

# THE ECHO



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Tips & Tricks part 2

Audio Networking

Forming a Limited Company

Issue #9  
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Design by Made In Earnest  
Printed by Premier Print Group

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## Editorial



GARETH FRY, CHAIR, ASD

June saw the announcement that the Tony Awards would no longer include the categories Best Sound Design of a Play, and Best Sound Design of a Musical. This led to immediate and widespread outrage across the industry, both in the US and here in the UK. No reason has been given for the elimination of these categories.

There have been some reports that the decision wasn't even made by the Tony Awards Administrative Committee, but that it simply rubber-stamped the decision, made by a secretive Rules Committee whose membership and purpose is hazy at best. Without any official explanation speculation has been rife.

An anonymous account from a TAAC member, reported in the *New York Times*, suggested that it might be attributable to the judges feeling unable to judge the sound design category, lacking expertise about sound design, with some being unsure what sound design actually involves. There was also a suggestion that some members considered sound design a technical

craft rather than an art form. Whether these are the individual speculations of the person being interviewed, or a true reflection of the TAAC is unlikely to be made clear.

The nominating panel who watch all the eligible shows are primarily current or retired theatre professionals from a range of professions: producers, agents, writers, directors, designers. That they should feel unable to judge the merits of one excellent sound design over another excellent sound design is partially understandable. Who amongst us could say they were expert enough in every field to judge every category that exists?

How would one expect a writer to judge the merits of one lighting design over another? How can an agent extricate between the categories and collaborations of set, lighting and video designers to create a visual masterpiece. Is an actors' performance excellent because of their acting skills, the direction they were given, or because of the writing? This is exactly what the Tony voting panel are asked to do.

The problem exists across all the categories. Given these facts, it seems absurd that this could potentially be the reason for removing the sound design categories.

Alongside their announcement of the elimination of the two sound design award categories, the TAAC said that they held “the right to determine a special Tony award for certain productions that have excelled in this particular design realm”. If the voting panel feels unsure about what constitutes sound design and how to judge excellence, how will they be able to judge who to give this ‘special award’?

How does one judge what is best anyway? These are problems faced by a lot of awards, particularly those associated with the arts, and a fundamental problem facing the majority of the Tony Award categories.

The anonymous statements reported in the *New York Times* don't really explain why the sound design category should be singled out for elimination, but it does indicate that there is a lot of work to be done in educating the rest of the theatre industry about what we do.

This has always been part of the ASD's remit, but perhaps now is the time for it to rise up the agenda. Creating materials, written, aural or perhaps some short films should go some way to making what we do – our contribution to the creative and production process – more widely understood.

The response to the elimination of the awards has been overwhelming. US sound designer John Gromanda set up an online petition that received 30,000 signatures within a week, including Stephen Sondheim and this year's Tony Awards host, Hugh Jackman.

We have seen West End and Broadway casts showing their support, holding signs supporting the reinstatement of the award. We have had several prestigious US organisations, such as the Stage Directors & Choreographers Society, the Dramatists Guild, and the 74 US theatres that comprise the League Of Regional Theatres (LORT) all urging the TAAC to re-examine their decision.

We too have been busy sending press releases all over the place, trying to bring media attention to this. There have been conversations in the US about establishing an equivalent to the Association of Sound Designers.

Above all it has brought a lot of people together. It has shown that we are not alone, that a great majority of current theatre practitioners value us highly. It has shown that sound design, a once minority design strand, is now an intrinsic part of the way we make theatre, and it's not just sound designers who think so.

#### COVER PHOTO CREDITS

**Top line, left to right:** Tony Shalhoub from *Act One* (photo © Marc Salzberg); David Hunter from *Once The Musical*, London (photo © Mike Thacker); Jill Winternitz from *Once The Musical*, London (photo © Mike Thacker); Peter Lockyer from *Les Misérables* (photo © Gareth Owen); Jefferson Mays from *A Gentleman's Guide To Love And Murder* (photo © Dillon Cody); and Cherry Jones from *When We Were Young and Unafraid* (photo © Mark Parenti).

**Middle line, left to right;** James Franco from *Of Mice and Men* (photo © Caitlin McConnell); Joshua Henry from *Violet* (photo © Elizabeth Coleman); Caroline Bowman from the US National Tour of *Evita* (photo © Max Gutierrez); Choreographer, Jerry Mitchell (photo © Andy Lang); Amy Warren from *Act One* (photo © Marc Salzberg); Wendy Rich Stetson from *Act One* (photo © Marc Salzberg); and Kyle Dean Massey from *Pippin* (photo © Kyle Dean Massey).

**Bottom line, left to right:** Emilie Fleming, Celine Schoenmaker, Wendy Ferguson and Carrie Hope Fletcher from *Les Misérables*, London (photo © Gareth Owen); Terrence Mann & Charlotte D'Amboise from *Pippin* (photo © Andy Lang); Santino Fontana from *Act One* (photo © Marc Salzberg); Writer/Director James Lapine (photo © Marc Salzberg); Cheryl Baker from *Happy Days The Musical* UK tour (photo © Ben Harrison); and Joshua Henry, Sutton Foster, and Colin Donnell from *Violet* (photo © Joshua Henry).

