

ISSUE 17 // MAY 2022

# THE ECHO

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ASSOCIATION of SOUND DESIGNERS



**LISTENING**

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## COVER

Detail of 'Listening', acrylic and mixed media on soundproofing panel and accompanying photo series of A5 digitals, by Abbey Bursack

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# Introduction

A very warm, Spring-like welcome to this seventeenth edition of *The Echo*.

We're really pleased to be able to share this new collection of perspectives from our sound making colleagues, whose insights are based this edition in thinking around diversity and access.

The contributors to this *Echo* offer us an opportunity to reflect on what accessibility means and looks like to different sound practitioners, and how we might work more intrinsically with its practice in our own. Crucially, these approaches are varied and open up space for fresh learning in each context. There's much practical insight in these pages, and some truly exciting visions of the future too.

This edition explores a small sample of the range of practices and path-making that pushes

our industry to be the ceaselessly inventive place it is. Behind its forward facing view, stands the knowledge of the barriers too, and the ground still to cover to shape work around its people, instead of people around their work.

We all have a way to find solidarity with the specifics of being human. Reflecting more broadly now, I'd like to acknowledge that many of us are experiencing great challenge in work situations at the moment, carrying complex feelings of anxiety, inadequacy and stress. We find ways to adapt, to accommodate, to survive, though we shouldn't have to do it at such personal cost. We break in where we haven't been welcomed and take up space, we are resourceful and restive, though we shouldn't have to fight for it so hard and so long. To those of you with tired, sore hearts, know that the ASD is always here to connect you with help and support if and when you need it. We stand with you to create the changes we need to thrive.

Turning back with this promise, to the voices of this edition, I connect this solidarity to Vicki Hill's editorial on the potential for the ASD name change. We stand with each other, but there is no one sound practitioner, we are so many different shapes, learning in so many different ways. There is no one right way, no front door, only many, many side doors, equally legitimate, hewn by whoever decides to dig. This is our strength.

This *Echo* is brought to you by the editorial verve of ASD board member Vicki Hill. Thank you Vicki for the huge energy and imagination you've once again invested into the project of this publication. Each *Echo* represents a large and time consuming piece of work, and Vicki has succeeded again here in creating a thought provoking place, for us to reflect and think broadly about the ways in which we work and learn from each other.

I'd also like to warmly thank visual artist Abbey Bursack for creating the cover artwork for this issue. Abbey's work lends this edition a fresh new visual language for materialising sound, and the founding processes that inform her work beautifully expand our themes.

One thought to leave you with: we're making plans to expand the numbers on the ASD Board later this year. This is so we can resource the work and new ideas we want to achieve with more time and greater person power. We'd love for you to join us, so do please consider putting yourself forward, and help us keep building the strength and resilience of our extraordinary association.

Happy reading!

Melanie Wilson, ASD Chairperson



# Listening

**Abbey Bursack is an acrylic and mixed media artist based in London. Her work focuses on themes of queer identity, inclusion and mental health, using heightened and honed textures to create a sense of contemporary abstractedness. Her studio will be based at Wimbledon Art Studios from March 2022.**

**Abbey lives with her wife and corgi in Clapham.**



For this work, I really wanted to champion the idea of inclusion, learning and working together. I found using a soundproofing panel as the canvas a helpful way to abstract this idea. A panel, by definition, forms a part of something greater. By isolating one single part and using that to create an artwork, I hoped to symbolise the importance, beauty and uniqueness of each individual, whilst the accompanying photo series was a literal bringing together of different viewpoints and perspectives.

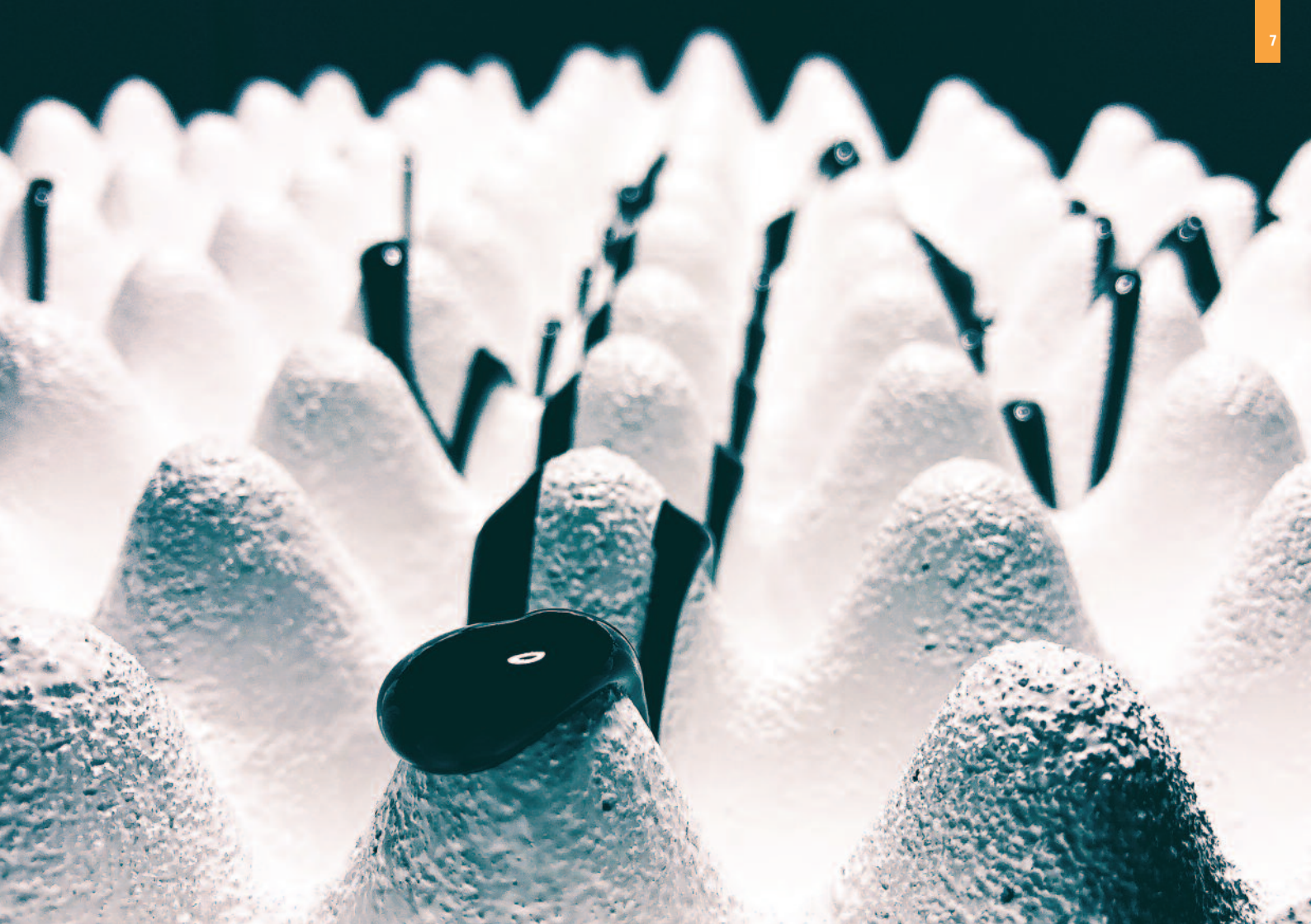
This piece was created by an accumulation of different paint layers being poured over the one before. Each layer that was added brought something new and made the piece as a whole more dynamic, providing more scope for the accompanying photography. I found the foam form lent itself to creating interesting visuals with this method, providing ups and downs, peaks and troughs, angles, texture and depth.

Soundproofing creates a safe space for creativity. It listens and absorbs. Pour some paint over it

and it becomes a visual representation of how we should be protecting each other, creating safe spaces for discussion and development, valuing each other... of the importance of inclusion, of working together, and ultimately, of making the effort to listen. ●

**'Listening' mixed media and acrylic on soundproofing panel (in frame: 34x34cm) and accompanying photo series of A5 digitals**

**MORE INFO**  
[@abbeybursack](https://twitter.com/abbeybursack)  
[abbeybursack.com](https://www.abbeybursack.com)



# Remembering

## Nic Jones

*This tribute to Nic Jones was shared with us by Christopher Shutt and Paul Arditti, who described Nic as a mentor and great friend.*

Nic started designing during his stint as Head of Sound at the Bristol Old Vic in the early 1980s. He then designed many shows as senior technician in the National Theatre's sound department between 1984 and 1992. He was also responsible for designing Complicite's first ground-breaking productions, before giving it all up to move to Stockholm to marry his wife Ellen and become a sound recordist for Swedish TV and film.

