



GET *On* TOUR

A SOUND ENGINEER'S GUIDE

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FOREWORD BY DARRYN DE LA SOUL**

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By Scott Adamson, Chase Benedict, Jon Burton, Heatherlyn Egan, Buford Jones,
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Aleš Štefančič, and Tomas Wolfe

Foreword by Darryn de la Soul

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Foreword

I have known Nathan Lively since we met on my first tour while he was doing his first house job in Portugal in 2004—it's amazing how the people you meet on the road stick with you over the years!

Most of the authors in the chapters that follow I have also met in person, worked alongside, or at least have heard their names. The touring industry is a very big and very small world at the same time, which is the first lesson to learn. Everyone you meet in this industry will turn up again at some point, so developing good relationships (or at least not pissing people off) is the best starting point you have.

Having worked in the audio industry for nearly two decades, first as a sound engineer and later as an educator, I can vouch personally for what each of them has to say—**this is your textbook on how to get into touring.**

The question "How do I get on tour?" expects an answer that there is one route, one path to follow, a To-Do list of things you need to achieve or get under your belt before the touring world opens up, but this is not the case. Some people started touring immediately. Some people took years to get there.

There is one thing that all touring engineers have in common, however, and that is the burning desire to do it.

No one in these pages ever relied on other people to "give them a job" or "got lucky". Most of them don't even have a formal education in sound. You make your own luck in this world and they made theirs by focusing on what they wanted. If you make a clear and specific decision about what you want your life to be like, the universe generally conspires to give it to you. Making a clear decision allows you to spot opportunity when it arises, gives you the incentive (and the courage) to seize those opportunities and enables you to make good decisions.

You'll notice that many of the authors (including myself) did their first tour for a pittance, with a band that probably wasn't that good, in "toilet" venues, sleeping on floors and sharing hotel rooms with more people than they were intended to accommodate. However difficult the experience, it was this first tour that set them on the road to success.

I changed careers at age 30. I was bored with the hospitality industry and was tired of counting other people's money at four in the morning. I made the decision to

study studio engineering at Alchemea College, and envisioned myself in the post-production sector. One night at a Horace Andy gig, whilst watching the stagehands do the changeover, I turned to my friend and said "I want to be a roadie." It was a very clear decision! And although I completely forgot about my comment (my friend was to remind me of it years later), this conscious decision set my subconscious to work, and from then on everything I did led me towards this goal. A roadie I became.

In the pages that follow, you will not find a formula for how to get on the road. You will not find a step-by-step process to follow. What you will find are successful touring engineers who have made their own luck, got what they wanted out of their careers, and are living lives that they love.

In the end, it is all down to you. Grab opportunities when they arise. Do not hesitate or worry about how much you're being paid. The money will come later. For starters, just being on the road, learning how it is to travel intensely with a small group of people, coping with new venues and equipment you may not have used before, adapting to the house engineer's way of working, maintaining your politeness, working in other languages, discovering the pitfalls of flying a band with budget airlines and above all, deciding whether life on the road is, indeed, for you—that is what your first few tours are for.

Carpe diem, and happy touring!

Darryn de la Soul
Founder of [Soulsound](#)
Author of *Getting A Foot In The Door*

Bonus Content

[Follow this link](#) to get the Cliffs notes and a collection of interviews with the authors.

Preface

The most common career-related question I get is how to get on tour. There are some questions that deserve nuanced answers from multiple viewpoints, and this is one of them.

Instead of trying to answer the question directly (e.g., work hard, get lucky, sacrifice a lamb) the best thing I can do is gather compelling stories. The career paths outlined in these stories will give you ideas for actions and next steps in creating your own path. The only rule is that **you must take action or the ideas will be forgotten.**

I have attempted to order the chapters by experience so that you can first hear from someone who may only be a few years ahead of you and later from people who have been touring for 30 years or more. This is an experimental project and you will notice that the format and style varies between contributors. Don't worry about the form: the content is paramount.

All of the contributors to this book are sharing their stories in an effort to help you, the reader. Visit their websites, connect with them online, and reach out to them with any follow up questions you might have or experiences you'd like to share.

Nathan Lively
[Sound Design Live](#)

Chase Benedict

Hi, I'm Chase

I was fortunate enough to have a family background in the entertainment industry. Most of my childhood summers were spent on Hollywood film sets with my father, and before I was born, my mother was married to a touring country artist. She also worked as tour manager for some time. Naturally, they were incredibly supportive of my career choice. I paid for college by working concerts, festivals, theatrical productions and large scale corporate events. Currently I am a full time FOH Engineer for Sound Image, touring across the US, Canada, and Mexico, for Rock, Metal, and Country artists. I've also worked as a Monitor Tech, PA Tech, and FOH tech for such artist as Toby Keith, The Shins, Devin Dawson, Michael Ray.

What I love about touring

Touring has helped me make priceless relationships with people across the world. It's broadened my cultural outlook and provided me a unique perspective on the world. It's allowed me to build special bonds and has introduced me to people I would have otherwise never had the pleasure of knowing. I've seen many of the countries famous landmarks, and experienced some of the best food and beer imaginable.

What I hate about touring

There are many things that we take for granted in life and touring can shed a unique light upon them. In that sense, the lessons learned can make one especially grateful for what they have. One might find themselves giving up the most basic of life's necessities, like showers or decent toilet paper.

There was one tour in particular where, over the course of three months I spent more days off on a bus in a Walmart parking lot than I spent at home. I can think of another time when the entire crew had to go four days without showering and then hop on a plane. Our only saving grace was the baby wipes we had on the bus.

Being gone for long periods of time puts a strain on personal lives and family relationships. Within the first two years of touring, I not only lost the most serious relationship I've ever had with a girlfriend, I lost several close family members as well.

My mother died while I was rehearsing for a tour. It was unexpected. We were three days into rehearsals. Needless to say, it was a very difficult time. I was able to reflect on the time I had with her without being too regretful. She was always very supportive of my career. The touring life takes dedication, and possibly the worst part about touring is that it takes time away from other things. Time spent with loved ones is invaluable, which can be hard in an industry with such a big time commitment.

How I got my very first tour

I would say the first step is to live in area where tours regularly depart from. Then find a sound company that actually has touring accounts. There are a lot of good companies, but not all of them supply tours. Next, most national audio vendors want the same three things that every company wants: a college degree, strong work ethic, and some type of practical experience. At least that was the impression I got, from the folks I interviewed with. I know other engineers that did not go to college.

While I was studying audio production at Middle Tennessee State, I was working live shows. Sometimes it was mixing musical theatre, sometimes it was hanging lighting fixtures for corporate events. This was in addition to attending every pro-audio workshop I could. By the middle of my senior year I was A1 for large corporate events and hanging PA ten deep per side. Upon graduating I applied at several national sound companies, and was able to present a solid resume with a degree from a known and respected university.

