: I'm trying to not feel anxious about the fact that it is historically seen as a weakness. I don't think it's a weakness. I think if I didn't have the problems in terms of mental health I had and have, then maybe I wouldn't be able to do what I do on the stage, because I think that having mental health issues helps you to connect to emotions and feelings in a way that is that transcends anything else. I don't know if that's very profound or not. ●

MORE INFO

alexandrafayebraithwaite.com

Mini profile



FLORENCE HAND

What is your current project and role?

Although currently on my summer break, in a couple of weeks I am operating a 'RADA Talks' session for the Vanbrugh Theatre and for broadcast at a later date. I also have some exciting compositional work on an unconfirmed project coming up. I have just finished as sound designer and composer on Shakespeare's *As You Like It* for the GBS Theatre, RADA, my favourite project yet as it gave me a chance to really explore composition and to workshop and collaborate on musical ideas with the actors.

What is your favourite part of your work/process?

The overwhelming sense of achievement! Although I feel this comes at different points of the process for a designer compared to a PSE, (both roles we do as part of the course), it still just as satisfying when everything comes together.

What would you change about your work/the industry?

Although we're making progress and changes are being made, I still feel we have a long way to go to improving our inclusivity and diversity. I personally would love to see more young people coming from different backgrounds and more outreach programmes, as a lot of the young technical theatre and stage management students come from schools which had the money to enable students to explore backstage, and a lot of potentially very talented students never get to explore and find their passion whilst at school.

What's your top trick/tip?

Always be willing to learn and keep involved with new and developing technology, hardwares and DAWs. As a student, I'm constantly learning and being introduced to new ways of approaching things! For example, having been introduced to so many DAWs over the past two years, I now use a mixture of Ableton Live, Reaper, Logic and Sibelius, rather than just one. I find that each one has a strength for certain situations that the others lack.

What are you currently listening to at the moment?

A lot of the music I composed for *As You Like It* was based around modal folk music, so I found myself listening to a lot of cinematic music of the same style, i.e. that from *Game of Thrones* and *Lord of the Rings*, and still find myself gravitating towards that even after. However, I have also recently been really enjoying Muse, particularly their earlier music, as I love their fusion of multiple music genres, sometimes even specific classical pieces, all into one song.



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Mini profile

GARETH
SWINDAIL-PARRY

What is your current project/what are you currently up to?

Currently, I am getting ready for Sound Designing *Human Animals* – a fantastic dystopian play by Stef Smith that has many parallels with the Covid pandemic, and the climate crisis, which I feel will really resonate with people. I'm also continuing to compose as part of a sound label called Unredacted Productions as we work through our summer commissions, and also do some work in some local studios. It's nice to be busy again!

What is the favourite part of your work/process?

My favourite thing has to be working with other new creatives, and watching ideas blossom into life on the stage. After so long without seeing people's faces, and not having that same level of spontaneity with Covid, I'm very excited to return to the collaborative process!

What would you change about your work/the industry?

I think that, although progress is being made, there is still work to do on making this a more diverse and inclusive industry. I think that mental health is something that still needs more awareness and support, but the progress already being made is fantastic to see, and I think the sound industry, in particular, has so many wonderful, supportive people in it.

What's your top trick/tip?

Never stop learning! This industry is constantly changing and developing, and keeping an open mind to learning new skills is always good. Even with skills I thought I knew well, I love learning different approaches to the same thing, as often a different way of thinking about tasks can lead to saving time, or leading to different creative pathways.

What are you listening to at the moment?