Nic was a brilliantly talented sound designer at a time when that title was hardly used. Nic always thought outside the box, whether the subject was sound or life. All of us who knew him in his theatre years credit him with pushing the boundaries of creative sound design and doing more than anyone else to help make sound design respected in the way that it is today. An extraordinary, unique, and gentle man, he will be much missed by Ellen and his daughters Bella and Lily.

## Clare Salaman

Clare was a talented musician and composer. Her instruments included baroque violin, nyckelharpa, hurdy gurdy, Hardanger fiddle, medieval vielle, rebec, viola d'amore, trumpet marine and accordion.

She studied at Oxford and continued to The Royal Academy of Music and later went on to found The Society of Strange and Ancient Instruments which was created to explore unusual instruments and sounds. She was a composer and arranger for theatre and played for productions at The National Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe. She also made programmes for BBC Radio 3's *Early Music Show*.

## Alan Russell

Alan joined the design team of Theatre Projects in 1971. Iain Mackintosh wrote in his obituary for his friend and colleague in *The Guardian*, 'Alan had the necessary qualities in abundance: a show business background; inexhaustible energy; knowledge of tried and tested solutions; an inquiring mind; and the capacity to create working relationships on each project and to involve colleagues at Theatre Projects who had complementary qualities.'



## Laura Head

*This tribute to Laura was written by Ollie Young, Alex Broad and Beth Woodford in remembrance of their friend and colleague.*

It is with immense sadness that we announce the sudden passing of Sound Operator Laura Jane Head, on Friday 4th March 2022, aged 27. Our deepest condolences are with her family at this time.

Laura studied Professional Production Skills at GSA where she specialised in sound. After graduating, she went on to be the #4 at *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* at Theatre Royal Drury Lane. She then moved on to *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* as #3. She would quickly move up to #2. An initially shy individual, her confidence flourished both personally and professionally during her time on the production.

Laura's self-effacing attitude could not mask an astounding natural talent – her meticulous attention to detail and precision were the perfect match for the complicated inner workings of Hogwarts. Whether mixing, operating QLab, running mics or facilitating a

seamless cast change – her aptitude for each task was unparalleled.

Outside of the show, Laura brought joy and light to our subterranean office ('The Dungeon', as she called it), whether she was sharing tales of late-night escapades across Soho, or proving she could fit into any number of oversized cardboard boxes we had lying around. Her sardonic wit kept our spirits high through every two-show day, tech rehearsal and everything in between.

That Laura's bright and promising future in sound was cut short is a tragic loss to our industry, but more importantly, we have lost our dearest friend.



# Bryony and Xana

**Xana is a live-loop musician, sound artist, sound designer, composer, freestyle poet who also works in theatre performance and even writes shows and works with installations. Also the Inventor Music Lead at SoulCase label, Xana finds people who are working on exciting new software and hardware products relating to sound and supports them in exploring the possibilities for their development with a particular focus on the intersection with access and health.**

**Bryony's work for the ASD has had a particular interest in inclusivity and mental health and she is currently the Head of Sound at the Almeida Theatre.**

**Bryony uses she/her pronouns and Xana is 'just Xana'.**

**Xana:** Access is everybody's responsibility, whether or not we think we need it or not. I've needed access in different ways, but I've also started to think about the ways in which I may not have needed access for myself that other people need and questioning how I am contributing to the lack of available accessibility. I think about how I can contribute to the accessibility that we don't know about and how I can become more involved in it. It is up to all of us to create a different foundation to the one that we have. A lot of the time, when we think about accessibility, as long as it works for the majority, then it is considered to work and everyone else can adjust around it. So, for example, everybody else adjusts around the inaccessibility of a building, or everybody adjusts around the economic accessibility of getting into the Arts.

I came into the industry in what is considered an unconventional way; I didn't follow an institutional path. I had to find different ways

that could work for me, because the institutional paths weren't accessible, economically and otherwise. So I've always challenged and also created new ways for myself in order to do the things that I needed to do. But that then centers on an individual and I want to always try to work collectively.

So how do I collectively work on the ideas of access? Are other people able to access this? Are they able to access it through the language that I use? Are they able to access it through the software that I use? Is what I'm doing available for all at the foundation of it? Does it have access at the heart of it, and if it doesn't, then it needs to be scrapped and rethought and it needs to include those voices who require the accessibility that I don't specifically need.

**Bryony: What sort of things have you done in your process in order to achieve that aim of accessibility?**

**Xana:** I realised that I do a lot of work in theatre

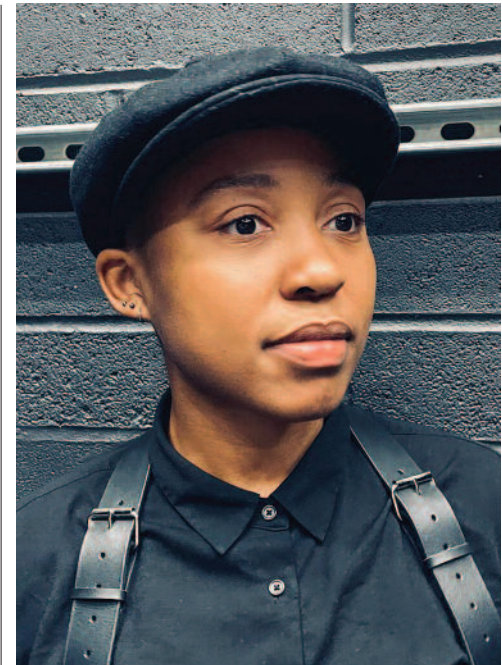
and what I see in theatre sometimes is that there will be an interpreted set of performances. Oftentimes, somebody who's doing interpretation for performance is kind of wedged off to the side and isn't put into the story. I've seen different shows where they've actually included the BSL interpreter as a performer, as a cast member and done it really well. So when I see productions like that, I know that there is a way to provide this creatively, rather than as an afterthought.

My other realisation was that there isn't a specific meeting between me, the sound designer, and the BSL interpreter. So how could we involve different members of the creative team in that? Sound designers, for example, could sit down and have conversations with BSL interpreters, or people do who are doing Makaton, about incorporating elements of the sound design story into their interpretation. So, I started doing it myself; asking producers about who's doing the interpretation for the show so

that I could send descriptions of what sound is playing at that time, or work with them to create different signs to say that this is a sound that's coming in here.

I also use a lot of bass within my shows, because I'm very much interested in physical response when it comes to being in a theatre. I spend a lot of time thinking about the architectural concepts of the space; for example, if people are feeling vibration, what kind of sensations are people getting it from it? What is it communicating? Vibration can be used in a multitude of different ways; it can be used for chronic pain, it can be used for different things around mental health. We can be using it for communicating within the show, a special language all of its own.

I did a show called *Ivan and the Dogs*, [The Young Vic] and I wanted to put speakers in the seats because I felt that the sound design was, until that point, only communicating to a



certain audience. A portion of the audience was losing out on the language [of sound design] that was being created and a portion of the narrative. It certainly was a turning point in my career as a sound designer, and for the better. I started thinking about speakers under or on seats and then approached people who were doing this work who suggested Subpac. I immediately bought one and I loved it.

I also started working with a scent designer. Smell triggers memories, as sounds and visuals do, so I thought that maybe a smell could trigger memories and emotions that would provide access to the language of a piece that might otherwise be missing to certain audience demographics.

### **Do you mind talking a bit about Subpac and how you have worked with it?**

**Xana:** It's a technology where you can experience the feeling of touch by applying vibrations to the user. For example, if I were using it in a virtual environment, like a VR game, and another character threw something at me in the game, I would feel the force of that object hitting me because it would send a signal from the software to the backpack which I would feel as a vibration. In music, I can use the backpacks to communicate the bass line to the user. Bass is the foundation of music, so the user being able

to feel that allows them to access the music and follow the rhythm. I can then add detail over the top of this - for example a mosquito flying around the theatre; if the BSL interpreter says there's a mosquito and then there's an accompanying vibration, you have created a language with the vibrations that allows access to the sound design. This is the experience that we should be working towards in theatre, there is so much technology out there to provide a live experience for everybody, we should be championing these technologies and their creative applications.