Like everyone else, I spent the first three months of employment working in the company shop. This is a critical point. Not only is it a great opportunity for learning, but it is where one's soft skills really come into play. The key to getting on a tour is showing up early, thinking critically, and maintaining a standard of excellence in one's work. There's no doubt my work history and life lessons from my parents played into getting that first tour, but no matter how good someone's pedigree is - if they're unreliable or unpleasant to be around they'll never have a career touring.

For my most recent tour

Most recently I have been the Production Manager and FOH mixer for the rock/metal band Pop Evil. I am responsible for all things involving gear and the show. This includes being involved with lighting and occasionally video.

Part of the role of a good PM is also being able to facilitate needs of the crew. This can range from making sure everyone is given the appropriate tools for their job to making sure that the new hire's personality meshes well with the rest of the crew.

How I make a living

Every tour is different, and it's worth mentioning that the day rates for my local corporate shows have always been higher than my touring rates. While working Country shows, I made more money per day, but might only book 50-75 shows in a season. Working on a Rock tour, the day rate was less, but there were easily double the amount of shows. Regardless though, I had nearly doubled my annual local show income by my second year of touring.

One thing that is often overlooked is the cost of living offset that comes with touring. When I'm gone for several months at a time I save hundreds on my grocery, utilities, and gas bills. This ultimately turns into thousands over the course of the year. So, while my first tour's day rate was around \$100 less than my corporate rate; I was able to offset that cost through the money I was saving on the road. Meals are generally provided, and you're getting a per diem, so there's no personal expenses incurred for the gig.

To sum it up, don't be blinded by the short-term cost of a seemingly low paying tour. Not only is the experience valuable in its own right, but the financial cost may not be as high as it seems. I still do local freelance work, but it's usually about two months out of the year and only makes up 10-15% of my income.

The best decision I made

Small and dodgy venues can honestly be some of the best learning environments. My first club tour was dire. Nearly every venue had drivers wired wrong, power issues, and horrible acoustics. This presented an opportunity to phase and time-align new PAs every day and hone in my process. Not to mention, learning how to get a B-minus mix in a horrible room will make mixing in a great room a breeze.

The biggest mistake I made

One major problem for me was thinking that an FFT could provide qualitative data. For the longest time I had several target curves I would try to achieve when calibrating the PA. While I've heard of this technique working well for tours that carry their own system, it doesn't really hold up when dealing with different makes and models of boxes. Different PAs have different sonic characteristics. For example, let's say the first leg of the tour was spent with a Meyer Leo system and the second half was spent with a combination of L'Acoustic and VTX. All three are great systems, and while the magnitude traces in Smaart might look the same, they most likely will sound very different. I dug myself into so many holes because

of this. It especially becomes a problem with some of the lesser quality rigs out there.

Over time I started to paying more attention to the differences in transfer function measurements and began storing individual traces for each make and model of PA. Vertec has a specific magnitude trace, as does Leo, K1, and even some of the smaller trap boxes. Then the next time I encountered one of these boxes, I would listen and EQ, observing how similar the EQ decisions I made resembled my target traces. It's usually pretty close. This strategy has been working well for me.

If I were in your shoes

The market is highly competitive, if not saturated. The most important step to getting on a tour is to be in a location from which tours depart. I personally chose to move to Nashville, but that's not the be-all and end-all. There are touring sound companies that have offices in Denver, Orlando, San Diego, Detroit, and Cleveland, for example.

The next step is building relationships. Attend whatever manufacturer seminars and master classes are available, and then begin shopping companies. It's important to find a company culture that is a good fit. Despite the size of Sound Image, working there feels like being part of a family, and that's why I chose them.

After that, show up on time ready to learn, and ask intelligent questions.

The cases in which a band hires a sound guy from some unknown club are rarer than ever. Not to mention, the skill sets required for a touring production are often very different from the skill sets required for a venue with a permanent installation.

Regardless of technical ability, I tend to trust people who've worked for sound companies more than people who've worked in clubs. In my experience, club guys that come out on the road tend to do really well with mixing, but are absolutely terrible with production, plugging things in, and getting things done in a timely manner.

It's important to get as much experience as possible, in every department. Early in my career I'd do lighting or video if that's what was needed. So far I've held many different titles, as FOH engineer, PA Tech, FOH Tech, Monitor Tech, L2, V2, Etc.

Working for a sound company, whether it be regional or national, you'll find yourself filling several different roles in the beginning. At one point you might be the monitor tech, then you're the PA tech, and another day you're the FOH engineer; ultimately this will make you a more valuable touring professional.

In terms of technical skills

As the cliché goes, the only thing in life that is certain is uncertainty. Technology is constantly improving, and thus changing. Being able to troubleshoot equipment has always been paramount. In the past it was good enough to know basic electronics, but with the integration of audio over IP, networking skills have also become essential. Make it a point to understand at least the first three layers of internet protocols.

Over the past few years, wireless has also become a lot more tricky. As the FCC continues to auction off various bands of frequencies, RF coordination is only going to become more difficult. It's important to consider the wireless environments of the upcoming tours and help build a package that is robust and flexible. These are just the changes I've seen occurring, but who's to say what tomorrow will bring.

I'm always happy to chat or grab a beer. Email me at cbenedict@sound-image.com

Tomas Wolfe

Hi, I'm Tomas

And I'm on tour with Underoath and Run The Jewels.

What I love about touring

Traveling and experiencing different cultures. Also the challenge of mixing in a new environment daily.

What I hate about touring

Having relationships can be hard when you are away from home. It puts a lot of strain on your loved ones and you miss a lot of important life events.

How I got my very first tour

I was a house engineer for a few years and I got a call from a buddy of mine that I knew from before I got into live sound. He asked if I wanted to start a career touring and offered me a tour as TM/FOH, but it did not pay very much (like, barely enough). I always wanted to tour so I was willing to take a very steep pay cut to get my foot in the door. The current TM/FOH had been fired, so I had to catch a plane the next day to meet up with them and the rest is history. Haven't been off the road since.

For my most recent tour

I was hired by the band's manager and was referred to them by the TM of the tour I was on at the time. I hadn't been asking for more work, but if everyone sees that work your ass off then people will recognize that and think of you when they hear of gigs. Before that I was hired by a TM and met them through the guitar tech on my last tour.

How I make a living

In 2017 I earned about \$100,000 and 90% of that income was from touring. Every tour is different, but on average I am out on the road for three weeks at a time and am paid about \$2,800 per week, not including per diems and expense reimbursements. It took me seven years to work up to this level. When I started, I made about \$35,000 per year. My first tour paid \$600 per week.