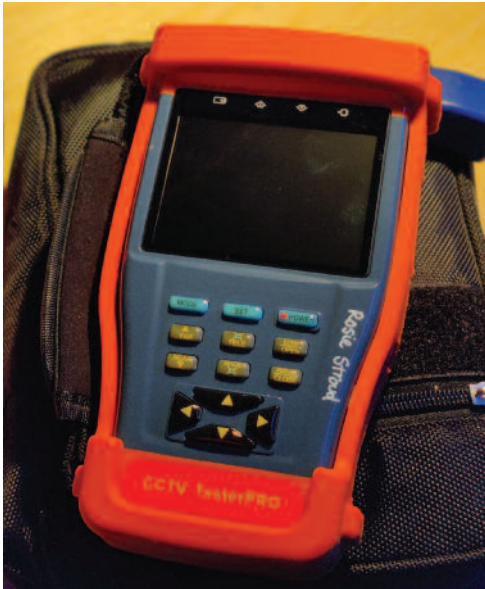
Outside of sound in the theatre or studios, I am a Welsh Folk musician so I'm constantly listening to the wonderful works of Ar Log and Crasdant. I'm also obsessed with film and game scores, and always find inspiration in the scores of Patrick Doyle and Jerry Goldsmith (to name just a few).



A few of my favourite things

ROSIE STROUD

Previous work includes
Cats international tour, various shows at National
Theatre, *Wonderland* UK tour, *Wind in the Willows* UK
tour.





My Campervan

My personal lockdown project is my digs on wheels!

I bought an old drainage company's van and kitted it out with everything I'd want in the perfect touring theatre digs. A comfy bed, hob, toilet and plenty of storage space for clothes, tools... and a motorbike.

Having toured the UK a few times I've found the quality of available digs has gone down and the price has gone up, and this is my solution!



My bicycle

I bought this little old thing for twenty pounds on eBay. It folds up to fit in the van, has three gears and a faint, charming squeak that lets pedestrians know I'm coming.

I've found cycling to be an incredibly efficient way of getting around, avoiding the packed trains and buses, which nowadays make me feel a little anxious. And since it's technically exercise I can afford that extra slice of cake... right?

My CCTV Tester

A slightly geeky item to finish.

I bought this wonderful thing whilst on tour in China. It saves the exceedingly awkward and frustrating 'down a bit, no too far, okay stop! Nope, you went past it' conversation that happens whilst focusing front of house cameras. Instead of a two-person job, I can now run up to the balcony and zoom in and out to my heart's content until it's perfect.



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Bouncing forward



VICKI HILL

Rebecca, my youngest sister, is storming her way through her Masters in Risk, Security and Politics. She spends her time analysing and reflecting on socio-political events and thinking about things like resilience and strategy. I don't envy her being a student at this time. But I do see her observing this chaos with an air of knowing; she seems to have the words to explain it all. So I asked her.

We talked about resilience. About how a community, such as ours, can survive such a turbulent period.

Resilience; how a community endures and grows through periods of uncertainty. Rebecca is much more theoretical about this and made comparisons to coral reefs surviving climate change, whereas I wanted answers to Brexit and COVID-19. But bear with us.

'I have spent a lot of time thinking about resilience. For many, this term has become a buzzword, it's everywhere. Yet each time it's used, it takes a different shape or meaning... Are we talking about psychological resilience and



one's ability to bounce back from a negatively perceived and received scenario? Is this idea of 'bouncing back' even desirable?'

I would hazard that this is a complicated question. Yes, we want to spring back to applauding press night crowds and tepid front of house wine. We'll hop up ladders and rig speakers. We want to launch ourselves into tech rehearsals and orchestra pits. But then, when you look back really closely on that last job pre-pandemic, there were some less-than-rosy bits too. What about the missed meal breaks and that time you had a bucket next to the desk because you were the only one who could mix? Little less rosy, little more cloudy.

In a world where we are now painfully aware of contagious illness and show closures, we should be talking about comprehensive cover ... as a necessity

‘Do you need to go back to who you were before?’ I do, but I want some changes. But before we get to that, spare a thought for those who won’t be joining us. Some have started out on exciting new career journeys and should be commended for their diversity. Others have had to have hard looks at their commitments and have had to turn to more stable workplaces. It’s for them that my heart breaks. Theatre has let them down. Rebecca clearly defines all of these paths as resilient. Which ever way a person has managed to survive is active resilience in the face of an impossible time.