Last year I made a commitment that every single show that I work on has to have the Subpac. The response has been really great. I usually start by testing it in the room with the creative team, to explain what I'm going to be experimenting with. It's important to remember that not everyone is able to sit in the theatre's seating and feel the sound that way - so having a portable option is perfect. It's like going to a club and standing with your back to a speaker, you're really in the music and there's an intimacy there that exists on a level that is impossible to replicate.

I did a gig at Cafe Oto where I had people sitting in seats right opposite to me and I was looping a free-styling with a microphone and they were

feeling it. It was an experience of touch that we hadn't been able to experience for such long time because of COVID and social distancing. The sense of connection was amazing. Touch is a real gift, I think we have all come to realise this over the last few years so being able to tap into that is powerful.

### **What's your favourite performance that you've seen where there has been BSL or access clearly included as a core part of the show?**

**Xana:** Recently I saw *And So The Choir Gathers Before It Is Too Late* by Liv Winter at The Bunker, and they also did a showing of it online. This was a great example of the incorporation of both the interpreter and creative captioning. Creative captioning is another great way of including accessibility in the format of the show, so for example in this particular piece, there were TVs all around the stage for captioning. It was centered around a punk band with the interpreter as a cast member, so really including the access in the creative content and the symbiosis of those things was so exciting to see. That's how it should be.

### **Do you have any plans or visions for the future of sound?**

**Xana:** Following on from talking about creative captioning, I'd love to see more work done with this. I'm currently really interested in video

projection and exploring the projection of sound waves onto the stage and how this could incorporate creative captioning.

I'm also interested in headphones for deaf people that are adjustable via something like an app. It would mean that you could choose the level of hearing ability that you have and the headphones would respond with a personal feed.

I'm very interested in people who want to invent things; people who see that this system isn't working for everyone, that it's inaccessible and therefore oppressive and have the creativity to make change. I want to invest in those people to create an equitable world where people can express what they want to express and access things to be able to express themselves.

My big hope for the future is that accessibility isn't an afterthought, that it becomes something that is at the very core and the foundation of everything. I hope that we get to a point where if a project isn't accessible, then it doesn't get made. If it isn't accessible, then we go back to the drawing board, or work out who it is that we need in the room to advocate for access and get it there. We should all be actively participating in making things more enjoyable and accessible for all. It is in all of our best interests to open the doors for everybody and

## A PORTION OF THE AUDIENCE WAS LOSING OUT ON THE LANGUAGE [OF SOUND DESIGN]

welcome people who have previously been excluded from these spaces and give them the opportunity to really shine.

### **How would you recommend people get more involved in creative ways of bringing sound and access together? How can people be part of your inventors' group?**

**Xana:** Just reach out. My label is specifically for Black inventors and is a place where there is support and a grant system so that they can develop their ideas. I started it because there are so many inventors that we don't know about who have been overshadowed and have had their inventions taken away. They invented from a place of scarcity to make abundance for the many and they are being ignored by the few who have the power. I'm really interested in those people who see that there's an inequity here, there's inaccessibility there, and they want to create something that's going to be for the betterment of those who are not considered in the foundation of the technology that we use

already. Just message me and we'll have a chat about what excites you and what you think is going to change the world as we know it and how people navigate their way through it.

Supporting us can be through donating money, so that our inventors can research, experiment and play, but it can also be in the donations of time and opportunities. Not just in design, but in all areas. For me, it's not just about the creatives, it's about those people holding that creativity up, which is the people backstage. I have found that technical people are some of the nerdiest and smartest future-thinkers because they know what the problem is. They know what's not working, they know that this system is old and it needs to be replaced because it's going to make things better. I'm inclined to listen to them as much as possible, to be honest. ●

**MORE INFO**  
[soulcase.live](https://soulcase.live)

# Mini profiles



ANNA WOOD

## What is your current project and role?

My current project is an R and D of a play called *Spycops*, which is looking at the Spycops scandal (where undercover police officers had relationships and children with women they were investigating in an official capacity). I'm the Sound Designer, and we're looking at using silent-disco style headphones to allow the audience to choose which channel of sound design they want to listen to while they're watching – it's really exciting.

## What is your favourite part of your work process?

My favourite part of the process is getting to collaborate in an artistic way with the rest of the creative team – I love being able to enhance a story through sound, or create a dramatic effect that heightens the emotion of the piece.

## What would you change about your work?

If I could change anything about the industry, I'd probably change how closed it is. It's a real struggle getting started when finding work relies on knowing people, and even stuff like the facebook groups for finding dep work are completely invisible unless you're invited to them – it's ridiculous! This kind of atmosphere also feeds into a real lack of representation in the industry, because people tend to hire people who look and think like them, and if you never have the chance to send in a portfolio for a job, you'll never be objectively considered as a candidate. There are organisations like Open Hire who are fighting to change this, but it's still really slow going.

## What's your top trick/tip?

My top tip would be to work out where you fit into the world of sound design early on – personally, I'm never going to be a technical designer, because I come from a musically-trained background and I approach sound from much more of a composing angle. It means I can narrow down job searches and only apply for roles where I'm an artistic designer, rather than a technical one.

## What are you listening to at the moment?

Currently, I'm listening to Thomas Ades' *Violin Concerto op. 24, Concentric Paths* – he's an amazing orchestrator and it's a beautiful piece.



ELLIOT ROBERTS

**What is your current project and role?**

Working as Sound No. 1 on the *Da Vinci Code* UK Tour. First ever tour and really enjoying it with a lovely cast and crew.

**What is your favourite part of your work process?**

I really enjoy learning how different designers and engineers work. Yet to find two that work the same way and it's always interesting peoples rationale.

**What would you change about your work?**

I'd like to see a change to the 'show must go on' mentality. Sometimes things can be out of people's control which can cause delay resulting in stress and crunch time working and that can be a lot on a persons mental health.

**What's your top trick/tip?**

Remember it's ok to ask questions, no one knows everything and showing an interest in learning something is always a good thing.

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

Listening back and forth between the *Beetlejuice* musical album and the *Hadestown* album.

# Skilling up with Sam Vincent

Returning to work after lockdown has been both exhilarating and challenging – not just in the navigation of the new landscape of masks and social distancing, but also in a notable staffing shortage. So many shows have opened at the same time, with some of our colleagues not choosing to return to theatre and pursuing exciting new careers. Lots of opportunities have opened up for PSEs and operators to step up into new roles and try their hands at jobs that maybe weren't there before.

The learning curve in a new role is often steep and stressful, however great an opportunity, so I spoke to Sam Vincent about his thoughts on 'skilling up'. Sam is on the Board at the ASD and has had a varied career as a sound engineer, designer, operator and consultant. He has worked all round the UK, West End and internationally in theatre, live events, VR, and recording amongst others.

Sam uses he/him pronouns.

## How did you get into Sound?

I was a student at the BRIT School (where I now teach occasionally), at the time on the Production Arts course you did every job going from building sets to mixing musicals.

I guess the earliest work I can put my finger on was bits of freelancing while I worked in the warehouse at Whitelight. From there I went to be the in-house Sound Tech at the Churchill Theatre, Bromley, (a position that sadly no longer exists). Back in those days, Bromley was *the place* to produce tours due to its low seat count and massive stage with large wings. The staff were so used to production weeks that they were always smooth. I learnt a lot in my time there.

## How have you found new roles? Did you feel that you had the resources to step up?

The hardest move I made was from No.2 to No.1. I wasn't ready to be a Sound 1, I wasn't ready to manage a department and I found it tough. I

was thrown into a situation where I was mixing a really demanding show, designed by someone who wasn't a sound designer, the show was redesigned half-way through by a new designer and then it all got a lot easier. Luckily my No.2s on that show were fantastic people.

I get imposter syndrome in pretty much every job I've ever done. It drives me to push myself to be better, to prove to myself that I belong there.

## How did mentor-figures help? How do you get people to trust you in roles that you haven't done before?

For every other position that I've taken, I've made sure that I was ready and found people that would be sympathetic to my 'greenness' in a new position. After that first tour as No.1 I had gained a reputation (good and bad) but having survived that show I was much more prepared for the next steps.

Being trusted as an associate takes a bit of reputation and a lot of relationship with the



designer. My first associate position was to cover in the designer's absence; I had been working on the show for a while and understood what was needed and what the vision was. My other associate positions have been when a designer has needed technical support or workload support. In these cases, my personal relationship and the trust we've built plays an important part in creating a new show. Being an associate requires great communication skills and sound is almost secondary to that! I love being an associate almost as much as designing for myself, the one thing I always keep in the front of my mind is: I'm representing someone else's brand and must put their vision in front of my own.