# Sound design tips and tricks: part 2



GARETH OWEN

Last year we approached a number of successful sound designers to share their ideas and insight on designing theatre shows. What became quite apparent is that the majority of designers are more than willing to share ideas and techniques with their colleagues, very much undermining the notion of creative technical theatre people as a competitive and secretive bunch. In fact, ninety percent of the people we approached not only took time out of busy schedules to come back with a noteworthy idea, but went on to suggest additional topics that they would be more than willing to elaborate on, in future editions.

Got a tip or trick to share? Email us at [admin@associationofsounddesigners.com](mailto:admin@associationofsounddesigners.com)

**Kicking off proceedings, Chris Full (*Rock of Ages*), Chris Wybrow (*Thriller*) and Nick Lidster (*Autograph*) highlight the importance of good system setup.**

Full suggests: “You often hear that ‘less is more’, and this is true as much of sound design as anything. Using a minimum number of microphones in the pit, each placed carefully to capture the exact sound of the instruments that you want, coupled with as few a speakers as you can get away with, will pay dividends by reducing phase interactions at both ends of the system. Couple this with a clean, simple signal path and you’ll use less corrective EQ and processing with the bonus of shorter system tuning sessions, leaving you more time to be creative”.

Chris Wybrow further elaborates with respect to touring theatre shows: “Correct timing and

phase alignment of a system is paramount in achieving consistent results from venue to venue. It is very common for people to try and compensate for lack of cohesive low end by simply turning their subs up but actually the subs are out of phase with the system.

Electro-acoustic measurement software such as Smaart is a great tool to have in your arsenal as well as a great way to better understand your craft. To get a great result in the minimum amount of time, stick your mic three quarters of the way up the stalls in between one side of the systems tops and sub position, take a measurement of just the tops and capture the phase trace, then mute the tops and send the pink to the subs and line your phase traces up at the crossover point, copy and paste the timing to the other side of your system. Play your favorite song and click around the measurement you took for your subs when you

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## ***It should be noted that Kai's belief in documentation led him to write his own software package to simplify the task, called ShowTracker***

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get exact gain addition you will hear that your subs are in time!”

Nick Lidster concludes the discussion on system setup, suggesting: “There are many things to consider when setting up a loudspeaker system in a theatre, and there should be an order and pattern to your work that will aid you toward a more pleasing result. It might seem an obvious thing to say, but try and mentally divide an auditorium into zones and point your loudspeakers at the areas of seating you wish to cover. Avoid pointing loudspeakers at walls and ceilings. You are trying to remove the room’s acoustic influence, not add to it.

Your best sounding loudspeakers should be the ones the majority of the audience hear (probably your proscenium system) and these should be delayed and set up to a point in the performance space where most of the playing

action will take place – downstage centre is the obvious starting point. Subsequent loudspeaker groups (Front fills, Down fills, Delays etc) can then be layered on top of your main system using a combination of system delay and level.

Finally, EQ can be added to taste and to smooth transitions between your various loudspeaker groups. Try not to over-EQ your loudspeakers, as vocal intelligibility will suffer.”

**Several notable designers highlighted the importance of good housekeeping, not least of which are Gareth Fry (*Blackwatch*) and Kai Harada (*Follies*).**

Harada explains his thoughts on documentation: “Whether detailing multicore assignments or variations on a sound effect, make sure you create a system to clearly identify what is happening. I use various databases and

spreadsheet templates to help in documenting all aspects of a sound design. Not only am I getting old (reducing my brain capacity for input channel assignments) but I also never know what could happen – if I get hit by a bus, the show must go on – someone else may need to refer to my paperwork, look through my sound effects sessions, or work out what microphone is patched into which multicore channel. Keep it clear, and keep a backup copy!”

It should be noted that Kai’s belief in documentation led him to write his own software package to simplify the task, called ShowTracker. Those of you working on Broadway will know that the vast majority of New York shows would fall over in an instant without the benefits it provides!

Gareth Fry further elaborates on the value of efficiently archiving shows: “I believe it’s critical



From left to right: Chris Full, Chris Wybrow, Nick Lidster, Gareth Fry, Kai Harada, Pete Hylenski, Rich Walsh and Martin Levan

to walk away from every show I do with up to date paperwork, a copy of all the show files and photos of everything I can point a camera at. There are numerous reasons to do so and they often don't become apparent until far down the line. The obvious reason is when a show revives, transfers or tours – by recording what you do you're starting from the place you left off, rather than starting from pre-tech paperwork and a hazy memory of the fifteen different ways you tried to solve that problem."