‘Surely being resilient to COVID, one could argue, has entailed a degree of bouncing forward as a society... over the course of the Coronavirus pandemic, society has undeniably transformed with facemask-wearing and social distancing becoming the new norm for so many. So, even though we are now slowly bouncing back to the way of life that we recognise with fewer

restrictions, we have and are continuing to bounce forward and adapt into a society that has a greater resilience to the spread of infectious disease’.

There’s a lot in here. Taking the politics of face masks out of it, it is a refreshing new norm to have people off when they are sick and everything being wiped down. I hope it’s here to stay to be quite honest. We are all in such confined spaces and we so rarely acknowledge that a cough or cold can actually very quickly bring a production to its knees. Pass me the antibac, I’ll be keeping it.

Rebecca is quick to add that not everyone has the same level of resilience. She points to a person’s socio-cultural identities and individual privilege as factors that can affect a person’s ability to handle these changes. She does say that community resilience is a ‘powerful’ force in the face of adversity. I would agree

wholeheartedly; I have sought refuge in groups of people who are going through the same things as myself. She added that all members of a community have value and contribute to its existence, even if they are ‘lurkers’ who don’t actively post and campaign. Everyone who belongs to our community makes us a larger and more supportive presence. Isn’t that a lovely thought?

Amongst all of this, I think I was most excited by the term ‘bouncing forward’. We have been calling it ‘Reset Better’ and it has been a hot topic in the AAPTLE meetings. Until I had this chat with Rebecca I had seen this as a wish list, an opportunity for us all to be talking about new contracts at the same time and so a great time to use our combined force to ask for change; real breaks, better pay and job shares... But maybe it isn’t a wish list. I think that it is actually a survival strategy.

In a world where we are now painfully aware of contagious illness and show closures, we should be talking about comprehensive cover and taking sick days not as an aspiration that rocks the boat during contract negotiations, but as a necessity.

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"Believing that line array has to be the standard in theatres is a big mistake."

Andreas Hammerich
Theatrical Sound Coordinator,
Stage Entertainment GmbH



Meeting Tingying Dong 董汀滢



VICKI HILL

Tingying Dong is a sound designer/composer, and she's the sound designer behind Rob Madge's *My Son's A Queer, But What Can You Do?* which played at The Turbine Theatre earlier this year and was all over my social media feed with rave reviews and high praise for the autobiographical piece. Having graduated in 2019, Ting has been incredibly busy curating a diverse portfolio of devised, theatre and online work as well as co-founding Out of the Blue theatre company.

I caught up with her to ask about her career so far:

Tingying Dong: I had always been very interested in theatre. But I didn't make up my mind about doing theatre as a career until quite late. I did some degrees before but I wasn't passionate about them. And then I started to get to know more about the backstage roles. I felt that for me this seemed to be a sensible choice as a career.

I got into drama school, LAMDA, thinking that I might do Stage Management. But then because the course is multi-disciplined, I tried a full range of things. So really, I was introduced to sound at LAMDA.

I knew nothing about sound until that first year. In the first year at LAMDA we did a sound project [where students create a soundscape using ProTools and Qlab] and it was super fun. Gary [Trow, Production Sound Tutor] was like, 'yeah, you're really good at this'. That was great

to hear, especially because it tied in well with my love of music.

That's when I started to think, okay, this is what I can do. And this is what I'm good at. Probably. So then from the second year, I started to specialise in sound. I did placements at the Lyric Hammersmith and at Autograph. When I graduated after three years, opportunities to sound design came to me. So here I am.

I started by doing fringe shows and then the pandemic hit and there was not much happening for quite a few months. Then I started to do some online projects like radio and digital theatre.

At the end of last year Stratford East came to me. And I ended up sound designing one of the shows for this new season (*The Sun, The Moon, And The Stars* by Dipo Baruwa-Etti). It was my

first mid-scale production, which was really exciting.

Did you find that you had to change the your workflow to work online and digital?