**What resources are available for people who want to start down a new career path or step up into a new role?**

I wish I'd had the seminars we now have at the ASD. Had I watched those I would have been so much less clueless. Roisine's seminar on being a





Sound 1 is fantastic and the radio mic seminars are also amazing. Having easy access to training and knowledge back then would have been so helpful.

The ASD mentorship scheme is brilliant; I've really enjoyed being a mentor and find it rewarding, with my mentee we've done mock interviews, had discussions about binaural audio, discussed what their first day might look like and what to expect, and what skills they require to do the jobs they want to apply for.

I would also say the ASD Google Group forum is great, there is rarely a day when I don't learn something there. You'd be amazed at how happy people are to share knowledge or be sound geeks together. I've always said that 'there are no stupid questions' and I believe it, if you need help then reach out!

### **Do you think that trying new things is important in a creative industry?**

Absolutely, but manage the risk. I've seen shows fall apart because of ambitious people wanting to try something that they don't fully understand. If you're going to try new things then introduce them slowly and have a backup plan for what you could do if it doesn't work. On a personal level, if you don't take risks then you won't progress; manage the risk, educate

yourself, find people you can trust for advice who will be honest with you. It's important to be challenged, listen to that challenge and consider an alternative perspective.

### **Can you explain a bit about the Equipment Loan Scheme and how it could help our members as they progress through the industry at different levels?**

The Equipment Loan Scheme is an awesome resource. It gives members access to equipment and tools that they might not be able to afford yet. For example, when first starting as a PSE the required toolkit can be very expensive, so we're trying to give people a chance when starting out by supplying some of the important, but more expensive things that you might need. Looking at design; ambisonic design is a growing market but the mics are prohibitively expensive and hard to get hold of, so we're making equipment available to allow people to experiment without the hefty price tag. I know that some of our members use the scheme for projects they're funding themselves to keep costs down. Looking to the future, we want to expand the scheme further and want to know what people would like to see added. ●

#### **MORE INFO**

[theasd.uk/equipment-loan](https://theasd.uk/equipment-loan)

# The ASD Equipment Loan Scheme - Updated for 2022

This year, The ASD are updating the Equipment Loan Scheme with new equipment, and a new hub at the Royal Exchange in Manchester so even more members can benefit.



Brother PTE550WSP  
Labelling Machine



Tenma CCTV and Security  
Camera Tester



Inari Audio Pro  
Trinaural Head



Rode NT-SF1 Ambisonic Mic  
(Donated by John Leonard)



Clear-Com DX410 Wireless System  
(Donated by Clear-Com)

As well as all of our usual items that can be found at the National Theatre in London, the Tenma Video Tester, Inari Trinaural Head and Brother Labelling Machine can be found at the Royal Exchange.



# Opening doors

**This issue around accessibility would frankly be incomplete without the inclusion of Jenny Sealey. The CEO and Artistic Director of Graeae was encouraged to pursue dance at the age of seven after developing a hearing impairment. Not to be defeated by not being able to hear her teacher's instructions, Jenny followed the person in front of her. I can't think of a better metaphor for how Jenny has created an environment of inclusivity so that others can join her in her pursuit of relevant creativity that showcases disabled artists.**

**The ASD's Lewis Gibson interviewed Jenny for this article and wrote this piece.**

**Lewis uses he/him pronouns and Jenny uses she/her.**

Accessibility is a subject that seems to be getting more attention in the theatre world. It is now standard to have captioned shows and special performances that are interpreted for British Sign Language users. The introduction of 'relaxed' events is also more common. But is there a way to integrate accessibility into our work from the outset, to make it part of every production, and can we improve our working spaces and regimes to allow more disabled and neuro-diverse people to contribute in making the work?

Graeae are a deaf and disabled-led theatre company. They have encouraged lots of disabled performers to take central roles, many of whom I now see on stages and screens across the country. The company's artistic director is Jenny Sealey MBE, a strong advocate for disabled artists. She co-directed the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games in London 2012.

I have had the pleasure of working with Jenny and Graeae on many productions over the years

and have learnt a huge amount from this experience.

I met up with Jenny to talk about the theatre landscape in relation to disability. This is an edit of that conversation. First, I asked her to explain the two main models of viewing disability.

**Jenny:** Yes, I can explain both the medical model and the social model. The medical model is what's wrong with you. So you've got a hearing aid. I assume you're deaf, which is your problem. Where as the social model is 'ah you're deaf, do you need a sign language interpreter?' People who are wheelchair users are disabled by mobility impairment. They're not disabled by a wheelchair. The wheelchair and steps are the issue. So therefore, with the social model, wherever there are steps there also needs to be ramp access into a building. Access is everyone's responsibility, as access is a human right.

**Old theatres are full of little back corridors and ladders and staircases. Are you aware if things**

### are now better in newer spaces?

**Jenny:** I think when Graeae first started out 40 years ago, there was a real limitation about where the company could go. Little tiny studio spaces where there was ground access was okay, but the main bigger theatres, no. The new theatre builds have had to take access into consideration. So suddenly our world as a theatre company has expanded hugely.

### When it comes to making work, do you have a set of rules, a template?

**Jenny:** No, I think the template is always the art, the play. What is the conversation you have with the sound designer or composer or designer? Where do all the components naturally start to fuse as part of the whole production? It's the same as any company, but with us, the conversation will be different.

The sound is locational. It's emotional. Where you've got signing going on, blind people can't see that, but they hear the music/sound, they've got their equivalent. As a deaf person, I have to make sure that I trust the sound designer. I have to trust them explicitly, that they will make the sound that I want, and I have to work hard to make sure that the visuals are equal. And it's how sound really propels and drives some of the narrative in terms of access.

**You know the expression, 'don't put a hat on a**

**hat'. So quite often, in theatre, we try not to say things in more than one way. But I find with Graeae work, I'm quite often trying to put hats on hats. If I close my eyes, then the story needs to still make sense to me.**

**Jenny:** Some sighted, hearing people say that Graeae clutter their work. And I do, on purpose, because a hearing person can filter out what they don't want to look at or don't want to hear.

**I like that as a creative team, we have to have detailed conversations about what everyone's intentions are, and we have to agree on it.**

**Jenny:** I think it gives a sound designer or a composer a huge dramatic licence to play and be innovative in a way that they may not have thought about. It's about having the equivalent amount of immersive treats for a deaf audience and a blind audience.

**So you're not giving the same experience for everyone. You're trying to give a rich experience to everyone.**

**Jenny:** Yes, and it's the same with *Reasons To Be Cheerful* (a musical using the music of Ian Dury and The Blockheads by Paul Sirett). The thing that I loved so much was what you did with the 1970s payphone, with the sounds of the 2p pieces going in.

**So, this was a device for giving live audio**

**description from onstage to anyone who wanted it in the audience. The show was set in a pub in the early 1980s. I had an old tabletop payphone with a microphone in the handset and a little MP3 player loaded with payphone sounds. We would see one of the characters on stage getting on the phone in the pub. But what he was actually doing was audio describing the scene to people who were wearing headsets in the audience.**

**Jenny:** It was a real treat for blind people. Having that absolute intimacy. Sometimes the blind audience would be laughing out loud and the rest of us would be like 'what's going on?'

**So, being a deaf director, what was it like taking on a musical?**

**Jenny:** Well it was ridiculous. I mean I'm just about to go and do an opera. I think I've been really lucky in the composers and sound designers I work with; they just get it. I'm not afraid not to know. I know that if I asked a question they will explain to me the emotional landscape of the sound. But I also know the emotional landscape of the sound because that's what we've talked about in the design meetings.

**I have worked on lots of foreign language pieces, I mean languages that are foreign to me,**

REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL  
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL  
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL  
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL  
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL  
REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL

GINGER BAY



NHS



Woodbine

VIRGINIA

ABBA

PADDY

OH!





including BSL. When you have more than one language in the room, you have to wait for people to speak, then be translated. Everyone gets to finish what they want to say, rather than having your thoughts finished by others. I think this allows quieter voices, less dominant people's ideas to be heard and this really benefits creative discourse.

**Jenny:** There's more breathing space. And it's respectful of people. I think that's what's really important about anyone who comes to work with Graeae. It's a different way of doing things. I think that's really important and it strengthens your practice. You have to think about what your music and sound is really doing. Think about a blind person's position. What is it they are really listening to? Does it tell the story?