"I've had shows revive five years after they originally closed, when there had been no plan for a future life. I've had mixing desks stolen from the auditorium, and entire playback racks get nicked from backstage (complete with the backup data that was in the rack drawer) – I now always keep all the show files from any shows I have running on my laptop just in case. We often create intricate bespoke solutions to particular problems - sooner or later you're likely

to encounter the same problem again, and if you have a photo of how you solved it in the first place that's going to make life a lot easier. Plans and schematics inevitably contain mistakes and multiple versions exist across our hard drives and email folders, so photos can prove a great solver of disputes. Take photos of the desk scribble strips, gain pots, mic stand positions, speaker focus, rigging solutions, racks, and amplifier volume controls.

I never delete my show archives – every now and again I get my name in a play script for designing the premiere of a new work – this inevitably means that at some point over the next twenty years you're going to get a series of emails from other people who are doing it and want to know what version of that music you used. And of course I have never recycled a sound effect from one show to another. Never."

### **Stage Foldback for musicals also proves a**

### **popular topic with both Pete Hylenski (*Shrek*) and Ben Harrison (*Evita*) posing interesting ideas.**

Hylenski suggests: "Sometimes more is not always more, especially when it comes to stage foldback for theatre. Often when a performer says they 'can't hear themselves' turning down band into the foldback is the best solution. Adding head-worn vocal mics into foldback is a slippery slope! Spend time onstage listening and make decisions based on the combination of foldback plus the acoustic energy coming from the house. Additionally, picking one trusted member of the cast as a barometer can help keep you informed from the performers perspective as you continue to dial in the stage."

Ben Harrison elaborates further, proposing: "Instead of routing each instrument in the orchestra pit to stage foldback speakers individually, create a 'Band to Foldback' mix, the



output of which you route back into an input channel. This allows you to wind as much of your 'Band to Foldback' channel into each part of the stage foldback without having to go through the whole band adjusting sends.

This technique is particularly useful on touring shows where foldback positions may vary from venue to venue. For instance it's easy to up the band level to the downstage foldback without altering any SFX that may also be routed there. By leaving the fader of your 'Band to Foldback' channel in the automation of the show plotting and recalling band foldback pushes or reductions throughout the show becomes easy."

**Rich Walsh has this suggestion when it comes to streamlining QLab systems:**

"Don't waste auxes on effects processing if you're only going to use them for QLab – insert them instead, doing the routing of the reverb

return on the QLab channels themselves. This is particularly useful on those little 01V96 jobs where you have more QLab channels than amp channels: why not use the four effects engines at your disposal? I particularly like having three instances of the same reverb: one doing a normal pros/surround mix, one in just surround – and one just onstage, which can do some very interesting things with perspective. I use the fourth engine for X-Pan Delays, spread diagonally (ie: Pros L with Surround R versus Pros R with Surround L), which with subtle use can give movement to ambiences and beds."

In conclusion I approached the man who arguably molded many of the techniques we consider standard practice today.

**Sound design legend, Martin Levan shares these thoughts on how to deal with the acoustics of the theatre and the sonic experience as a whole:**

"Even though there have been many changes to the equipment used in theatres since I was designing, the one thing that hasn't changed is that the performers and audience share the same complex acoustic space. Always work towards creating a positive symbiosis between your sound system, the live sound and the acoustics of the environment – all three are essential ingredients. Don't fight the auditorium – the live sound doesn't, and it is this very fusion that forms the sonic landscape, enveloping the audience, enticing them to engage with the musical performance. Even without consciously realising it, the audience will sense their environment and be influenced by the acoustics. If your sound does not create harmony with that environment, the audience will hear its presentation as disingenuous and will not fully embrace it. Communication, the business we are in, is always a two way street and in order for it to succeed, requires both parties to willingly participate."



# TECHNOLOGY. EXPERTISE. INFLUENCE.

**PLASA London returns to ExCeL  
London from 5-8 October 2014.**

The show will welcome the biggest names in lighting, audio, video and stage technology - and thousands of visitors from around the globe - to the most vibrant city in the world.

The **ASD** invites you to register for a **FREE** ticket!

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 [facebook.com/PlasaShow](https://www.facebook.com/PlasaShow)

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5-8 OCTOBER 2014 - ExCeL



# Plasa London

**ASD MEMBERS CAN REGISTER FOR FREE**  
[www.plasashow.com/asd](http://www.plasashow.com/asd)

PLASA London returns to ExCeL for the second consecutive year on Sunday 5 October until Wednesday 8 October, with an improved format and a Professional Development Programme brimming with variety and creativity.

The show, which attracts the biggest names in professional audio, lighting, video and stage technologies, has been a pivotal date on the international entertainment technology tradeshow calendar for more than three decades.

This year, visitors can look forward to seeing a very strong contingent of audio companies, including Cadac, Bose, Yamaha, Sony, Shure and FBT. The ASD can be found on T16.

One of the exciting changes to the show format is the relocation of AudioLab Interactive to the show floor, which will allow for larger numbers of visitors to gain access to demonstrations and interactive experiments designed to test pro audio theory.