TD: Often the turnaround is quicker! It is different in that, in theatre you would create a Qlab file with a cue stack, but with radio work or short films, the sound is much more closely tied into the text.

But I think in return, it also helped me to develop a different approach when I'm doing theatre again.

Can you tell me more about that? About how it's changed your approach to theatre?

TD: When I compose for radio play, I have that recorded text with me. And then I add the sound or composition to that. So then I can really make a flow with the text.



I'm not musically trained, so lots of times, it's about the feeling and finding the right sounds and then putting them together and layering them up to create a soundscape

But previously, when I've done theatre, it hasn't been as detailed. I have found that I really like how detailed it can be. So after doing these, when I do live theatre again, I will try to give that detail to the underscores and the soundscapes.

Did you find the collaboration process different online?

TD: It is different, for instance there's no lighting or set designer. Usually it's just me and the director working closely, but again it's online, we don't really have that in-person connection. It's all done through zoom or phone calls. So, even now, there are quite a few [directors that] I haven't met in person.

Do you think that your career will be shaped differently because of doing this online work? Will you continue to do it?

TD: My main passion is still in theatre, the live element just feels different. It was great to have that experience with working in radio and short films. And it is really interesting to do. So if there's opportunities coming to me, I will still take them.

But still, I think online work actually reminds me how much I miss doing live theatre.

You do love composition as well. So, what inspires your composition? Do you have any artists that inspire you?

TD: I suppose my taste in music is kind of

specific. I quite like music that has synthetic sounds and sort of dreamy, like soundscapes with that kind of expansiveness.

I'm not musically trained, so lots of times, it's about the feeling and finding the right sounds and then putting them together and layering them up to create a soundscape.

What is your go-to set-up? What are your favourite tools to work with?

TD: I use Logic and the MIDI instruments on Logic. Also I like Spitfire which has lots of different MIDI instruments.

I am still quite early career and still compiling my pool of sounds. I started with the free options. Spitfire has a free range called LABS, which is really, really useful. They have great sounds. And recently I started to also purchase some of the Spitfire instruments.

I have a couple of keyboards; a larger one at home and then a smaller one that I can carry with me. I have a Zoom recorder and I have also bought a binaural headset from Sennheiser so I

have started doing recordings with that. It's just fun.

Do you find time to play and explore sound outside of work?

TD: I'm finding it a bit hard to find the balance of doing commissioned work and my own projects, I'm taking on a lot of other people's projects! At the moment I really don't have much time for myself to explore.

I'm trying to find a better balance with that, because I do also want to develop my own skills more and try to develop my own work. It's just trying to find the time to.

Have you developed a process for working on a theatre piece?

TD: I've got a general workflow that I follow, but because I am still quite new, I haven't really developed a certain structure of how I approach content creation. With each project, the process can still be varied. And I'm still finding new things from each process.

Every project is still quite fresh and, I'm just



I do take lots of inspiration from the rehearsal process. I will try to be at rehearsals and just watch how the actors and the directors work

exploring how I can do this. But maybe further down the line, I would have a more structured approach, and that might feel different.

It also depends on the director. For example, on the show I just did, [the director] challenged me to make two or three different versions of underscore for one scene. That really challenged me to think what can I use? What kind of sound can I use? What different sounds can I use for this scene? It was challenging, but it was also really great, because I feel that I really got to explore different sounds.

But then some directors prefer safer options which doesn't push me as much.

Do you enjoy collaboration? Who do you enjoy collaborating with?

TD: I do take lots of inspiration from the rehearsal process. I will try to be at rehearsals

and just watch how the actors and the directors work. I usually make a lot of notes from the script before rehearsals start and then when I watch the actors in the room, it gives me new and fresh ideas. Also, it's interesting to see how they react to sound. They really react to it. I enjoy that relationship a lot.

If you're so involved in the rehearsal process and then in tech, how do you feel about handing your work over to an operator? Is it like handing over a baby?