**It made me really think about the location of sound. In *The Iron Man*, we had performers moving through the audience with puppets whilst wearing megaphones playing sound, and of course the Iron Man puppet himself had a series of speakers that allowed me to sonically articulate his movements. And in the end, it helped everyone grasp the story. It has informed my practice a lot. But I don't know if I would have made those decisions if I hadn't been thinking about accessibility.**

Having these ideas in the beginning of the

**process allows them to be really integrated. Of course in a theatre I can move sound around a lot more and we can use projection for captioning.**

**With our production of Jack Thorne's *The Solid Life Of Sugar Water* at the National Theatre, directed by Amit Sharma, we had captioning projected onto so many surfaces around the space that it was almost like having speech bubbles following the actors around. It does something interesting to the way in which you are receiving the text as a hearing person too. And there is something very beautiful about that.**

**Jenny:** The other thing that we must think about is how to make working conditions accessible, so disabled people can operate sound. How can we adapt equipment and spaces?

**Yes. Every single time we move the sound desk for a tech, we build a table in the seating, and you have to clamber over things to get to it.**

**Jenny:** It's about thinking there are disabled sound designers out there, disabled operators and stage management. Everyone's got to revisit how they think about tech. And you know, I get very scared with tech because everyone's on cans and I have to trust the people I am working with.

There is no reason why someone should not employ a disabled sound designer because there is so much adaptable sound equipment.

It's about the backstage world finding who is out there and engaging the next generation of sound artists. It's about opening the doors for them.

We have a deaf sound designer on our Beyond programme. He is a bit like me, in that he can hear something, but it is not what you hear. And it is about how he embraces that.

**When I talk to people about their origin stories, why they are in theatre, there is often a little moment that they remember. Maybe as a child, they saw something, or there was a teacher that was inspirational. And it's allowing those moments to happen for disabled young people, to have that experience. Maybe it's about seeing yourself on stage or behind a sound desk.**

**Jenny:** Let's really think how we're going to continue to push boundaries. Where is the learning at drama schools in terms of sound design, where are the disabled people coming through? That's what we need to address. ●

**MORE INFO**  
[graeae.org](http://graeae.org)

# Matthew Wadsworth

**Matthew Wadsworth is a lutenist and owner of classical record label Deux-Elles. Working in UK Europe and North America as a soloist and chamber musician, Matthew has appeared in most major concert halls and festivals and can often be heard on the radio, both in live performance and recordings. Matthew is a sound engineer and edits recordings for his label.**

**The ASD's Helen Atkinson spoke to him for this piece.**

**Matthew uses he/him pronouns and Helen uses she/her.**



I was born blind, I've never known any different. My parents were very clear when they were raising me that I would have the same opportunities as anybody else. I've always believed that you make your own luck. There have been many barriers along the way, mainly people's fear of not knowing how to deal with my disability. I've always taken the approach that if you're in any kind of minority, then you fit in with what everybody else does, you don't expect people to adapt to you.

I started on classical guitar when I was six, I played electric guitar for a few years in a rock band as a teenager. I studied at Chetham's School of Music, the first blind student to attend, and then I went on to The Royal Academy of Music, where I very quickly discovered the Lute and ultimately the Theorbo and I got hooked on it. You're providing the chords and the harmony, the backbone in Baroque music. It's really a sociable instrument. I had to develop a system of Braille Lute tablature for me to be able to read the notation.

Deux-Elles records was started in 1998, by

Patrick Naylor. He was really interested in what we call early music, Baroque music. I made my first album for Deux-Elles in 2003, *Theorbo Concerto*, and then *Late Night Lute* in 2017. Four years ago, I bought the label from Patrick. I'd always been interested in sound. I wanted to offer an inclusive package to artists, so we brought the recording and editing in-house to the label.

I've taught myself a lot in the last few years. It didn't take me too long to get equipped with mics, preamps and audio interface. The editing side of it was more of a challenge. I rely on computer screen reader software, some of the audio editing software available just didn't give you the right kind of spoken feedback. I was looking around for software packages that offered good source/destination editing. Pro Tools is relatively accessible with an add-on called Flow Tools on the Mac. Then I started to look at Reaper for Mac. I found that for recording classical music it was pretty good. I came across this thing called Cohlor Classical, which is an add-on for Reaper. It's made by John Cohler, he's a clarinet player and does a lot of





editing. He had got frustrated, even as a sighted person, by what was available on the market so he developed his own code that sits on top of Reaper so you're using the Reaper platform and it's just full blown source/destination editor that's super fast and reliable. I contacted him and explained my situation and he took the bull by the horns and made it completely accessible. For anyone who uses a screen reader, you can do very complex editing, and really know where you are.

For example of one feature John has created; when you're recording if something goes above zero dB, it gives you an audible warning, and then it tells you 'at 2.46mins it went above zero dB'. Another example; you can hover over a channel meter and it tells you the peak level on each channel. It's been a complete revolution. I believe this software is not just useful to me, it benefits sighted sound engineers also.

We don't have our own studio we always record on location. When I go out to a recording, I transport everything on public transport. I've got the got two racks of preamps, which gives me 16 channels into my RME Digiface and my Mac. This all packs up into a little suitcase. Then I have a really huge back pack with all the leads, mics and stands, plus a large Manfrotto stand for my main pair. I spot-mic all the instruments

## I DON'T HAVE ANY VISUAL REFERENCES OF WHERE TO PUT MICROPHONES OR THE INSTRUMENTS, I ONLY USE MY EARS. SO, BEFORE I EVEN GET THE MICS OUT, I'LL JUST LISTEN

with a collection of Scheops MK21 and MK2, I'm also a big fan of the Swedish microphones Line audio, and then I have a main pair – DPA 4006 – as reference mics. Spot mic-ing is not always common in classical recordings but for me it gives complete flexibility to control the mix in the edit.

I made the decision I would have help running the cables. When it comes to positioning the mics, there's no point me scrambling around, in amongst the cables, violins, cups of coffee on the floor. It's an unnecessary distraction when I can get a sighted person to take on this task and I can be listening. I don't have any visual references of where to put microphones or the instruments, I only use my ears. So, before I even get the mics out, I'll just listen and move around and get down or I'll stand on a chair, set the instruments positions and I just really listen to where it sounds best and use that as a starting

point, and see what my ears are telling me. If I've got it right, then great, if I didn't then I keep trying until I know that I'm capturing that sound that I heard. I make sure that I am given all the visual descriptions, so I knew exactly where people were in relation to each other and the mics and the physical aspects of the room.

Sound engineering to me is just like playing the Lute, you're sculpting a sound picture. Of course, you need good players, you need a good room and good equipment. But if you put those together, then you've got a chance to come up with something really great. ●

**MORE INFO**  
[matthewwadsworth.com](http://matthewwadsworth.com)  
[deux-elles.co.uk](http://deux-elles.co.uk)

# Mini profile



CALLUM WATSON

## What is your current project and role?

I've just finished designing two plays in LAMDA's Carne Theatre. One being Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, possibly my proudest work to date where I composed a couple tracks including a piano waltz and developed my creative speaker design skills. This came in useful with having two shows on at once. We went from the small Prozorov house, out to the bleak English moors in Silverman's *The Moors*. Along with the earthy soundscapes, it ended with a rock ballad I arranged myself. It's certainly something different to what I'm used to but I loved the challenge!

I'm now currently the PSE in our main space, the Sainsbury Theatre for our production of *Emilia*. As one usually on the creative side, it's been great to learn more of the inner workings of sound systems and desks as well as further developing my team work skills.

## What is the favourite part of your work/process?

Creating something new. It brings me such joy to turn original ideas into reality and then see them on a stage. Even if it takes 10 ideas to get there, the process is always worth it.

## What would you change about your work?

Something I'm always working on is bettering my confidence and allowing myself to take more risks. As I'm just getting started in this industry things can be intimidating but I think I've got lots to offer so I'm making sure I continue working on this.

## What's your top trick / tip?

I think the main reason I love theatre is how it can take me out of the real world for a bit. I can put aside my troubles and enjoy something completely unrelated for even a couple hours.

So, I encourage others to see it the same. Even in making theatre which at times can seem stressful, I find its best to remember that it is just a play. I do this cause it's what I enjoy more than anything, so if that's ever not the case, it's good to take a step back.

## What are you listening to at the moment?

There's always a musical soundtrack playing. I've recently picked up *Great Comet of 1812* after an actor in *Three Sisters* said my music reminded them of it, both being a mix of Russian folk and classical. I also recently saw *Come From Away* which has a fantastic score. Nonstop energy.