Seminar rooms hosting the Professional

Development Programme (PDP) will also relocate to the heart of the action, on the show floor. By making the seminar rooms as easy to find and as accessible as possible, visitors will be able to maximise their time at PLASA London 2014.

Each PDP session will feature experts from across the entertainment technology industry and will include a seminar hosted by the Association of Sound Designers entitled 'Theatre Sound Designers: what do they do exactly?' – a response to the recent decision by the Tony Awards Administration Committee to eliminate the sound design awards from its program.

## **MORE INFO**

**More information about PLASA London 2014, including events and parties taking place in and around ExCeL, will be announced in the coming weeks.**

**For up-to-the-minute news visit [www.plasashow.com](http://www.plasashow.com)  
Follow the show on Twitter at [@plasashow](https://twitter.com/plasashow)  
or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/PlasaShow](https://www.facebook.com/PlasaShow)**



## A FEW OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS

### MELANIE WILSON

Melanie Wilson is a London based writer, performer and sound artist, whose work combines theatre, sound art and contemporary forms of composition. She has collaborated with artists and companies across forms of theatre, film, music, installation, fine art and photography; including Rotozaza, Clod Ensemble, Coney, Shunt, Chris Goode, Will Adamsdale, Subject to\_change, Will Duke and Becky Beasley.

Her work has been presented in the UK and internationally including *Landscape II* (Dublin Fringe and UK tour 2013-14); *Autobiographer* (Toynbee Studios, London and UK tour – winner of Off Westend Award for Best Sound Design); *Iris Brunette* (winner of Best Production award at Dublin Fringe); *every minute, always* (Edinburgh 2010), *Self Portrait with Frida* (One on One Festival, BAC); *The View From Here* (One on One Festival, BAC) and *Simple Girl* (UK and international tour, Edinburgh Festival, Dublin Fringe).

Melanie's work featured recently in the sound design for the multi-media work of director Katie Mitchell, at Schauspielhaus, Cologne; Avignon Festival; Theatretreffen, Berlin Festspeile; Schaubuhne, Berlin; Berg Theatre, Vienna and the Salzburg Festival.



### **Beyer Dynamic DT770 headphones**

I have used these headphones for the last two years and find them very comfortable to wear for long periods. I love the sound they give, and take them everywhere with me. I have the 80ohm version which works better with laptops and the like.

<http://europe.beyerdynamic.com/shop/catalog/product/view/id/481/s/dt-770-pro-80-ohm/category/369>



### **Novation Launchpad with Behringer BCF2000**

I recently used this combination of kit in a solo performance called 'Landscape II'. Both pieces probably have limitations, but for the way I use sound, which is to compose in sections and then perform using a combination of triggering and live mixing, it is very satisfying and straightforward. Audiences also seemed to be fascinated by the illuminated colours of the buttons on the Launchpad too!

<http://global.novationmusic.com/>

[midi-controllers-digital-dj/launchpad-s](http://global.novationmusic.com/midi-controllers-digital-dj/launchpad-s)

<http://www.behringer.com/EN/Products/BCF2000.aspx>



### **Walking**

When making a new piece of work, I find it really necessary to walk and think and listen to the world, after long hours of monitor screens and designing. It's wonderful to construct the sounds inside your head, but important to let new ones in too, and something about walking makes ideas and sounds gather for me.

# Check one, two

At some point we've all been required to stand downstage centre and talk for a really long time, in order to sound check a microphone. This can be very boring as you try and think of something to say, recite what you had for breakfast, count to three thousand one hundred and fifty, or try to remember a Shakespearean monologue you learnt in GCSE English.

To make it a bit more fun, here's the first of a few things to say. This is the Tibetan Memory trick, which was originally used back in the 1930s to audition radio broadcasters, originating at Radio Central New York. The last sentence is a more recent addition, inspired by Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

## **The Tibetan Memory trick:**

One hen, two ducks, three squawking geese, four Limerick oysters, five corpulent porpoises, six pairs of Don Alverzo's tweezers, seven thousand Macedonians in full battle array, eight brass monkeys from the ancient, sacred crypts of Egypt, nine apathetic, sympathetic, diabetic old men on roller skates with a marked propensity towards procrastination and sloth, ten lyrical, spherical, diabolical denizens of the deep who haul stall around the corner of the quo of the quay of the quivery, all at the same time. Eleven Nutrimatic Drink Dispenser systems owned by the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation, shipped via relativistic space flight through the draconian sector seven.



# The future of sound design: audio networking



GARETH FRY

Many of us are used to thinking of audio as a linear signal chain that can be drawn as a schematic, with inputs on the left, flowing to outputs on the right, and where inputs are female XLRs and outputs are male XLRs. That world is changing rapidly, with technologies like Audinate's Dante becoming increasingly widespread. The audio schematic is increasingly resembling a star shape, with all lines flowing to and from a network switch. I started adopting audio networking in earnest last year and whilst there has been a learning curve the benefits are many.