TD: It's so important to feel that your work is in safe hands. I like cues to be accurate and I design in a really specific way and I need to trust that that's going to continue after I've gone.

I really appreciate when the operator or DSM really gets it, and then they can do a really good job and fulfil my design. So it's my job to make sure that they get it, that I have communicated

what it is that I am trying to achieve.

Do you find working on devised projects different from working with something that may be already been produced?

TD: Yeah, I suppose the level of involvement is the main difference. I feel that on a devised project, I will be involved right from the beginning and I will have much more input into the process. I feel part of the ensemble, creating something together, rather than creating something to go on top of what's already there. It's really exciting.

What have you got coming up that we can look out for?

TD: In September/October, I'm doing a show called *We Like to Move It, Move It* [by Amy Ng and Donnacadh O'Briain] which is devised around the topic of immigration, which is relatable to me.

I'm also going up the Storyhouse in Chester to design a great adaptation of *Antigone*. As soon as I read the script, I knew I really wanted to work on it, so I'm really excited. ●

MORE INFO
tingyingdong.com

NINA DUNN

STANDING BY

A walk through London's dark theatres in the time of pandemic

EDITED BY SARAH RUSHTON-READ | FOREWORD BY BONNIE LANGFORD

The Dark Theatres Project began as a photo essay captured in deserted theatres during the first lockdown. They convey a sudden emptiness, silence and a sense of spaces patiently waiting for their audiences and workers to return.

The photographs have been published in a hardback book alongside stories from cast and crew who were in the theatres when they closed and features a foreword written by Bonnie Langford.

All profits are donated to four theatrical charities to support workers and buildings both now and in the future. You can buy your copy online or at the National Theatre bookshop.

This book captures a moment in time:
moment in history.



www.darktheatresproject.org

Mental health matters



VICKI HILL

In 2019 Mig Burgess Walsh conducted a survey into the mental health of the backstage sector. And as our industry ground to a halt last year, she relaunched the survey to see how we were being affected and to help provide some insights as we eventually returned to work.

As sound professionals, we contributed to 14% of the respondents to the survey and as the second best represented sector (only outstripped by lighting practitioners), we should see these results as relevant to us. I'm not going to report all of Mig's findings – she has done a fantastic job of that herself – but there are a few things that I think that we should think about.

First of all, as Mig writes, 'our industry has a higher prevalence of mental health conditions. (39.45% national average 25%) We also seem to attract workers with preexisting conditions.

Although the reasons for this are unclear, it needs to be taken into consideration when thinking about positively supporting mental health in the workplace'.

Our entire industry is built upon the minds of our creatives and technicians, and yet 98% of those who responded to the survey felt that their mental health is perceived differently to their physical health. What that will often mean is that we don't feel able to discuss our mental health needs and boundaries in the same way that we do so about our physical abilities. 60% didn't feel that they could talk to their employers at all about their mental health. The gap between managers and employees/freelancers is widened at this point, as 84% of managers felt that they could talk to their staff about mental health. The disparity here is clearly where the work needs to be done.

Applause For Thought, the brainchild of Raffaella Covino, is acting to close this void through education. Speaking to *The Guardian*, Raffaella says 'equipping people with the right knowledge both breaks the stigma and assists in stopping

more serious conditions developing' (13 August 2021). The company has rolled out a range of free and low-cost training sessions and workshops to give managers and individuals a starting point when it comes to understanding and supporting the mental health of their staff. The Mental Health First Aid program has over 900 graduates from the arts and entertainment sector and Applause For Thought hasn't stopped there... it is working directly with seven West End heavyweights, including *Hamilton* and *Mary Poppins* to improve the support for cast and crew.

Both Mig and Raffaella address the return to work in their work. Mig's survey has revealed that just over 63% feel that the thought of returning to work is causing them stress and anxiety. Raffaella (again in her *Guardian* interview) offers the explanation that 'the feeling of needing to be grateful for actually being in work, is a huge pressure. There is an added stress of jobs being cancelled because of coronavirus and the "pingdemic"'. This is in addition, of course to the pressure of finding work and delivering roles that have been dormant for over a year.