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# Zoe and Roisine

In the way that these things often work out, I am editing this piece on International Women's Day. This is a day where we celebrate our female-identifying community and reflect on how far we have come with regard to parity and representation and often this leaves us thinking of what there is still to do.

I was fortunate enough to attend a Women in Audio evening, hosted by Shure and Women in Live Music where a panel discussed these very things. Amongst them was Bryony October, a prominent FOH engineer known for her work with Katie Melua amongst a long list of others across her 25-year career. She has just completed two tours with her young baby onboard the bus and candidly discussed how that worked for her. It's a fascinating story and I will refer you to an article on the TPI website, but it makes a fantastic companion piece to this one written by Zoe Milton about Roisine Mamdani's experience opening *Get Up Stand Up*.

Zoe Milton is a sound engineer with a background in West End Musical Theatre. She now works more on live events and theatrical broadcasts, most recently as Associate Sound Designer for *About Us*, a video mapped performance shown in towns and cities across the UK.

Roisine Mamdani is a Head of Sound with many years experience working in some of the finest theatres in the UK. She has worked on critically acclaimed shows including *Company*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Showboat* and most recently *Get Up Stand Up*. Roisine also has a passion for education, she's a regular guest lecturer and often shares her experience with ASD members.

Both Zoe and Roisine use she/her pronouns.

I sat down with Roisine Mamdani in a busy cafe in Letchworth. Roisine had just opened *Get Up Stand Up* in the Lyric Theatre, designed by Tony Gayle with SFX Design by Benjamin Grant.

What makes this a conversation worth having is that Roisine was six months pregnant on Press Night, something that isn't seen that often in West End Theatre, so we took the chance to chat about how that felt, what worked and what she wished she'd known when she first started out on this journey.

We start at the beginning:

I was first approached about the show about three years ago. We did a workshop, and I knew then that I would want to work on the production if and when it came around, but the pandemic happened and the show was postponed repeatedly.



When Tony finally called and said we'd open by the end of the year, I was already early days pregnant. I wanted him to know, but I was nervous about telling him, I thought he would be apprehensive. In fact, he was really positive, and actually was one of my biggest supporters throughout. His reaction made me more able to process the situation, if Tony was positive, maybe I could make this work!

I did some digging around to find others who had done this job while pregnant, and could only think of yourself (Zoe) and two other women who had been #1's through pregnancy, and although they were all very reassuring, the difference for me was that I would be opening a new show, so going through tech in my 2nd/3rd trimester.

The rehearsal workshop took place when I was just coming into my 13th week. I was really ill





with NVP (ill-named ‘morning sickness’) in my first trimester but thankfully the 24/7 nausea had subsided by the time I had to work. However, I had lost around 9kgs in 6wks so was very weak, and looked pretty bad. I decided to tell the rest of the sound team; they were all friends as well as colleagues and would have been concerned had they not known what was wrong. Having their support was very reassuring. The last day of the workshop coincided with my 12-week scan, and since all

was well, I decided to tell the Producers. Employee law means that I didn’t have to until much later, but I wanted to let them know as soon as I felt comfortable.

They were immediately completely supportive. It turned out that both the DSM and Set Designer were also pregnant – 10 and 5 weeks ahead of me respectively – so there was a wonderful camaraderie in that. Playful’s [the producers] Human Resources organised a maternity

meeting and were happy to be led by us as to how we could make it work. Janet, the head of HR, suggested we put a plan in place for cover, in case it was needed.

Tony and I had a conversation about how that would go, and decided that it would be best to bring in a #1 cover rather than expect Ollie, our #2, to step up. This was solely due to the timeframe involved. As capable as Ollie is, the #2 role is too integral to the tech process to enable

him to be mix cover as well as run backstage. For consistency, it was important for us to have a solid team backstage and two mixers FOH. Our first thought for this role was Michael Poon. An established #1 in his own right, he was someone I knew I could work with, and who would support me through the process. There was never a moment when I felt I couldn't trust him, he was so supportive from the start.

The DSM, who was ten weeks ahead of me, needed cover from rehearsals.

The legal requirement to be able to leave work for medical appointments meant that her maternity cover was on board and ready to step in from day one, however, she continued to call the show right up to two weeks before her due date.

Mike started on the team at Preview 3, which was really useful during the tech/previews period. It meant that he could do dry tech in the mornings, then I came into tech with the cast in the afternoon and do the preview in the evening. It was a great way to share what is usually a tough part of the whole process. Mike is also a very fast learner! He was able to learn the show off-script in a matter of days, it was quite remarkable!

## IT IS 100% POSSIBLE, BUT BE REALISTIC ABOUT ASKING FOR HELP

The Sound design roles were slightly different to other musicals in that Tony looked after the system and Ben Grant designed the SFX. Ben, Joel (Price the associate SD) and Tony had a brilliant relationship, there was a real mutual appreciation between them.

The live band only played the songs. No underscore, no scene change music. Whenever Clint (Dyer, Director) needed a moment underscored, he would call on Ben to create it electronically in Qlab, to be fired by us. Those cues came thick and fast during tech, and numbered over 200. The design roles were both so specialised but intrinsically linked through the sound system.

It did mean that there were quite a few people asking for different things when the tech stopped and it took discipline to make sure that everyone spoke to each other about the correct

things and no one missed out on crucial changes.

We decided that it would be useful to link Qlab and DiGiCo snapshot changes within Qlab, so that we were only pressing one 'GO' button while mixing, we did it this way round so that Tony and Joel could make programming changes on the desk without the risk of firing sound effects. It was an extra point of integration which at first made both designers hesitant, but made operating/mixing the show much more accurate for both of them.

The week before Press Night, my blood pressure took a dive, landing me in hospital for an afternoon, and I was advised to rest for a few days. I had to have the difficult conversation with Tony about whether or not I should mix Press Night. Although I appreciated his care and understanding, I knew that I could keep up with

the changes thanks to Mike, and be back on form after a couple of days rest. It was a really special press night for me. There was some pride involved, of course, but I was so grateful to have such an incredible team – they were all going through their own stuff, yet were completely there for each other, and me.

When we got past press night, my midwife advised me to start thinking about cutting down my working hours. When you think about it, even working four shows is a 36 hour week, not including commuting, so it made sense to start slowing down.

It was a seamless transition. Ollie, the #2 learnt from both of us, this meant that I could teach Ollie during the afternoons, then he and Mike would mix the evening show. Gaby our #3 had worked with Mike before, so would learn from him after I left – it all worked out smoothly. I eventually left a week earlier than intended, when I was 35 weeks pregnant, because the threat of COVID-19 in theatres became too high to risk that late on in term.

I would say that the main difference between opening a show pregnant and not pregnant would be my energy levels. I know that everyone felt more tired coming back after COVID-19, but this was a different level of fatigue than I had

ever felt. I have an hour commute each way, including a tube from Kings Cross. With all the stairs at Piccadilly, that was exhausting in itself, and I feel that those factors together meant that I had less physical energy than normal.

If I could give some advice to other pregnant women, it would be that it is 100% possible, but be realistic about asking for help when you need to. Growing a whole person is a full-time job in itself! The changes happening to your body can feel daunting and there were times when my confidence took a knock. But I always had Lucy Baker's voice in my head saying, 'Go out there and boss it, you know you can do that job, now you can do it pregnant!'

Also... always have snacks! Having someone to make me food was a total game-changer. Ryan [Roisine's husband] sent me out each morning with snacks, dinner and lunch. I felt hungry all the time and having amazing healthy food right next to me was brilliant.

Rest.

We were really unlucky because there was no space in the Lyric, so as much as Playful wanted to provide us with an Expectant Mothers' Room, it wasn't possible, so there was nowhere to lie down. Sometimes I ended up having a nap on

the floor behind the desk on a yoga mat! As a #1 you can sit down more than someone backstage, so having a comfortable chair that you can rest in is important. I had to learn to mix sitting down, which was tough, especially on a show like *Get Up Stand up* where you want to bounce!

Being backstage felt too hectic, I wouldn't have felt comfortable doing a backstage role on that particular production due to the lack of space in the wings, it didn't feel safe. Also, say if a mic went down in the pit, I just couldn't get in there and fix it; I was too big to be crawling along a floor with a cable. I was happy not to be backstage while pregnant.

Mixing shows felt like the easiest role to do in the sound dept, except maybe designing, which involves even more sitting!