I often create shows that use more than 16 channels of audio playback. It's been quite difficult to buy a sound card that has more than two ADAT outputs on it for the last couple of years. I create a lot of shows that tour, often internationally, which means flight case size and weights are scrutinised: two soundcards, an ADAT switcher, all the patching and cables result in a costly, bulky system with a lot of cable. To remove all of that has cut the case size in half,

and the cost. Audinate sell their DVS (Dante Virtual Soundcard) software for \$29.99, which gives any Mac or PC the ability to send and receive up to 48 channels of audio over the Ethernet port, whilst retaining its normal networking functions. So now I have a QLab computer, a backup, an Ableton computer and my laptop all hooked up to a network switch, hooked into the mixing console with a single cat6 cable. The Dante system runs word clocking internally removing the need for word clock masters and cables.

The console typically plugs into a Yamaha DME to do system processing, again using cat6 cable. At this point I usually convert to analogue to patch into a house multi. Currently there are no cheap converters to get to analogue, so I use a Focusrite RedNet3 to get to ADAT then use a Creamware/Ferrofish A16 or two to get to analogue. I can imagine that reasonably priced converters are just around the corner. Or, you could send the DME outputs back to your mixing console and use its analogue outputs.

There are a few side benefits of the technology - providing splits for broadcast becomes very simple when you can give them a network cable and they can pick up every input or output of

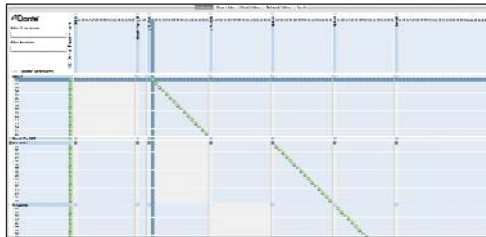
the desk. Being able to tap into every in and out by plugging your laptop in with an Ethernet cable means you can record and archive the show in ways previously impossible. Virtual sound checks become very easy with a couple of patch recalls.

The technology behind Dante is the Ethernet networking system our computers have been using for the past decade to talk to each other, so it's reasonably mature. Though the application of it for audio is in its infancy, as are our ways of thinking about how we design systems using it.

Like any new technology there are things to be aware of. As anyone who has tried to network computers together, it either works or it doesn't, with virtually no middle ground. This can make setup and troubleshooting frustrating as there is often no gradual getting better as you get closer to the right settings. It requires a degree of knowledge about computer networking. There are videos on the ASD website in the Seminar Archive looking at computer and audio networking principles. It involves careful selection of a network switch – Focusrite have an extensive tech note on their website (<http://global.focusrite.com/rednet-ethernet-switch-requirements>). I've found the

commonplace Netgear CS105 series of switches do NOT work well – manifesting itself in the system going out of sync and dodgy-word-clock type sounds being audible. I've had a lot of success with Cisco SG300-10 switches, which only cost £120 and are completely silent (unlike a lot of managed switches). Of course your network switch is now the Central hub of your sound system so it's important to have backup units ready to swap out, and to have a secondary network in place for the system to fall back on if the main network goes down.

We can expect to see technology like this proliferate through the industry in the next few years. And it will likely have massive effects on how we design sound systems. In the near future we'll see AVB, the consumer focused version of audio networking, finally getting to a point where products will be released.



Significantly the last version of the Mac operating system, Mavericks, incorporates AVB audio networking. The Audio Engineering Society ratified AES67 a few months ago, which allows interoperability between Dante and various other audio networking systems. Further ahead, we can expect the technology to have a massive impact on the design of the products we use. The cost of the analogue input and output stages are often one of the more expensive parts of the electronics in a sound device. If we eliminate them, and the only port we need to get audio and control data in and out is a single Ethernet port, then we can expect to see devices capable of much higher channel counts at cheaper prices.

In fact we're more likely to see devices being replaced by computers. Plug-in manufacturer Waves already sell their SoundGrid System, allowing you to insert dozens of their plugins across the channels of your mixing desk, and of course it communicates with your mixing desk via a single Ethernet cable. Rather than use bespoke DSP hardware, it runs bespoke software on a computer.

And as our technology becomes more computer based we can expect to see more homebrew

products. We are already seeing the easily programmable £25 Raspberry Pi popping up as the DSP heart of several entertainment products. Give the Pi the ability to tune into an audio network, and you have a low cost, sophisticated DSP with audio, HDMI and GPI in and out that can be deployed all over the place, remotely controllable from a central location. This perhaps is where innovation could really flourish.

Dante and the other technologies really benefit from using the long established, low cost systems of wired computer networking. Of course, this technology is old hat for the IT world, where the focus of work is on wireless networking. Audio networking over WiFi can be bodged, but is risky due to the growing use of that spectrum as phones and tablets get smarter and more data hungry. Crowded and unreliable WiFi connections present a problem the IT industry has yet to solve, but surely must in the future.

