Needfinding

Art & Digital Media: **Sound & Music Production**

Katie Pieschala
Nathan Sariowan
Pramod Kotipalli

Our Team

Katie

symsys soph/junior
singer, pianist, composer

Nathan

symsys sophomore
violinist, bassist and producer

Pramod

n-th year MS CS student
"former" violist & pianist
composes for short films

Participant Selection

- Music engineering & production
- Emphasis on *live* sound
- Amateurs and Professionals

Areas of improvement:
education level, age, location

Participants

P1: "Mary"

- she/her
- PhD music student at NYU
- Sound designer
- Accommodated: Phone Call vs. Zoom

P2: "Dani"

- they/he
- sound designer & theater sound engineer in NYC

P3: "Robert"

- he/him
- information security engineer
- Amateuer musician/EDM producer
- **Extreme user**

What got you into music/audio?

Walk me through your creative process.

What tools/software do you use?

What's a typical day like for you?

What makes creativity on the spot difficult?
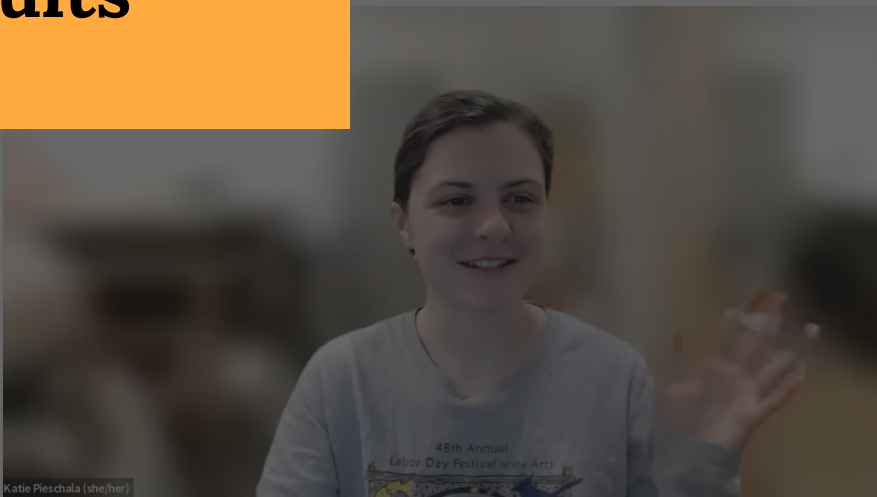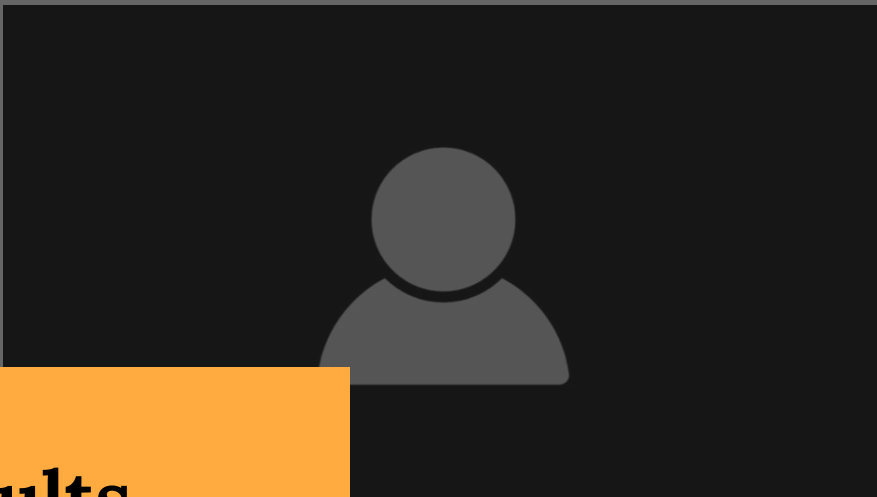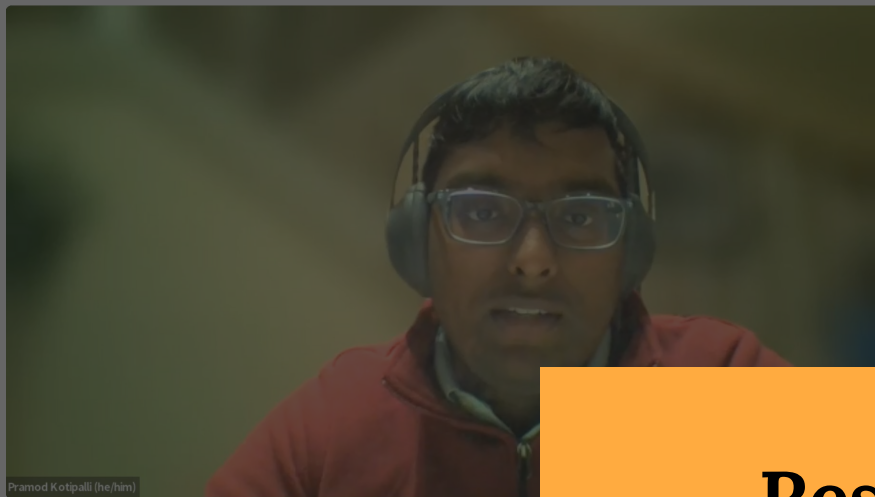
Interviews

