

Joe Payne

Composer, Sound and Projection Designer

Research/Creative Activity Statement

"I am not at all interested in theories about cinema. I am only interested in images and people and sound. I am really a very simple person." - Claire Denis

As a theatre artist and part of a storytelling team, dramatic action and human interaction is important to me. The way one moment fits into the next, how it expands or contracts with tempo, volume, vibrancy, or complexity, and how that supports or influences the people in the room, excites me. Regretfully, this is the most difficult thing to show in a design portfolio. The following is meant to give context to the work as a whole, and to convey what I hold dear, if not apparent when viewing/listening to the individual work.

I am a pragmatist; I go for the workable solution, create product that is accessible and understandable, make actors feel comfortable, and do the highest quality work under the circumstances I am given. Also, I become the kind of designer that the director wants in the room; a collaborator, a button pusher, supportive, flexible, passive, generous, intellectual, etc. I adjust my behavior in order to fulfill the expectation of the director. Consequently, each project is interesting and pleasant, and I am always invited to return. I am proud of the work that I do, enough so, as to include every production that I have designed since my appointment at The University of Tennessee into the following tenure review portfolio.

Why sound, music and projections? Because each of these design elements enhance audience performer communication, intensify emotion, help locate the characters in believable and interesting worlds, and propels the energy of the story. When successful, this is creatively challenging and immensely satisfying. "But one is visual and the others are aural!" You'd be surprised how often I get that comment. Does the fact that I am focused on creating interesting sonic environments, or delicately balancing an actor's voice with an orchestra, preclude me from having taste in visual design, or being emotionally stirred by Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*? I am an artist. My medium is time. I build and transform emotions and spaces through time.

I have always been more interested in music that is emotionally driven rather than technically proficient. Perhaps this is because I grew up in a family of musicians and am not formally trained as one, or that I fronted a grunge band in college. I do not write music that sits in an iPhone waiting for its turn in the car. I write music that fits a particular action or beat, enhances its mood, and drives us forward to the next moment. It gives a sense of unity to the world of the play.

My process may be a little backwards to formally trained composers, but I find it useful, especially in teaching composition to young sound designers. I start with orchestration, not melody. Tempo and instrumentation often have the most effect on mood, so I find instruments that feel like the character, location, or genre, then let them dictate melody through experimentation (noodling). I then create an entire score out of four or five motifs, because I feel strongly about audience connection through the use of recurring themes. Then typically, everything goes on hold until I see rehearsals, at which point I take these themes and generate cues that belong to given moments.

I treat sound effects as music and music as sound effects. My compositions are often textural and ambient like soundscapes, and my effects are melodic and tempo driven like music. I use them interchangeably but am happiest when they overlap. There is nothing like a spritely piece of music with garden birds happily chirping along (you'll notice, that is a recurring theme in many of my Shakespeare designs).

This portfolio is heavier on the sound side, but I am increasingly motivated by creating projection work. I am most interested in projected imagery as character and texture in a production. Even when relegated to backdrops, I always make sure my projections are emotionally rooted and drive the show forward through subtlety, or excess, as the storytelling demands. Most of my projection work, definitely the impressive material, can be found in the Internal Projects section of the portfolio, as much of my freelance projects still tend to be sound and composition in nature.

What follows, is a snapshot of every production that I have designed over the last five years. While each page is unique in content, most will have an audio collage or soundscape, which gives my sonic approach and atmosphere of the production. Some will have video clips, primarily showing projections. All will have pictures to give context. A few will have bits of various paperwork.

Thank you for taking the time to review this work.

Sincerely,

Joe