68% of Mig's participants don't think that there is adequate mental health and wellbeing support for their return to work, and so she has offered five recommendations to form the beginning of a strategy to rise to this call for help:

- Acknowledge the high prevalence rate of mental health in the backstage industry.
- Commit to being proactive in the provision for support of staff for mental health and well-being
- Work to better understand and offer empathy towards the needs of mental health and well-being for the work force
- Pledge to work on creating and cultivating a positive cultural change backstage towards mental health and well-being.
- Work to promote an open culture of communication on mental health and wellbeing. One where people are safe to talk about this topic and can be heard non-judgmentally and without risk of jeopardising future employment.

I managed to speak to Raffaella about Mig's research and she said that whilst it was sad to see that so many of our industry were struggling, it does make her feel that Applause For Thought are in the right place at the right time. As it turns out, they have been laying the groundwork with organisations such as

Cameron Mackintosh's offices for the last 14 months, preparing the entire company (not just the backstage staff and crew) for their return to work.

Raffaella and her team of educators and mental health professionals have devised a scheme to aid shows to return and successfully run and the steps in the scheme tie in beautifully with Mig's recommendations.

The team work with the company to create a return to work briefing that lays out the company's commitment to a non-discriminatory policy towards the mental health of all its employees. It is a commitment to take all mental health conditions and concerns as seriously as physical health issues.

Two or three mental health first aiders are trained as part of the company to provide on-site assistance and a point of contact for anyone with concerns. The return to work process acknowledges the concerns of workers as they re-enter the theatre and provides multiple avenues to express concerns and ask for help, both via anonymous forms as part of the sessions.

Company managers are put at the centre of the communication (and rightfully so) and are

supported by Applause For Thought in conversations regarding the mental health status of the teams and the changes that would improve working life for the staff. The team will also collect data at the start and end of contracts so that companies can objectively analyse their efforts to make the workplace safer for their staff.

Heads of department are given specific training by Applause For Thought so that they can not only support their teams, but also so that they can safeguard against situations that could put the wellbeing of the departments at risk. Importantly, Applause For Thought are also providing resource packs to theatres to promote local resources that are available to theatre practitioners both in times of crisis and for those wanting to further their understanding of mental health.

For me, the most groundbreaking step in this plan is maybe the easiest to action. Incidents of mental health are to be recorded in the same way that accidents are conventionally logged. This will provoke accountability and de-stigmatise episodes of crisis as they are objectively recorded in the context of the work environment. Patterns can then be acknowledged and support and strategies can be put in place to improve the workplace for everyone.

Having read Mig's report and undertaken Raffaella's training, my big takeaway is that we need to all be better at communicating with our employers and our employees. We might think that we're doing it already, but the figures are telling us otherwise.

We all need to acknowledge the enormous strain that the pandemic has had, and will continue to have, on our mental health and signpost support in a non-judgemental and accessible way. Our freelance workforce need to be supported in the same way that we look after our employees. It has been encouraging to see the formation of the BECTU branch to represent our freelancers, but I hope to see them have the same access to resources as their PAYE counterparts. ●

MORE INFO

Read Raffaella Covino's full interview on *The Guardian* website and keep your eyes open for the publication of Mig Burgess Walsh's UK Backstage Mental Health Evaluation (2021 Follow Up Survey) as part of her work at GSA.
[applauseforthought.com](https://www.applauseforthought.com)



I am very happy to be able to share this report with you all. It's been a labour of love and I hope that armed with this information that people will now read, digest, think and start to make plans and positive changes to consider the mental health and wellbeing of all the great people we have in our backstage community.

It was a privilege to read all of the responses to this survey, and I read each one with empathy and respect.

Thank you to everyone that took the time to participate, we can only hope now and our collective voice is heard by those that are in a position to make change.