How this may manifest itself is yet to be seen, but it is a necessary cog in our future world. That solution may turn WiFi into as inadvertent a tool as Ethernet connectivity has become for audio, though that may come at the cost of more of our valuable radio mic spectrum.

# Mini profiles

This issue we profile the two winners of this years Olivier Award for Best Sound Design.



GARETH OWEN

Gareth Owen won for his design of Sondheim's *Merrily We Roll Along*, originally starting life at the Menier Chocolate Factory, then transferring to the Harold Pinter Theatre.

How was *Merrily* unique for you?

"I've done some really complicated sound designs (most recently the ill-fated *I Can't Sing*) whereas *Merrily* couldn't be simpler. There's just some Q10s, Q7s and QSubs on the Pros and some Eo delays - no surrounds, no zoning, no A/B system. It's got an original PM5D and a couple of PCM91's and that's about it. I looked at the show and thought that all it needed was a great sounding orchestra and a great vocal sound. The only break from the norm was using Sennheiser's 9000 digital radio mics."

It must be nice to be able to say that you got the Olivier Award then as a result of your work as a sound designer, rather than because of any new toys that allow you to do things that other people can't?

"If you have lots of new kit it can mean by the time you've got it all set up and working, you've got very little time left to do any sound design. Far better to spend the time making the snare sound right than tweaking something that does something nobody will notice."

You were working with Maria Friedman in her debut as a director. Did her experience as a performer affect her relationship to you as a sound designer?

"In our very first production meeting, everyone sat down and the first thing Maria said was 'How this show sounds is extremely important to me. Gareth,

tell me what you need'. I was a bit stunned so I replied 'Umm, no hats with brims, and some decent speaker positions on the Pros'. She turned to the costume designer and the set designer, and said, 'Okay guys, let's make that happen'. It was like a dream come true! So we got good speaker positions and lovely hats - which was a relief after *Top Hat* earlier that year - 'the clue is in the title', as another favourite director of mine so memorably put it."

What did it feel like to win?

"This was my fifth nomination - with two previous Olivier nominations and two Tony nominations. I'd spent a lot of the last few years convincing myself that it's OK not to win, that the nomination alone is completely worthwhile. But actually I'm really proud of having won, especially against such illustrious competition. And it was awesome that my mum, dad and sister could be there, along with my partner and extended family - it was a really great night out!"

What are you up to now?

"We have lots of exciting things happening right now but I am very much concentrating on *Hunchback of Notre Dame* for Disney. It's pretty rare for a non-American sound designer to be invited to do a big new musical from scratch out in the States, so I'm determined not to bugger it up. We've just finished in the *Heights* at Southwark Playhouse too - a wonderful antidote to big musical equability!"





CAROLYN DOWNING

Carolyn Downing won for her design of *Chimerica*, originally at the Almeida then, like *Merrily*, transferring to Harold Pinter Theatre.

#### How was *Chimerica* unique for you?

“I’ve had my fair share of intense wall-to-wall soundscape shows in the past and I’m no stranger to 200+ cue shows either, but it was the near-on 50 scene changes, accelerating at a rate of knots between Beijing and New York, and back again, via a clockwise-revolving white cube which made *Chimerica* an intensely unique experience. I was charged with the task of creating a sound score encompassing energised musical elements, moments of abstracted emotional reality and finding enough Mandarin-speaking actors in London to recreate the 1989 protests and violence in Tiananmen Square. Though the much more important job was to keep it fresh enough so the audience didn’t get fed up by scene change 25!”

#### How was working with director Lyndsey Turner?

“Refreshingly exciting, immensely challenging and thought provoking. Lyndsey is astute and rigorous, there was no resting on laurels, no recycling of old material. Although I have worked with Lyndsey in the past, this particular experience forced me to re-evaluate my process. Lyndsey has a big heart and so is very passionate about every detail, which meant a demanding process lay ahead. At first, she seemed to have a very clear vision of every story beat but was open enough to allow me to weave in my proposals, so between us we were able to develop a lively dialogue in our quest to crack the *Chimerica* code!”

#### How was the transfer?

“Lyndsey was keen for the show not to stand still so I had chance to add lots of extra layers to the content and give the sound system a good spring clean. At the Almeida it felt like we were bursting at the seams resources-wise and we only just finished teching by the skin of our teeth, so it was fab to be have the chance to revisit it so soon. Sonia Friedman Productions were really supportive in terms of both kit and staff to make it happen. Lyndsey was busy working elsewhere so we had to tech most of it without her. It was a great testament to how cohesive we were as a team that she’d come in to see something we’d worked on without her and just say “Tick. Let’s move on!”

#### What did it feel like to win?

“It was a big shock. I really didn’t expect it, especially considering the calibre of the other nominees. But in some ways the nomination was almost better – it was a huge confidence boost, plus the messages of support I got were wonderful. It was surreal to win, I think I must have been in a state of shock as I managed to give a coherent speech which is quite unusual!”