The best decision I made

Was to take every gig I was offered no matter what the pay and to keep touring through strained relationships at home. Basically I decided I would make this my career no matter what the cost. I don't recommend this but it worked for me. It can be a double-edged sword, though.

The biggest mistake I made

I wanted to get on this tour but I had to backline tech on top of being a monitor engineer. I did not have a lot of experience as a backline tech and I was really bad at it. It affected my ability to be a good monitor engineer because I was being stretched too thin. Know your limitations and learn to say no.

What I wish I knew 20 years ago

Pro audio is not a meritocracy. The truth is that there are three parts: 1. Who you know; 2. How you get along with people; 3. Your skills.

Contracts

If you're just starting out I don't recommend asking for anything, because you want to build up your resume and the less you ask for the better your chances are of getting that gig. Of course this can bite you in the ass but sometimes that's the price you pay to get other gigs. Later in your career you might want to ask for things like having your own room on days off, being paid a day rate on every day (not just show days), and being paid 50% of your rate if the tour is canceled, but even today this is on a case-by-case basis. If you want to stay busy sometimes you have to take one for the team.

Mental and physical health is super important, which is why I have developed these habits: eating right, not indulging in drugs and alcohol, not staying up all night, meditation, and exercise. Of course this is easier said than done.

Take time out of every day to talk to your loved ones, even if you have nothing to say or if it feels monotonous and you're tired. Facetime is a godsend. Send your partner flowers from time to time, or a postcard. Fly them out if you have a few days off.

If I were in your shoes

If you're a house engineer, give your card out to every band that plays there and go above and beyond for them. I don't have any specific stories about this, but I

would make sure I gave any band that came through 100% and have a good attitude regardless of how they treated me.

Besides hard work, get active on social media and join audio groups. Look for engineers in your area and hang out with them. Find a mentor.

In terms of technical skills

I think there will always be a need for TM/FOH or PM/MON and other combo jobs like that, because touring is expensive and managers are looking to save money where they can. Besides that, I think video will be the highest in demand in the upcoming years. I see more tours adding it.

Find me on Facebook (Tomas Wolfe), or email me at tomaswolfe@gmail.com.

Aleš Štefančič

Hi, I'm Aleš

And I'm a sound engineer. Here are a few quick facts about me:

- 20 years of experience as a FOH/monitoring engineer
- Audio educator, musician, and project studio owner
- Regular contributor to audio journals, such as ProSoundWeb and Live Sound International

What I love about touring

Coming from a miniscule country of Slovenia, Europe, touring is quite different than in other areas. Since it only takes about 4 hours of driving to cross the country, we do not usually “go on tour” in terms of packing up our gear, kissing our loved ones goodbye, and hitting the road for months on end. Ninety-nine percent of the time I have the option of driving home and sleeping in my own bed, then heading out for the next gig the following morning. As an example, the upcoming tour I am doing has thirteen dates between October and December, mostly two shows a week (Fridays and Saturdays), and almost all of them are within a two hour drive. So my touring experience might not apply as much to productions that pack everything in a van/bus/plane and take off as it does to regional touring experience specific to our small country.

The thing I love about touring is the ability to do what I love as much as I can. Since music is my passion, I feel tremendously blessed to be able to make a living doing what I love. There is a specific moment that I enjoy the most. Even after all these years, after making sure everything is in order, double- and triple-checking everything in terms of gear, there is still that adrenaline-filled moment when the act goes onstage and the show starts. When the show starts and the crowd goes wild, when you realise that everything is working great and you take that first breath of relief—that is my favourite moment of touring. That feeling when all the crew involved create another great show and you get to be a part of that is my drug of choice. Touring gives me the opportunity to experience that feeling on a regular basis and also provides an environment to think about details rather than broad strokes. When a show is set up for a tour, you get more time to try out various techniques or gear and really determine how they shape or influence the sound. Compare that to the hectic job of building a mix from scratch for a new band; your priorities are much different. When I tour, I can try different effects or different mics during soundcheck and compare that to the previous show. It is a lot

of fun trying out things that might sound better or improve your workflow—a great opportunity to further your abilities and refine your approach.

What I hate about touring

I think my greatest challenge is repetitiveness. It is easy to fall into a trap of skipping steps when checking gear or setting up, because “hey, if it worked yesterday, it must work today, right?” I find myself mentally skipping steps or thinking that I have done something because days can seem very similar. The way around that are checklists that I build for myself before every tour that list all the things I have to do, and sticking to those lists religiously. That helps me overcome any sloppiness that might occur because of the repetitive nature of the tour. I found out that I don’t hate the daily routine itself, but I hate how it can make me less focused and I consider that my greatest challenge when touring.

How I got my very first tour

My very first tour happened only a few years ago. I started working as a monitoring engineer for a rock band Siddharta. I was working at a music gear retail store at the time and their keyboard player walked in one day. I knew the guys from the band from previous encounters at live gigs and in the store, but had never worked directly for them. He told me that they just had another horrible experience with the monitoring engineer that the festival provided and that they have decided to hire their own monitoring engineer. I told him that I would like to be considered for the job and a few weeks later I got a call from their management that they have decided to try me out. I told them what I tell all productions that want to hire me long term—I will do the first show for free so we can develop a relationship and just see if we can work together, without pressure or obligation on either part. (They refused, because we already knew each other personally, but I find that strategy helpful in developing lasting relationships with production managers and artists.)

I have been working with them ever since, for two tours in 2017 including about 10 dates with the full-scale show where I was the monitoring engineer, and a shorter tour with an acoustic set where I mixed FOH. Like I stated before, these were not tours where we would pack up and hit the road, but rather a condensed schedule of shows which I could drive to on a daily basis. But it was still a new world for me. I was now able to build a show and tend to details using the same sound system, same gear, and same set list, which allowed me to think and work differently from what I was accustomed to.

For my most recent tour

I was hired to mix FOH for an acoustic tour for a renowned Slovenian artist Alenka Godec. The tour is a celebration of her 30-year career as a singer, and it focuses on

smaller, intimate venues, with the show being a jazz-pop mixture with some amazing musicians in her band. I was recommended to her by her record producer, who is also a bass player in her band as well as in the band Siddharta. Since I worked as a FOH engineer for the last acoustic Siddharta tour and got great feedback from the audiences, he recommended me for her upcoming tour.

How I make a living

Until recently I had a full time job and only did freelance audio in my spare time. Since May 2018, I have transitioned into freelancing full time. My freelancing activities include audio education, operating a small studio for music and voice-over jobs, and mixing or teching live sound gigs for bands or rental companies. Touring is about 10% of my total income, with my fees ranging from 150-250€ per gig excluding travel expenses and meals, which are added to the cost of the artist or production.