I don't really have a plan for after maternity leave. As much as I think I want to come back to the show, I don't want to make a decision yet in case it isn't possible for our circumstances. We don't have access to family childcare, my husband is also on shows and works for a different producer. He got two weeks paternity leave, after that we'll just have to figure it out. I feel like I'm at the stage in my career where I've done a lot, and if it turns out that it's time to

stop doing eight shows a week, then I think I'm ok with that.

*Get Up* was my 20th press night, 10th as #1. I love my job, and I've loved it for the majority of that time, but I also love the idea of teaching and mentorship. I don't know though, I'd miss mixing... those high pressure gigs, first previews and one night shows where you're working under tight time constraints, I'd miss all that, so maybe our family and theatre can find a way through which works for us.

The past two years of living through the pandemic taught me that I can survive without theatre and there are other things I can do. Going into care work during the pandemic was a huge eye-opener to the real world.

I guess that because of my age, I am in a place where I can stop thinking about what's next, take a step back and enjoy where I am. If I'd had a baby 10 years ago, I think it would have been very different, but as it is, even though I'm seen medically as a geriatric mother, I'm much more comfortable with the road ahead, whatever that may be. ●

#### MORE INFO

[getupstandupthemusical.com](https://getupstandupthemusical.com)  
[womeninlivemusic.eu](https://womeninlivemusic.eu)



# Mini profile



RAFFAELA PANCUCCI

## What is your current project and role?

I am currently the Sound #2 (Mix Cover) on Robert Icke's version of *Animal Farm*, with sound design by Tom Gibbons.

## What is the favourite part of your work/process?

I really enjoy working on textual analysis, having those initial creative conversations with the entire production team, and seeing the piece begin to come together over the rehearsal process.

## What would you change about your work / the industry?

I would want to change the hours worked by those in the industry, and I think theatres and companies adopting two session tech days is a great start! Having a more inclusive selection process of roles, and a diverse team, also makes the stories that are told so much more genuine and beautiful.

## What's your top trick / tip?

One top tip of mine is download the app 'Radiooooo'. It's a map of the world with a few different decades to choose from, and you can listen to music from anywhere and almost any time. It's a great way to research for pieces and widen your library.

## What are you listening to at the moment?

Everything by Sault is in my regular playlists, as well as Disclosure's newest album *ENERGY*.

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# Learning Sound as a Neurodiverse Tech Swing

Whenever I am asked to give advice to future professionals, I always offer 'learn how you like to learn'. It's an important skill, that self-knowledge. It allows us to ask for what we need and hopefully, receive it. That's how this all started, by asking Dan Turner how he liked to learn as he arrived in the Sound Department at *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* as a Tech Swing.

I asked Dan to contribute to this issue of *The Echo* for two main reasons. Firstly, I think that Tech Swings are a huge part of how we run theatre shows, never more so in this age of COVID-19. Their cast-counterparts were acknowledged at this year's The Stage Awards as the 'Unsung Heroes' of 2022, and our technical swings deserve the same accolade. It is an extraordinary feat, to switch between plots and roles covering for other team members, sometimes working in departments for the very first time. Dan is a very experienced theatre practitioner but had never worked in Sound before he came to *Ocean*, so I asked him about how he found the experience. As he explained to me how he liked to learn and what he needed from me, we began to discuss his Neurodiversity and how that played into the process. Dan speaks so generously and openly about his ADHD and how his diagnosis has helped him to understand how he interprets the world and so the concept for this entire issue was born.

Dan explained to me that he feels that 'Neurodiverse' is a better descriptor than 'Neurodivergent', although both refer to people whose brains function in a way that is considered 'non-typical'. This can manifest in a huge variety of ways and to varying degrees. The term 'Neurodiversity' was coined in 1997 by Judy Singer, a sociologist (and herself autistic), with the aim of reframing these differences in a neutral way rather than as inherently bad or negative. Dan has included some links at the end of this article for anyone who wants to learn more.


Dan uses he/him pronouns, and I use she/her.

It would be a big old claim, to tell you how to teach Neuro-Diverse (ND) Tech Swings, when I'm just one guy. Probably the headline of this should be 'How One Specific ADHD (Combined) Tech Swing Finds Learning Things He's Specifically Interested In', but that doesn't grab the attention as well.

There are a couple of caveats that need to be made first, I think, and then we can get to it. Firstly, there's a LOT of different types of neurodiversity, and I can't pretend to speak for everyone. I have ADHD, which is just one form of neurodiversity amongst many. I was asked to write this as a ND, first-time Tech Swing to give a little insight into how I found being taught about Sound for *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, so that's what I'll do. There are a wealth of resources online for learning more about Neurodiversity in general, or specific aspects of it if you'd like to. I'll be mentioning a few things







Nia Towle (Lettie Hempstock),  
James Bamford (the Boy) and  
Siubhan Harrison (Ginnie  
Hempstock) in *The Ocean at the  
End of the Lane*  
(© Manuel Harlan)

which affect me specifically, and I'll post links to explanations below.

It is probably time to get into it, but (though this is the last one, I promise) another disclaimer. This was my first West End show, but by no means my first large-scale production. I've been working in the industry for about seven years (counting those two years we won't really mention...), mostly in large-scale theatre production. When it came to learning the Automation and Stage Management plots for *Ocean*, they weren't new or confusing for me. The benefit of this was that I could focus almost all my mental energy on learning Sound, which I had next to no experience in.

Mental energy is a very, very important thing for people with ADHD (there's a 'Spoons' metaphor which I'll link to at the bottom of this which explains it pretty succinctly). I had patient teachers, a relatively simple plot, and I had a week of shows to pick it up in. The most important part of this is the teaching, honestly; I'll ask a LOT of questions. Sometimes these questions will be seemingly un-connected to what I'm being told, sometimes they'll have incredibly obvious answers. I'll ask them anyway. If you're teaching me something I know nothing about you'll be my first point of call. It's annoyed people before, and it'll probably annoy people

my whole life, but if I want to use a system, I need to feel like I fully grasp it.

This is the big difference between me and other people I know my age or younger. I've spent a lot of my life not really being able to divine the unspoken rules that other people seem to get. There's a lot of stuff that goes unsaid, that's meant to be understood as implied, that goes right over my head. Rather than let this potentially happen with equipment I'm supposed to be using, I will bombard you until I understand it. If there's a user manual then maybe I'll read that through and make notes, but if there's not then you're it pal.

The good thing which happened for me on *Ocean* was that there were very clear parameters set out early for what was expected of me. I need to know how to battery up, mic check, and troubleshoot mics in performance. I don't need to know how to balance the sound system. That meant I could focus on what I need to know now. I made notes, I read them over, I learned the plot off by heart. Having parameters on what I need to learn is incredibly helpful, because I don't need to be confused about understanding anything outside that. Suffering from Executive Dysfunction in times of stress happens to me a lot, this is often characterised by finding time management tricky, having

challenges getting started on tasks or sticking to a schedule.

I guard against it by understanding what I need to do in its totality; stuff outside of it can paralyse me quite literally, my default when I don't know what to do is to do nothing. Obviously once I've been signed-off this goes away completely because theatre is a stress-free working environment, so no worries there. This isn't uncommon in ND people who can often feel overwhelmed by uncertainty and stimuli. It is, to be honest, something you should probably check in on with people who aren't ND too. The benefit of the way my neurodiversity works is that once I understand something I really, really understand it. It'll be cemented in there for a long time.

A few pointers about how best to help ND people when they come knowing nothing about Sound (or other technical departments). You should be tailoring, as far as possible, what you're teaching to the pupil's needs, and ND people are no different in that respect. The things you might want to be particularly thoughtful about are being patient in the face of endless questions and providing very clear instructions about what it is we need to know.

ADHD also means that my memory is pretty

Nia Towle (Lettie) and James Bamford (the Boy) in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*  
(© Manuel Harlan)



terrible in the short-term (and sometimes medium- and long-term too unfortunately). That's why you'll see me writing down every step of every process I'm being taught, which I'll have to reference every time I need to do it until it's muscle memory. That means it might be slow, or need prompting from you. From experience, if I get rushed in that stage of my learning, I may never completely learn a process.

The other thing I think that will help most is clear, concise evaluation of how I'm doing. A huge part of my ADHD is something called Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria. Very briefly it means I will always assume the absolute worst if you tell me nothing.

If I'm learning from someone and they're particularly tired and stressed one day, I will assume that I'm doing terribly and they're angry with me for it. I can't help it; it's how my brain is wired. I know it's irrational, and sometimes I can override that part of my brain, but it's pretty much always there. If you're happy with how I'm doing, tell me. If you're not, tell me that too, because I will be absolutely focused on getting whatever I'm doing wrong right. If you're just having a really tough week and aren't feeling chatty, I don't need to know what's going on, but letting me know that there's nothing else you need and everything is OK with us will go a

long way to easing me into the day.