#### What are you up to now?

“I’m working with Lyndsey again, on *Fathers and Sons* at the Donmar Warehouse. I’ve just finished working with Frantic Assembly on their most recent production *The Believers*, another fantastically intense affair. I’m collaborating with a number of composers this year, which will be a refreshing change from working solo.”

DOUBLE PROFESSION FORMATION CAPITAL AMOUNT UNLESS FRANCHISE LEGAL MULTIPLE PROVISIONS CORPORATE MEMBER STATES OWNERS PROVIDING REPORT TEXAS LOSS CHARACTERISTIC MAY

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# Should you form a company?



SEB FROST

You might have noticed a business card of a colleague had an extended name on it and was suffixed with Ltd. You had maybe thought that the person was freelance. So what have they got that you haven't? A Limited Company. There are other types of company you can set up (also known as incorporating), such as a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) or Public Limited Company (PLC), but here we're going to talk about Private Limited Companies (Ltd).

As a freelancer you're employed directly by a client such as a producer or production, but as an employee of a Limited Company, you're employed by that company and your services are contracted out to the client.

A Limited Company is an entity owned by its shareholders, and run by its directors. You only

need one shareholder and one director (it can be the same person), and that's one reason why it might be suitable for you. Directors are employees of the company, whilst shareholders can be awarded a share of any profits that the company makes; this is known as a dividend.

It is possible to remain a freelancer whilst simultaneously being an employee of your own company, but this would increase the complexity and amount of paperwork further.

If you're a freelancer, you might want to see whether it's worth setting up a company of your own. Forming a Limited Company isn't without its complications and it's not always the best choice for everyone, but on the other hand there are many advantages that can make the process

completely worthwhile. As a general rule, you should only consider the Limited Company route if your profits are over £30,000 per year.

Whatever you decide, it's certainly worth weighing up the pros and cons of each if you intend to continue with your current career. You could be missing out on the benefits of operating as a Limited Company.

## Why?

Firstly, as the name suggests, it limits the liability of its owner(s). That means that should anything go wrong, it's the company that gets sued, and if the company runs into debt, the losses are restricted to the assets of the company, not you as an individual. Your ASD Public Liability Insurance (PLI) will cover you as a

freelancer and as a Limited Company, so long as your limited company only has one director or employee, or two, if that additional employee is a family member and engaged in clerical duties only. If you void the policy for any reason, you as a freelancer are at risk of losing any assets you may own such as a car or a house, as well as emptying your bank account.

The majority of theatre producers operate this way for that very reason, as it can limit their risk to a single production rather than their wider business as a producer. Do note however, that reckless or fraudulent trading by a company still leaves its director, you, liable for criminal prosecution.

You might be looking to the future, but having a company could make you appear that bit more professional, and if you want to begin offering a wider range of services then it is the company that is providing these, not necessarily you, the individual. This increasingly applies if you do

sound design work outside of theatre. Contracts for your services will commonly be between the producer and your company, rather than with you as an individual. This also makes the situation clearer if you need to substitute yourself for one of your employees - although most theatrical Sound Design contracts will state who's expected to carry out the job.

It's not so common in theatre, but some production companies now require you to have your own Limited Company before they'll even consider contracting you for a job. This indemnifies them against various responsibilities they'd have if they'd employed you as a freelancer, such as tax and insurance.

It can also prove useful if you're working abroad for a non-UK employer, as your income will not be subject to local income tax and the rigmarole of double taxation forms.

You will have more control of your tax planning,

as income can be kept in your business to help out with leaner years. Profit made in one year doesn't have to be withdrawn from the company, and it can be kept to fill a gap should things take a bit of a downturn.

In a Limited Company, the money your company is paid belongs to the shareholders. Your company will pay corporation tax at 20%, and this is paid on the profits your company makes (income less expenditure). The money your company makes needs to be distributed to its employees and the profits can be distributed to its shareholders (probably just you in most cases) via an appropriate route. This is one of the major decisions you need to make, as you can withdraw money from the company in the form of salary, dividend or loan.

As a freelancer, you'll be paying no tax up to £9,440, and then 20% up to £41,450. You'll also be paying up to 9% National Insurance Contributions (NIC). Current tax rules allow an employee to take a small salary, for example £10,000, and increase their remuneration through dividends. Dividends may only be paid out of the profit your company makes, but they attract no NIC, are effectively tax-free up to £32,000 and attract 22.5% tax beyond that. This is a common way of maximizing your net income whilst making sure you comply with the regulations.

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***Profit made in one year doesn't have to be withdrawn from the company, and it can be kept to fill a gap should things take a bit of a downturn***

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Your pension can also benefit from a Limited Company, as your company can make pension payments into a personal pension plan. These payments are subtracted from your company's gross income, and are not subject to corporation tax.