The best decision I made

I often think of a quote by Steve Martin, who stated: "Be so good they can't ignore you." For me that translates into getting as much knowledge as I can, so I made a very conscious decision to invest in my education on a regular basis, attending every product presentation, audio workshop, and seminar that I can. I am a true believer in always learning more from just about anyone I meet. This is also the most common advice I give to other engineers or anyone interested in working in this field: never stop learning. It does not mean that I get to apply all of that knowledge every day, but it gives me options to respond to various situations in different ways and being as ready as possible for what can be very unpredictable circumstances.

The biggest mistake I made

I try not to consider mishaps as mistakes, but rather as learning opportunities. Here is one that comes to mind. Last year I was working as a FOH engineer at a town festival that has several stages. I was also providing tech support for the main stage at that festival. During a soundcheck on my stage I got a phone call to solve a problem with one of the digital consoles on the main stage. I was nearly finished with FOH sound, so I turned down the volume of the main PA to take the phone call. It only took a couple of minutes, but after the sound check the band leader came to me and chewed my head off for disrupting their sound check. I understood his point of view completely, but I also believed that there was nothing I could have done differently under those circumstances. My initial mistake was to agree to work both jobs, knowing they might overlap each other. So my takeaway from that situation was the realization that you when you take on multiple titles at one time,

make sure they overlap as little as possible and also to let everyone know in advance about the situation.

What I wish I knew 20 years ago

When I was starting out, I lived in a world of crappy speakers and analog desks, no processing in sight. We made do with the microphones we had at hand, kept deciding which 2 channels of the band would get treated with the only compressor we had, and did gigs that lasted for 14 hours straight. I often thought that having those limitations prevented me from being a great sound engineer and always wanted to work with better bands, better PA, and better gear. What I did not know is that I was building up to where I am today in ways I could not comprehend. Now I realize that figuring out how to get a decent sound from crappy bands on crappy gear made me a much better engineer because I don't get scared easily. I have heard enough terrible guitar amps to know what to do with them. I have dealt with so many underpowered monitor wedges that I know how to get every last dB before feedback out of them. I have inserted so many cables from that compressor into channels and groups that signal flow comes naturally now, even if it is hidden in the depths of digital consoles. What I wish I knew then was that it will all make sense in the long run. That was me learning to walk so that I could run.

If I were in your shoes

My goal as a sound engineer was to follow the music I liked and go after it. I mentioned that I would like to work with a certain band to band members or management. I would call up the friend who just released his first single with his new project to tell him that I love the music and would love to work with them in the future. I also made a conscious decision to offer my first gig for free—that would give the band a chance to meet me and evaluate my work with no cost to them. That one gig would then provide me with the opportunity to showcase my approach and my skills, but also see if I would enjoy working with the act. Some people are more compatible than others, so offering that opportunity gives everyone a chance to have a "casual first date" before committing to a long term relationship.

In terms of technical skills

During the recent Live Sound Summit, I had the opportunity to listen to some of the leaders in the industry claim that the next revolution in audio is just around the corner. From what we were able to gather, it will be even more technically challenged and demanding than anything we have been doing so far. When such seismic shifts occur, the only thing that will keep you afloat is your willingness to learn about new technologies and approaches and embrace them as soon as possible. Remember the days when digital consoles became readily available and

yet some analog guys insisted that it would never take off? We are all forced to embrace the future at some point. My advice is to be among the first. Lead the way, don't be dragged into it kicking and screaming. I always try to keep my eyes open to upcoming protocols, products, and techniques; you never know what might be thrown at you on your next gig.

Go to www.gainmedialab.com for a collection of Aleš' blog posts, upcoming online courses, and links to his YouTube contributions.

Nathan Lively

Hi, I'm Nathan

And I'm a recovering sound engineer. Do you like bullet points?

- 15 years of experience in pro audio, in 8 major cities across 3 countries
- Interviewed 47 industry leaders (including Ken "Pooch" Van Druten with Linkin Park, Bob McCarthy from Meyer Sound, and Dave Swallow with La Roux)
- 360,511 plays of my podcast, Sound Design Live
- 181 articles in Pro Sound News Europe, The Pro Audio Files, Soulsound, SoundGirls, and Sound Design Live
- Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards for Sound Design
- Toured nationally with the Ringling Bros. Circus

Also, I make a mean cup of hot chocolate. ☕

What I love about touring

- Knowing a show so well that you feel like you are as much a part of it as the musicians.
- Hanging out with the most talented people in the world.
- Living on a train.
- Working in foreign places.

Touring has the best combination of variety and consistency you can find. Every day there are a variety of new challenges you face to produce a consistent show.

As a kid, I thought that working in an office would be boring and decided to pursue more adventure. Like many people, I thought that touring with big shows would be the best way to get it. I would drool over every *Live Sound International* magazine with envy. I love traveling but hate being a tourist. Working with local people in a foreign city is so much better.

In Portugal I learned the language on the job and had coffee with Panda Bear. In Macau I went to lunch with the local techs and learned that most of them were from Hong Kong. In Slovakia the crew really tight and invited me to a hot spring in Hungary. In the circus we had to take a bus from the train to the arena every day and I met some of the trapeze artists, who were all Portuguese.

Every day on tour new challenges arise that put my skills to the test in audio, management, and emotional stability. We show up at a new theatre or arena and I have to figure out the most efficient way to get all of our gear into the building, right after I figure out the fastest way to get caffeine into my body. The arena in Fresno had no loading dock. The only way to get in was a steep ramp. Trucks had to be unloaded with forklifts. This is where I had my first 24-hour load out. Then, the most challenging piece: figuring out how to install and optimize the sound system. There are always problems and a good amount of troubleshooting.

At the same time, I need to make sure my team is doing well and that we are all on track to be set before sound check. The larger the team, the more variables I have to keep track of and the more opportunity for problems. If one person is having a bad day or gets injured, the whole dynamic can shift.

I will undoubtedly have some emotional upset before the morning is over. Someone will say something that my ego will interpret as judgement or disapproval. I'll have to walk away from an interaction feeling shitty and figure out how to let it go and move on as quickly as possible. I used to think that managers were somehow inhuman and unfeeling. Now I realize that they go through all of the same shit we do. They're just more experienced at dealing with it.

To balance out all that variety is some consistency: a core group of people, a show that I know by heart, and the same weekly income. In touring and live events, you meet some of the best people in the world and some of the worst people in the world. There is an amazing process over the course of the tour where you build strong bonds with people that you otherwise may never have known. It's like a big family, just more functional than most.

Building a show is also an incredible experience. Everything starts out very abstract at the beginning. Here is this big audacious thing we want to create with lots of adjectives. So you give it a shot and your first attempt is a mess, but you course correct over and over again until you give it life. Songs are added and others cut. By the end you are making 0.5dB changes at 3kHz to the vocal at 2m43s. Building the show is my favorite part.