How are you doing today?

What is a particularly hard part about your job?

Describe a gig that went particularly badly.

What's something unique about your working style?

How does it feel to work with people you don't jive with?

How did the pandemic affect your job?

Results

When you're doing live sound, you're "one of the artists performing"

P1: "Mary"

"You can be the most technically skilled person in the world, but if if they don't want to spend 10 hours in a dark theater with you, then they're not going to."

P2: "Dani"

Image Source:

"Creativity for me is very difficult for me to do on the spot... with music I can be overly-critical and difficult to work with."

P3: "Robert"

Empathy Maps

Say

[sound/mixing] a weird thing to do... it's a niche sort of thing

in theatre everything is mixed line by line (difference between theatre and live sound)

Sound engineers are "very much the IT department of the theatre."

Bonds are formed by spending "10 hours [together] in a dark theater"

Sound design is a relatively new field

After figuring out the logistics of getting audio equipment to the theater, they can "get back to actually doing things"

"You can actually do theater and earn real money"

"Not all just networking.... which is a discouraging way to describe an industry"

"You can actually do real theatre and earn money"

Sound design is a catch-all for random tech needs

"Anyone can learn the technical side, but the ability to be a good person to spend time with is not something you can teach"

"The Great Cable Shortage" of Fall 2021.

'Everyone left the industry with COVID', when I joined there were lots of open spots.

Finding gigs is "really all just networking... not the most encouraging way to describe an industry"

"Each sound designer has their aesthetic"

Think

Sound designers are artisans

There's different cultures around different sound design realms

Experiential learning and exploration is more important than a set degree program

Thought that there was an established way to go in the profession (summer festivals, networking)

Knows a lot about the history of the space

That sound design is a connections based field

a lot of people in sound are just systems or content people

thinks of mixing and the technical as artistry

Plays vs Musicals -- plays focuses on content and space, more abstract, while musicals involves artistry in system and mixing

Every job he's gotten can be traced back to their connections from their time at the American Reparatory Theater.

They think theater/sound design should be fun and creative

Technical skills are easier to learn than people skills.

Bidding is necessary, it's the way things work (can I have the thing I designed?)

Feel

They feel like they're in a niche field

Frustrated with supply chain of getting audio equipment organized and rented. (especially with new york specific workflow)

Pride in having "cred" and having "done their time" - helps them get jobs they have

That sound design is not just a job/activity, it's an identity

Feel that sound design can be exclusive

hard to be excited about a project if not excited by it

Frustrated working with a sound designer who couldn't make decisions.

"They don't want to hire someone they don't like"

Too much of the job is IT or technical, not artistic or design-y.

Feels a certain amount of job insecurity

Feels for opportunities in the field

believes history and culture of the space is important

Feels proud about technical and artistic skill

Surprised and lucky that pursuing a career in sound is possibe

feels lucky that they're in a city with connections

Do

making speaker plots for planning and rentals

Keep connected with former colleagues.