### **Why not?**

Time. Setting up as a freelancer is comparatively easy as all you need to do is to register your status with the HMRC. Setting up a Limited Company can be quite complicated. There are costs incurred and a considerable amount of paperwork that needs to be generated when you incorporate your company, and also on a continuing annual basis. You will need to submit annual accounts and corporation tax returns to Companies House and the HMRC as well as your usual self-assessment income tax return. You can get someone else to do much of this for you, but that will mean significantly increased accountancy costs. There are steep financial and legal penalties for those who do not file their accounts on time.

If you choose to stop working or enter full-time employment with another company, then you will still need to submit this information regardless of your situation until you close the company down, and that can be another considerable cost to you.

If you work for just one company over a lengthy period of time – for example, at least a year - you may not qualify for operating as a Limited Company. The HMRC has legislation known as IR35 that prevents people from doing just that and tries to identify those who use this structure as a tax loophole. In essence it determines whether or not you could be doing the same job as an employee of another company that is not your own. The question of employment status is a murky area, but there is a useful guide (links below) that includes 'business entity tests' to see if this might apply to you. This applies on a contract-by-contract basis, so if your work situation changes you may have to re-assess your compliance with this legislation.

Limited Companies are liable for an HMRC inspection at any time, though this is more likely if they spot any inconsistencies in your end-of-year accounts, or if your filing or payments are regularly late. This can be a very arduous process, and will likely incur steep fees for necessary assistance from your accountant.

Some production companies have different terms of payment for companies and freelancers. You could find yourself being paid a lot later as a company than if you'd been a freelancer.

Once you form a Limited Company, the information about you and your company, including financial data, is available publicly to anyone who requests it.

Always be aware that circumstances change, and there is always a risk that future governments may reduce the benefits and increase the costs of operating a small Limited Company.

### **How**

It's possible to do all of this yourself, but there's a lot of paperwork involved. Amongst other things, you'll have to file your company accounts with Companies House no later than 10 months after the end of your financial year. So the first thing you should do is to choose a good accountant. They will guide you through all the processes required including the initial incorporation, and offer you advice on company structure at all stages. They'll suggest ways to run your business efficiently, and you should be able to pay them with a monthly standing order.

Try and find one that has experience of dealing with small businesses and people in your position. It may well be that your current accountant, if you have one, is not suitable for you. A good accountant does far more than just bookkeeping.

Choose a company name. Anything you want, as long as nobody else is using it or something similar, it's not offensive, and you or your accountant will register it with Companies House. You'll receive confirmation in the form of a Company Number, which is unique to your business.

Select a registered office. This is the publicly available address for your company and is selected when you incorporate at Companies House. For this reason, it's strongly recommended that you don't use your home address for this. Your accountant's address is the option many people take. That way, all legal and financial correspondence is done via your accountant and it's much easier to have them keep track of it for you.

Open another bank account. You'll need this to get paid, as your clients will now be paying your company, and not you, directly. Setting this up is often the slowest part of the process but it's important (and a legal responsibility) to keep good records of your company's finances. It's also imperative that you keep your personal and business accounts separate, so together with a company credit card or debit card, this makes it much easier to keep your books in order.

A key part of the IR35 regulations acknowledge

this separation as an indicator of qualification. A business bank account differs in the services it offers its clients and you may find that your bank refuses to open a personal account for a business. However, the banking charges for business accounts are usually higher. Make sure you shop around for a good deal, and bear in mind that it can take over a month for an account to be set up.

If at some stage you employ other members of staff, you will need Employers' Liability Insurance as well as PLI, but this doesn't apply if you sub-contract services from a third party, such as a registered (self-employed) freelancer. Make sure you check their details and tax status before entering into a contract with them, as you will be liable for tax if it turns out that they're not officially self-employed.

Lastly, make sure that contracts drawn up by you or your agent are in the company's name, and that your agent and clients are aware of your new status and company details. Your company number and registered office address must be shown on all invoices, emails and website.

So, have you made your mind up yet? Whatever your decision, make sure you speak to a financial advisor before you jump in, and take some time to read the information on the links below and the wealth of advice that's available online.

**This article is for general guidance only and is not a substitute for professional advice where specific circumstances can be considered. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the information contained within this article is correct, the ASD does not accept any liability for any errors or omissions contained herein or any action taken or not taken in reliance upon the information provided herein.**

**More information:**

[www.hmrc.gov.uk/factsheet/limited-company.pdf](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/factsheet/limited-company.pdf)  
[www.hmrc.gov.uk/ir35/guidance.pdf](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/ir35/guidance.pdf)  
[www.companieshouse.gov.uk/about/miscellaneous/nameAvailability.shtml](http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/about/miscellaneous/nameAvailability.shtml)

**PCG, the professional association representing freelancers provide a lot of information on running a limited company, particularly in terms of IR35, which they actively lobby parliament to improve for freelancers. They provide some of this information to non-members, via their Freelancer's Guide, which can be obtained here:**  
[www.pcg.org/guide](http://www.pcg.org/guide)

# CORPORATE MEMBERS

Audio Alliance  
[www.audioalliance.com](http://www.audioalliance.com)



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# ASD

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