And of course, it's nice to be able forget about your income for a little while. Big or small, you know exactly what it's going to be. The result is a little less business administration work for a short time.

What I hate about touring

Touring is at the same time the best and worst job I have ever had. But it doesn't have to be. Remember in 2366 when Noonian Soong summoned Data to his lab to

install the emotions chip he had built for him? But Lore got there first and there was a big android fight? Crazy. Fast forward to 2371 and Data has installed the chip, but here's the amazing thing; he can turn it on and off at will, and so can you!

Just kidding. But wouldn't that be amazing if you could turn your emotions off for load in and turn them back on for the show? It would be great, right?! But you can't, which is what makes being a touring sound engineer so hard. You must be very sensitive to do the artistic side, mix a great show, and make people laugh and cry. But then, outside of the show, you are expected to be bulletproof, cool as a cucumber, unaffected, and 100% positive and professional. None of us got into this business because we are great at dealing with rejection, but it is the only way we will survive.

Touring is the most intense crash course in technical training, team work, health, and emotional intelligence you can get.

How I got my very first tour

In Portugal, I worked with the band [O'QueStrata](#) who played 2-3 shows per month in towns all around the country and went as far as Spain and Macau. Since then they have toured all over Europe. I consider that my first tour. I started working with them because they came through Galeria Zé Dos Bois where I had my first full-time house gig. They liked the fact that I let them do weird things like distance miking. They initially hired me to help them build giant custom lamps for a mobile art installation. Since I was around, they started asking me to come out on shows. At the time I think I was making €450/month at my house gig, so when they offered me €125/day to work on the best show I had ever seen in my life, my head exploded.

I consider my second tour the summer of outdoor symphony gigs I did in Slovakia. I got that gig by sending out bilingual postcards to all of the sound companies in the country. Two of them responded and started hiring me.

I got my first US tour with Spring Opera House by applying for the job through ArtSearch. My friend Julie had a TCG (Theatre Communications Group) membership and she let me use it to search for jobs. It was an entry level gig, so there probably wasn't much competition. I was able to give myself a small raise by renting them my wireless mix system. I don't remember the interview, but I think they liked that I had some touring experience and lots of troubleshooting time with wireless mics.

I realized this could be a real career

It was never super clear. There were lots of breakdowns and breakthroughs. I already mentioned the first time O'queStrada offered me a job. Later on I went

back to thinking I would never make enough money to survive. In 2008 I moved to San Francisco. Within a year I had burned through \$10,000 in savings and didn't know how I would pay next month's rent. Every night I would lay in bed for a long time trying to think of a solution. Towards the end of the month my neighbor Charlie offered me a gig helping with some install work at the San Francisco Zen Center. Later I found out that he was also the AV provider for a small art gallery called 111 Minna. One day he needed a last minute AV tech and asked if I could cover that instead of helping him on the install that day. It paid \$35/hour. This was more than I had ever made before and it opened my eyes to opportunities outside of concert sound.

That's a story for another time, though. This is a book about touring.

In 2016, I got a gig touring full-time with the Ringling Bros. Circus for \$1,500/week. That was the moment when I was finally convinced that I could really have a career and make a living in audio. Four months later I lost the job and had no home.

There are no promises in pro audio. The only thing you can rely on is change.

For my most recent tour

I was hired by the director of audio operations at Feld Entertainment and was referred to them by the sound system designer who consulted with them on their touring circus shows. I met them through attending seminars. It wasn't just a lucky accident. I had been intentionally building a relationship with this person since I met them five years before the tour.

How I make a living

In the last 12 months I have earned about \$79K and 5% of that income was from touring. In 2016, I earned about \$51K and 40% of that was from touring.

Currently, my income goes to these four buckets: 50% owner's pay, 30% operating expenses, 15% taxes, 5% profit. If I round up to make the math easier, this means that of the ~\$80K income, I take home \$40K, which works out to living on about \$3,330/month. This means that I am able to rent a small apartment with my wife in Minneapolis, share a car, and contribute to my Roth IRA. This is theoretical, though. As my income varies wildly from month to month, so does my personal budget. It's stressful, but most of the time I'm just happy to stay in business. My first US tour paid \$550/week, so I feel like I've come a long way.

The best decision I made

To get more of the work I really love, I started an education business that allowed me to create the perfect job for myself. I really like being an entrepreneur, teacher, and coach. My mission is to pursue growth and learning above all else.

In terms of touring and getting more work on shows, the best decision I made was to intentionally build relationships with colleagues who were doing work I liked and to ask them for help. Probably the best example of this was when I moved to San Francisco. I was going around to all of the theatres in town, advertising myself as a sound designer, getting little and low paying work. My first serious gig with a repertory theatre came through a colleague. He was one of the busiest sound designers in town, working on exactly the kinds of shows I wanted to work on, so I came to an event where I knew he would be, introduced myself, and asked him if he would connect me with more people. Jesus, was I nervous. Two weeks later he referred me for a production at Center Rep in Walnut Creek. With that one relationship, I probably saved myself five years of working up the ladder on my own.

The biggest mistake I made

All evidence I have ever seen is that people get fired for personality problems, not technical mistakes or inexperience. I got fired from the Ringling Bros. tour because I pissed off the Production Manager and the General Manager. There were a thousand tiny struggles on that tour, but the biggest mistake I made was more or less to say to each of those managers independently: "No." I know, it's obviously career suicide, but at the time I felt like I was being taken advantage of and needed to defend myself. In the end, it doesn't matter who was right or wrong. In that moment, I lost the trust they had in me. When I finally realized the mistake weeks later, I took action to correct it and resolve conflict, but the wheels were already in motion. I was fired right when things seemed to be improving.

I'm not sure what your takeaway should be from this story. Do you want to be happy or right? If you think it won't happen to you and that you are immune from the stress of touring, you are wrong. My best suggestion would be to do whatever you can now to build emotional resilience so that when the straw breaks the camel's back, you'll choose happy. That might mean hiring a therapist or life coach. It might also mean reading [Tara Brach](#), [Brené Brown](#), and [Kristen Ulmer](#).

What I wish I knew 20 years ago

Work, like life, is full of discomfort, but it's ten times worse when you fight it. Everyone wants their life to be a little bit easier and a little bit less stressful.

Hoping for some magical overnight transformation is a waste of time and energy, though. Every challenge is an opportunity to lose your shit or get stronger (sometimes both).

Here's a simple example: I used to have a lot of fear around hunger. You've heard the term hangry? I would get it, bad. I basically have to eat every 2-3 hours or I get a headache. For years I let this ruin trips, jobs, and events for me when all I could focus on was the fear or pain of hunger.