Finally, check in with the person you're working with. I don't have any access needs that are obvious, but not all access needs are. Dyslexia, for example, is more common in ND people – but how might one know that if we don't check in and make sure the person feels safe and capable of sharing their needs? Ask questions back. Don't assume anything. Share all your knowledge and expertise – don't assume someone knows c just because you've told them a and b.

A lot of the ND people I know are the most dedicated, passionate people I know about their areas of interest. If you get someone like this under your wing then you're going to have someone bombarding you with questions, very possibly doing their own research on the side, and maybe surprising you with what they can do.

The links below are to a channel on YouTube called 'How to ADHD'. It's how I first explored symptoms when I started suspecting I was ND. The videos are easy to digest, but more medical and comprehensive accounts of things are out there if you'd like to explore more. The videos are geared towards people who have these things and how to handle them, but they do contain explanations of what they are. ●

## NEURODIVERSITY

What is neurodiversity?

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALJ3CFRRZpo&ab\\_channel=HowtoADHD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALJ3CFRRZpo&ab_channel=HowtoADHD)

Executive Function in ND People:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4YIHRu-TU&ab\\_channel=HowtoADHD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4YIHRu-TU&ab_channel=HowtoADHD)

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM3azhiOy5E&ab\\_channel=HowtoADHD](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jM3azhiOy5E&ab_channel=HowtoADHD)

A pretty comprehensive guide to different forms of neurodiversity and how to support them can be found on this archived page: [webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20210104113255/https://archive.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6676](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20210104113255/https://archive.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6676)



# From Vicki

My great hope for this issue of *The Echo* was to provoke you to think about all the people who occupy this space. This is my second *Echo* at the helm, and I am proud to be sharing these articles and I hope to continue facilitating this work and starting these conversations.

An interesting part of this issue for me was listening to how our contributors identify themselves, the language that they use (anyone who knows me in real life will know what a pedant I am about language). A great example of this is how Dan Turner identifies as 'Neurodiverse', having decided that 'Neurodivergent' has a slightly different meaning. In a similar vein, I have asked all contributors to this issue to share their pronouns (as long as they have been comfortable to do so) with the hope that asking this question and printing the words moves us further along in the direction of inclusivity. Ultimately, the lesson here has been to ask what people want to be called, ask what their

pronouns are and ask their permission to share.

The ASD is an organisation that was founded to provide a home for Sound Designers, a safe community to discuss, share and learn. The constitution and Board were voted in in 2011 after some years of meetings and discussion. The formation of the ASD from Gregg Fisher's initial meetings through to the steering committee and then to the structure that we recognise today is all detailed on the website, if you're interested.

Its success is clearly proven in its growth, we are now a much larger hub encompassing some 900 members. I am going to say before I go any further that my statistics have been gathered from the ASD members' public directory, so I am going to get a bit fuzzy with the exact numbers (because I know that not everyone keeps their profile up to date).

Nevertheless, I went through and found that

just under 350 of you are listed as Sound Designers, but closer to 50 of you say that Sound Design is your only job title. Which means that over 450 of us here are not actually Sound Designers at all. As I say, pinch of salt. This research is purely me clicking through your bios and seeing what you have identified yourself as and made an old-fashioned tally chart (I'm sure Gareth has a smarter way... don't tell me, I've done it now). The point I am making is that we are no longer a home for just Sound Designers these days.

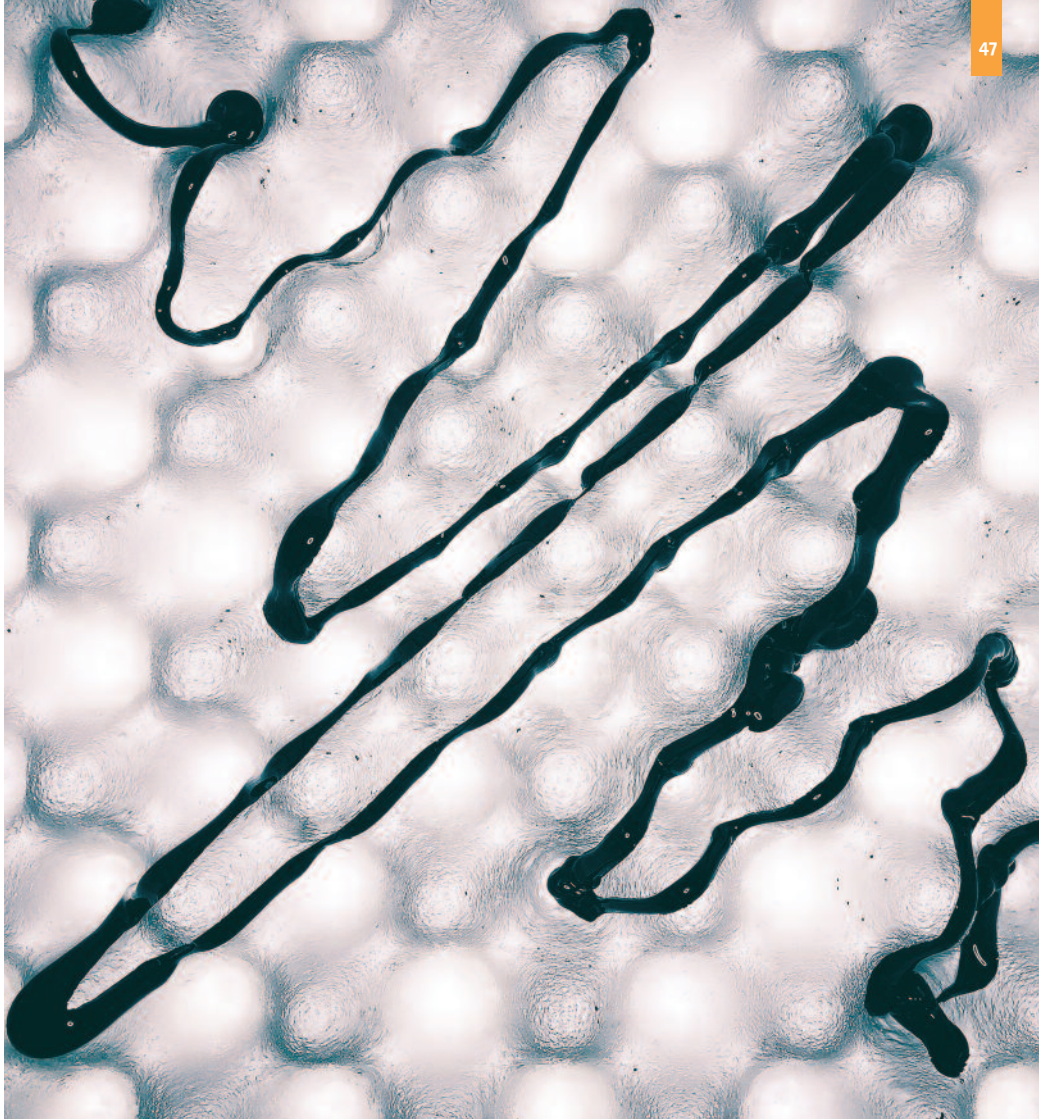
The question that I have asked, and that I now ask of you, is how do you identify yourself as a sound practitioner? Are you a Sound Designer? Or is there another word that you would rather we used to describe you?

Looking at our membership, at the breadth of talent and the wealth of skill, I wonder if to attribute such a specialist title to our home might be to the disservice of our diversity. I

wonder whether people starting out in their careers feel that this is not a space for them until they are sound designers, if that's what they choose to be at all. We have so many Production Engineers, Composers, Educators, Show Staff and combinations of all of these along with other things entirely. Even to look at the Board, none of us would singularly name ourselves as Sound Designers; we are composers, educators, engineers, show staff, consultants and sonic artists... and there are six of us.

To choose a name is no small task. This is not a decision that anyone could make quickly or lightly. For me, it will always be important to respect the legacy of the ASD and to ensure that any changes are done with the upmost care and respect. But I also strongly believe that the greatest and most enduring legacy is an evolving one, that stretches and moves to encompass all that it carries.

Vicki Hill, Editor





# amplifying change

more info & to join  
[stagesight.org](http://stagesight.org)

# STAGE SIGHT

promoting an off stage  
workforce that is more reflective  
of our society today, inclusive of  
ethnicity, class and disability.