Mig Burgess Walsh





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Sound and self-care



LAURA CAPLIN

Hello! I'm Ginge, Sound Engineer, fully qualified Personal Trainer and Wellbeing Coach.

I am delighted to be invited to share some tips with you about how we can look after ourselves better whilst working the hours we do. Specifically, how we can look after our overall wellbeing.

Having worked in our industry for over a decade, through trial and error I have found ways in which to keep fit and healthy during the longest of days – especially the tech period.

We all know how hard it is to look after ourselves during the 14-15 hour calls, and now more than ever, we need to try and find ways in which to prioritise this. Being mindful of not only ours, but our friends and colleagues' physical and mental health, is a key contributor in looking after ours and their wellbeing.

It is now said that we should be eating 10 portions of fruit and veg a day. Not only is it important for our general health but it is important to feed our gut microbiome healthy foods. This is the bacteria that lives in your digestive tract and has a big impact on our immune system, which is so important in keeping us healthy during the prolonged work days. Our gut microbiome love fruit, veg, nuts, seeds and legumes and a variety of them is best!

Now I know the last thing we want to do on top of a 10 hour plus day is exercise! So, fitting it in where we can, will help keep our body and mind stay active and alert. This can be a few star

jumps, lunges, arm circles or a walk round the block.

During tech when we are on our feet for a lot of the day some quick morning and evening stretches can help relieve tired muscles too. A 10 minute High Intensity Interval Training session in the morning can boost energy and help stimulate our minds ready for the day ahead.

When I am operating, I stand on an anti-fatigue mat, which I have found invaluable. As well as moving around as much as possible so that I am not stood in one position for too long. Dancing along to the show definitely counts as exercise too!

Mixing up the foods we eat over the course of a week is just as important as mixing a show! On our plates we should be aiming to eat the following portions:

- 35% Fruit
- 23% Vegetables
- 13% Protein
- 10% Legumes
- 8% Nuts
- 8% Grains
- 3% other

15 MINUTE SELF CARE ROUTINE

2 minutes

Breathing: in for 6 seconds and out for 4 seconds

3 minutes

Stretch/move your body/star jumps

2 minutes

Journal your thoughts/goals

3 minutes

Write a to-do list

3 minutes

Read a book/news article

2 minutes

Drink a glass of water



However, for us this can be made easier by making sure we get these portions in across one day. Having a stock of rice, tinned beans, frozen fruit and vegetables and some mixed nuts and seeds can help us to prep meals when we don't have time to get to the shops.

I find starting the day with a good breakfast can help me stay on track for the rest of the day. I like to have a smoothie for the commute, or pre-prepared over-night oats with fruit and honey, and even dark chocolate! I add Chia seeds to both of these to add a boost of protein.

Being on the road and staying in hotels can make it hard to make good food choices. I have found having good snacks and choosing healthy breakfast options, such as foods with slow releasing energy like oats helps me throughout the day. Eggs on toast with some fruit is also a good option.

To help make exercise easy and to avoid stiff muscles I often have an exercise band with me. I can use this when there is five minutes here-or-there to keep my muscles active and allow my mind a few minutes break from the intensity of the day. Stepping outside, filling up a water bottle or making a hot drink are good ways to break away and give your mind a chance to reboot. I try to make this a priority two to three

times a day when doing long hours as it can make all the difference in how I react to situations and help gather some clarity.

Maybe leave yourself a post-it note in your script, on your cue sheet or set a reminder on your phone to breathe, be present, have some water and check in with yourself are small things that can make a big difference. Perhaps it could be a team effort for you all to check in on each other?

On busy days I make sure to follow a 15-minute routine to ensure I get time for myself. I also do as much meal prep as I can even if it's two out of three meals and make sure I have plenty of snacks!

I hope this might have been of some use to you! If you have any questions or want to talk through anything that could help you and your wellbeing please do send me a message – I'd love to chat with you!

You can send me an email (lauracappers@gmail.com) or send me a message on Instagram (@allstationsfitness or @gingercappers). ●

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