In 2017 I did my first water fast for a day. I didn't die. In fact, I was fine aside from a headache that I easily treated with ibuprofen. Now I do one fast a month. This practice has given me the superpower of knowing that I can go a whole day without eating and not freak out. I know what the side effects will be, and while undesirable, it has allowed me to stop obsessing about food. While the rest of the crew is freaking out about not getting a meal break, I remain calm. I still make plans to always have enough food and water, but if everything goes wrong, I have a backup plan. If I had known this 20 years ago, I could have saved myself much unnecessary stress and pain.

On the nuts and bolts side, sharing a room sucks. I really need some alone time after being around the same people all day long. I probably wouldn't take any more tours where I had to share a room. On a theatre tour where we were sharing rooms, everyone came down with stomach flu except for me and one other person. This is just an extreme example of needing privacy so you can puke your guts out.

I also wish I had started saving money 20 years ago, or moved to Denmark. There is one simple principle that I only learned 5 years ago that I wish I had learned 20 years ago: pay yourself first. This means that you must save at least 1% of every dollar you make before the other 99% slip away. For more on this, read [Profit First](#).

If I were in your shoes

If I were starting over or moving to a new city, I would start by contacting all of the AV companies in town to get some cash flow ASAP and meet new people. I don't want to be desperate for money while pursuing my dream job. Corporate events and hotel AV have high turnover rates, lower competition, and nice people who are willing to help you out. It's not hard to get a job and get trained for free. Other entry level positions that always have openings are automotive and residential system installation.

At the same time I would find 10 people in town who are doing exactly the job I want to be doing and get dates with them where I would find out as much as I could about them and their work, ask for advice and contacts, and permission to

follow up in the future. I would also hire a business coach and get an accountability partner.

In terms of technical skills

In the next few years, the highest demand in touring will be for generalists. Everyone wants to specialize in mixing FOH or sound system optimization, but the highest demand is for people who can mix monitors, tour manage, operate a lift, and drive a truck. It's the same with local gigs. If you can set up a projector and operate a video switcher, you'll get a lot more work than if you can only take audio gigs.

Hear more great stories like the ones in this book on the [Sound Design Live podcast](#).

Heatherlyn Egan

Hi, I'm Heatherlyn

I've worked in entertainment since 1998 doing some variety of Stage Management and Lighting along the way, toured with multiple companies over seven years and did two years on the high seas as a Show Controller. I left the road late 2017 and moved to Orlando, FL to take a position with Universal Creative as a Lighting Manager for new attractions.

What I love about touring

The best part about touring is probably also the most obvious part, and that's the travel. Even when you're stuck on a bus or in a van for 16 hours a day, someone else is still paying you to see new places. I was fortunate enough to hit all 50 US states (and Puerto Rico!) as well as about 13 different countries. While none of my time in those destinations would qualify as a "vacation", it afforded me the opportunity to make a list of places I'd like to see again, and a longer list of places I never want to see again.

What I hate about touring

Touring is a soul-sucking, cynic-creating, all-consuming demon. There will come a time when you've never been so excited to see the inside of a Walgreens and eat food that doesn't come from a truck stop or a paper bag. Days and weeks meld into a blur of time that has no definite beginning or end and your best bet for remembering any of it is to take note of how nice the backstage bathrooms were. Ever made a joke about waking up during a car trip and not knowing where you are? It's funny until you start to rely on hotels to print "Welcome to [insert city name here]" on their keys.

How I got my very first tour

Sometime about 2009, I was working Off-Broadway in New York City and for some reason, decided I wanted to give touring a try. I'd seen pictures of hotel room parties and everyone crowded around a tour bus, giving a thumbs-up that they survived whatever tribulations occurred that day and something inside of me said "why not?"

At that point, I had very few friends who had toured and didn't have a clue how to start. Online job boards for theatrical jobs were just starting to crop up, and the

ones that already existed were utilitarian at best. It is much easier now, so be grateful you waited a bit to give this a go. To be quite honest, landing my first tour was easy once I knew where to look. The trick was finding a tour willing to accept technicians who had zero touring experience—that's still a major blocker for a lot of people trying to get into touring, companies wanting experience in order to gain experience. In any case, I found the listing and they wanted a stage manager/lighting split and it just so happened that's my exact specialty. I chatted with the folks who were my references prior to submitting anything so they knew what was coming and I was hired within two weeks of submitting for the job—I hit the road with my first show in January of 2010 and was off and running from there.

I realized this could be a real career

I managed to hit the tour circuit just as regional theatres were taking a downturn—layoffs, cutting back resources and season lineups, and the “regular full-time” jobs dried up. I had a regular summer gig out in Montana, and spent my first three years on the road touring from September to May and doing summer stock June through August because there were very few full-time jobs available that paid a living wage. At that point, I decided that staying on the road was a good option and continued to exercise that option until recently.

For my most recent tour

My most recent tour was a high-profile celebrity variety show. I was hired in as the Stage Manager and happened to find the posting while I was looking to fill a six-week gap in my regular touring schedule last fall. I didn't know anyone at the company and when they received my resume, they called to find out WHY someone with my resume was available with two weeks' notice for a six-week gig.

As someone who did hiring for several companies, you need to vet the folks who are available on short notice—there's usually a reason (and most often it's not a good one). I explained to them I was on hiatus between my summer and fall tours and theirs fit perfectly into that slot as long as they could fly me out to my other tour at the end of the contract. I was hired immediately...and I guess what I'm trying to say is that everything I've done has been slightly unusual in how I've done it—just because I've been hired immediately for 90% of my jobs in the last 15 years without knowing someone at the company doesn't mean you should expect the same results. I worked very hard to build a resume that lets me grab up what I consider to be “long-shot” jobs.

Prior to that tour, I worked for a company off and on from 2013-2017 as my availability allowed—they toured year-round and while I was their first choice, I left and came back several times in order to take advantage of some other

opportunities. I was hired in as the Technical Director/Lighting Supervisor in 2013 by the Production Manager, who I'd worked with way back in 2007 and 2008. It came out of nowhere as I was looking to get away from another company, and served as a reminder that you never know who is going to be important down the road—be kind to everyone (also be good at your job, but most importantly, be kind).

How I make a living

I've been working full time (out of school) in entertainment since 2006 and toured from 2010-2017. My highest grossing year while touring full time was 2014-2015, where I clocked in at \$50,000. On average, my weekly rate was between \$1,300-\$1,900 and I would be on the road about 30-35 weeks a year. My first tour paid \$400/wk, my last tour paid \$1750/wk. I left touring altogether at the end of 2017 for a new job and doubled my income, but I wouldn't have been able to land the job I have now if I didn't have the varied experience from touring.