We more aware of how to work with difficult-to-work-with prior colleagues.

Very eager to talk about their process, equipment, job

Writes out schedules for renting and setup

works better with people who are communicative and enjoyable to work with

Moved to New York

Uses a lot of theater jargon

Individually designed major in sound engineering

Works with directors and performers

went to summer stocks and theatre internships

sources and designs sound cues (not so much composing themself)

uses a lot of ethernet -- everything connected over cat5, dante, has to deal with ips

Uses QLab to send cues

manages renting from production houses

Say

- Talked about getting gigs through word of mouth
- Laptop orchestra was playing "strange stuff"
- Gigs through facebook messenger and instagram DMs
- "if you panic it all goes poorly"
- "Singers are dramatic"
- gigs usually provide equipment
- "really cool in the middle of the concert suddenly rapping with autotune"
- "not just about what you're hearing, but what you're seeing, and all your senses I guess"
- "Always present yourself in the best way possible"
- "Facebook is getting outdated but still really useful for these purposes"
- "It's really nice to live that way"

Think

- Lack of protocol/centralization for finding gigs
- Thinks connection b/t her and performers is important
- Facebook is outdated.
- cares about continuing relationships
- Thinks of music and sound as a lifestyle
- Thinks sound design is multi-inclusive (seeing as well as hearing)
- Thinks that sound design is collaborative space
- sound editing is very much about using all your senses
- DOESN'T think that different types of sound/designing are restrictive
- Getting the right sound equipment on time is vital to having a stress-free, artistic experience.
- It's odd that email/phone isn't used to network.
- It will take a few years of consistent engagement to feel like a core member of a community.
- takes a couple years to be seen as a core member of the community

Feel

- Sense of belonging when treating herself like a performer when she's working as the Live Sound Engineer for a group.
- sound rehearsal is fun -- time to be creative and bond
- tries to feel like part of group
- It's fun to modify live audio (autotune) even if there's a slight latency.
- "sound rehearsal is a lot of fun"
- Enjoys being creative with sound
- feels like she's another performer when she's engineer
- Feels a strong sense of identity as a sound designer - not just a job/hobby
- felt like there were limited opps even pre-2020
- Feels last minute planning/changes

Do

- Pause when talking about opera singer who was not good to work with
- Go to others' concerts to network with performers and sound crew.
- Network with people on Instagram.
- balances sound work with school and other rehearsals
- ran autotune at an acapella show
- Goes to the afterparties
- Take sound production classes at NYU with Grammy-winning artists.
- make friends with a performer because they want an Engineer too
- Being very flexible with group needs; prepared for any eventuality
- uses an audio interface and condenser mic
- Wakes up at 10AM on a typical day
- talks to engineers and musicians at concerts
- Sings in an a capella group
- Started sound designing heavily in high school/college
- Uses Logic Pro, ProTools

Most gigs are earned through word of mouth and connections (but many of the systems to facilitate this can be outdated).

"Really all just networking... not the most encouraging way to describe an industry"

"Facebook is the most common, surprisingly.,, You would think that email would be the professional platform, or phone calls."

Need: Streamlining in the gig-finding process that still maintains an emphasis on relationships.

Sound, for those who work in it, is not just purely technical, but creative and artistic. (but there can be barriers to getting to this point).

"A lot of the artistry comes in designing a system"

"not just about what you're hearing, but what you're seeing, and all your senses"

"How long sitting there trying to make the right sound versus making music."

Need: Reduced friction in getting from the technical to the creativity (while maintaining control).

Relationships and being enjoyable to work with is perhaps most important to success (but collaboration in music has its difficulties).

"Designers won't hire someone they don't like."

"the way you develop a rapport really is you spend 10 hours in the dark theater with no one else to talk to."

"continuing relationships" and "goes to afterparty" -> "it's really nice to live that way"

"How do you be a creative team for music production?"

Need: Ability to find and develop positive working relationships

Summary

- Live sound focus
- Interviews with sound designers
- Initial needs:
    - Streamlining gig finding
    - Reduce technical/creative tension
    - Find and develop relationships