The best decision I made

The best decision I ever made was to make a decision. People suffer from a lovely cliché known as "paralysis of the analysis" in which they spend so much time thinking about all the ways something could pan out that they do nothing to get there. Stop it. Just stop it. Sit down and figure out what you want to do and go do it. If you can't do it immediately, make sure that every single action you take and decision you make is moving you toward that goal. Every single one. Cut out the toxic people holding you back. Cut out activities that drain your energy. Replace those things with good people and good activities and go get it. Once you decide what you want, declare it, and start making the effort, you will be amazed at how quickly things fall into place. Remember, none of this is easy. It's not. Reading about how other people did it, or talking to folks who are established can very quickly give you a false sense of security. It's hard work and a lot of times, it's absolutely terrifying trying to figure it out, but it's worth it.

The biggest mistake I made

The biggest mistake I made was taking a gig because I thought I had to. I didn't see anything else on the horizon and I panicked. I hated the job, I hated the company, and I wasn't particularly fond of any of the people I was working with. Doing so was a great lesson in patience as I will never make that mistake again. Let the record show that particular production is the only one I didn't keep any paperwork for after it was over—I had a nightmare a month after that contract ended that we'd been given a mandatory extension.

What I wish I knew 20 years ago

Twenty years ago, I did my first show. I was 14. I wish I knew even one of the things I know now. The best I can tell you is to advocate for yourself- nobody else is going to do it for you. Get conditions put in your contract. If the company is expecting you to advance 60 venues and contact hotels, make sure they're either providing you a company cell phone or paying your personal phone bill. Don't let the little things slide. Many of the smaller companies bank on the fact that people either don't know or won't ask about stuff like phone bills or paying for airline baggage fees or cabs to and from the airport, and that stuff adds up.

Beware any company that asks you to pay for your own travel up front with the promise of reimbursement later. This should be self-explanatory.

Ask questions. Ask lots of questions. About everything. There are no stupid questions. If someone tells you it's a stupid question, don't take the job.

It is very easy to get mentally and physically worn down on the road. If the company is asking you and your team to do things that are unreasonable (e.g., excessive travel hours and little to no rest time), make some noise. You can't fix every situation, but believe me when I tell you that if a company can get away with it once and nobody gets hurt or says anything, they'll expect to get away with it every time after that. Again, advocate for yourself.

That being said, choose your battles wisely. You can't push back on every situation and expect the resolution you think you deserve. Take one for the team if it means a greater victory is ahead.

If I were in your shoes

So here it is—if I were starting over, moving to a different discipline or a new city without a job lined up, I'd start by researching and finding every company that does anything even remotely related to what I do. Send them an introduction email (most places don't like cold calls anymore and it's easy to forward an email to the proper person), ask for advice or recommendations. Spam all your friends on social media and see if anyone has contacts in that city. Entertainment is a dirty little birdbath and I'd almost guarantee you know someone who knows someone in that city or at that company. At the same time that you're blasting everyone in sight trying to find leads, take a moment to be very aware of how you're presenting yourself—the last thing you want to be is an annoyance who calls every week to see if they have a job opening yet. Space it out and be reasonable. If it feels like you're

being obnoxious, step back for a minute and assess the situation. There's a fine line between persistent and annoying.

If your dream job doesn't pop up immediately, but there's another option that perhaps doesn't pay as well or isn't exactly what you want to do, BUT it would give you the opportunity to meet more people, do it. Just do it. I did that last year—went to decorate trees for Christmas (in August) for a few weeks. It was cash in my pocket and everyone working for the company was an independent contractor who knew a ton of other people—it wasn't glamorous, the money wasn't spectacular, but I made some friends and some contacts and learned how to use a high-reach in the process (which is invaluable, by the way—learn high-reaches and forklifts).

In terms of technical skills

The range of technical skills tours are looking for is morphing and expanding every year with the expansion of video and automation in particular. At the same time more money is being spent on technology and effects, less is being put toward staffing. I am a Technical Director/Stage Manager/Lighting Supervisor split. Every single tour I did was some combination of those three positions. I can't stress enough that I firmly believe everyone should have at least two disciplines under their belt. You should be an expert in one and proficient in the other and still get a ton of work—but make sure you are legitimately an expert in at least one of them. Whichever discipline you are proficient in can be supplemented on the road as long as you're really good at the other. I took a job that required projection, video, pyro, and laser experience in addition to lighting, programming, and special effects. I only knew the latter three inside and out and the company saw the value in that and gladly got me trained up on the rest.

Oddly averse to technology and social media, you can find some slightly out of date material on my website at heatherlynegan.com. In my dwindling spare time, I write novels and do photography, some of which can be found at carbonarcphotography.com. I welcome questions, comments, and funny cat pictures at egan@heatherlynegan.com.

Nicholas Radina

Hi, I'm Nick

And I'm a freelance audio engineer, educator, writer, and musician proudly from Cincinnati, OH.

My 20+ year freelance audio engineering career has taken me on wonderful journeys. Small- and large-scale live events, high-level touring, special events, children's theater, executive corporate work, and the occasional dip in large bodies of water.

You can find me stage left as monitor engineer for the band O.A.R. and stage right smacking cowbells at home at Cincinnati's Salsa on the Square.

I write for the magazine Live Sound International and companion website, ProSoundWeb, focusing on helping fellow sound engineers by offering live sound techniques, fundamentals, and tips.

What I love about touring

Adventure and personal growth! Touring is such a unique way to see so much of the world, meet people, and work with great talent. The fast-paced and often challenging days bring opportunities to gain experience, knowledge, and camaraderie that I enjoy.

What I hate about touring

Being away from family and friends is a common theme. Navigating how to manage these relationships as well as "bad news" when you're away can be incredibly difficult. I've missed key moments in others' lives because of my choice to build my career. These sacrifices are very real. Working on a healthy approach to these losses and compromises is crucial to maintaining a good attitude, work environment and general sanity. Be realistic and show compassion.

How I got my very first tour

For ten years I was the house engineer at a small music venue in Cincinnati, with programming ranging from local events to national touring acts. One weekend, a Cincinnati band that had become a great success, Over The Rhine, played the theater for two sold-out nights. As the house guy, I was the de facto monitor engineer. After the first song of soundcheck, I had a strong feeling that this group

was my next path. We all seemed to click and the music was incredible. After load-out, they asked if I would be interested in joining their upcoming tour. This was a truly special opportunity for me and I took it very seriously.

I made plans to leave my job and go out on the road. I was offered the job as monitor engineer before the tour budgets were revised, though, and there was only room for a merch seller paying only \$500 per week. I gladly took the merch reins, learning as much as possible and treated it just as importantly as spinning up a great monitor mix. A week into the tour, a personnel change led to an opportunity for me to take over the tour manager position (in addition to merch, monitor engineer, and driver). I knew very little about tour managing yet knew I was up for the challenge. That single choice to say "Yes, I can figure that out" and trusting myself led me to a long term relationship with the band as a tour manager, FOH engineer, monitor engineer, and ultimately a musician in the band playing every instrument I knew how to play.

I realized this could be a real career

A key transition came when my skills, experience, and frustration came into alignment. I found myself a bit burned out, without much direction, and looking for another path. I started declining gigs that didn't meet some baseline wants for my life and career. That baseline includes work that helps me move forward, is good for my resume, benefits me on a spiritual level, or is financially rewarding. Looking at every opportunity with these things in mind made it easier to respectfully turn down work that would keep me from growing, make me feel stuck, and ultimately lead to a deeper burn out.

A friend mentioned the importance of defining who you are to others. There is a universal need to know whether you are an astronaut, a race car driver...or a sound engineer. Using the tools of social media and my local network, I was able to help others know what I do. Money and time often don't get along in this business. I knew that if I could balance this challenge, I would feel better about the sacrifices and gain courage to ask for more money. This small change led to the ability to not have to take much work I didn't want and to focus on better opportunities instead.

For my most recent tour

My most recent tour and majority of my recent touring is as the monitor engineer for the band O.A.R. This opportunity came to me via the talented road dog Michael Larcey. Larcey and I met while we were touring with Over The Rhine. Working together for many miles and countless shows offers a level of friendship and mutual understanding that leads to a great team and ultimately a fulfilling gig.

How I make a living

Diversifying and being flexible and available have always been the keys to my self-employed survival. When working at home I freelance with several audio companies, tackling festivals, special events, and corporate work. At this point in my career, \$350-500/day seems to be the competitive rate. I write articles for *Live Sound International*/ProSoundWeb.com, and I created and run SoundNerdsUnite.com, which offers products and teaching resources about live sound. I co-founded and program a special 22-week Latin music series in Cincinnati called Salsa On The Square. I also manage an apartment building.

A quick note about making a living: be careful about declining work just because it doesn't meet your financial goals. Not all of this life is about money. Weigh the short term financial loss against the value of the relationship and future work.

If I were in your shoes

Work. Do the gigs. Don't be intimidated by what you don't know, and thrive on learning. Ask questions. Always be respectful of others and know your place. This business is less about your technical aptitude as it is your personal and social approach. People hire you because of what you *personally* bring to the table: those traits that are inherent, personal, and one of a kind. Choosing you from a pool of equally qualified applicants is a privilege—treat it as such. Don't forget to smile.

You can contact me and learn more about my work at NicholasRadina.com, my YouTube Channel, Facebook, and Instagram via @NicholasRadina.

Scott Adamson

Hi, I'm Scott

And I'm a touring FOH sound engineer. Over the past 20 years I've worked for bands like Passion Pit, Haim, Matt + Kim, St. Vincent, Ingrid Michaelson, and Sleater-Kinney. I also do educational videos about live music production through my online school, The Production Academy.

One of the things I've learned during my time as a sound engineer is that it's a total privilege to enjoy what you do for a living. Not many people can say that they do! Even though touring can be tough sometimes, and flying around the world doing shows can be exhausting, I consider myself very lucky to have a job that I love doing.

The more I speak with other touring pros about our jobs, I realize that almost all of us share two major interests: music and travel. It's rare to meet someone who tours for a living who doesn't like getting out and seeing the world. I still get excited when a plane ticket pops up in my email, even though I flew around 150,000 miles last year (my heaviest ever, though I know people who pass that number every year).

However, to many of my audio engineer friends that sounds terrible! Fortunately for them, there are a lot of ways to work in live music production without touring. You can be a house engineer at a venue, work for a production company, or spend time in the studio as an engineer or producer. And none of these has to be exclusive! For many engineers, finding a balance between days on the road and at home is the key to long-term happiness in this line of work.

There are certainly people who do tour exclusively, and that lifestyle can be super satisfying for the right person. For others, doing it for a couple years or part-time is a great way to get some of the excitement without too much commitment away from home. After all, one of the benefits of freelancing is that you can pick and choose your work a bit more than full-time jobs.

Whether you're on the road or working at home, having a shared interest in music unites a lot of people working in this industry. In fact, quite a few of the best audio engineers I know started out playing music. I bought my first microphone because I wanted to record my own band. And when we started playing shows, I quickly realized that I wanted to be involved in the live side of things as well.

Actually, that's how I got a couple of my first jobs as a sound engineer. I played drums in a band and just started talking to the sound engineers at the venues. Once I had jobs in those clubs, I met touring bands and was able to jump on a tour. And like many engineers, my touring career started out small.

The very first tour I got was mixing a band called Jimmy Eat World. Opening the tour was a band called At The Drive-In (whom I mixed as a courtesy since they were so much fun to watch). Both these bands went on to have pretty good careers! At that time, though, we were in pretty small venues—as in 300 capacity and smaller. Looking back, it was embarrassingly low pay (\$350/week), but I was 22 and it didn't matter and I had a really great time.

At this point my going rate is pretty well over \$350 per day, which can add up to a lot of money, especially given the fact that it's pretty easy to not spend much on tour. Food is often provided for most meals, and even if you want to have a couple drinks at the end of the night many venues are pretty accommodating with that. But be careful! This can all lead you to feel relatively rich when you finish a tour.

Since most people aren't going to tour 10 months out of the year, you probably shouldn't just spend all those earnings right away. There will be some downtime (which is good!) when the money has to last. It's not like a salary you can count on every week. I learned this the hard way and now force myself to do something I kind of hate: budget.

Even a loose budget helps. Just so long as you don't do a long tour, then take an expensive vacation, buy a ton of new clothes and musical gear, and end up shocked when the next month's rent is due and you look a little light in the bank account. It's stressful, trust me.

One of the things I try to do is project the total I'll make for the year and divide it by 12; this is a very easy way to get me a ballpark figure when thinking about monthly expenses. This past year, I was on tour about 150 days. I've had heavier touring years, but I find this is about as much as I like to do. And if you think of a "normal" full-time job, which is five days per week, with a few weeks' vacation time and some bank holidays, you end up with about 225 work days per year. This leaves me with about 75 to make up.

So, I sometimes work at a venue called Terminal 5, which is a 3,000-capacity venue in Manhattan. Or, I'll work for a couple production companies that provide audio gear for shows. Plus, since I've been around doing this for a while people will call me to mix one-off shows in New York all the time. Some years I'll end up

working more than 225 days, some years a bit less, but that's the nature of freelancing and I try to enjoy the time off when I have it!

Of course, if you're touring with one specific artist you kind of have to go by their schedule. And some bands will definitely go on tour 10 months out of the year. About 5 years ago, I toured with a band called Passion Pit and we were on the road about 275 days in one 12-month period. It was pretty intense, but I got to do a bunch of really fun international travel.

But once that job was done I needed to find another tour, and through Sony Music (their label), I got a call for another band they'd signed, called Haim. I still have that job—in fact, that's been the bulk of my touring this year! And since they don't tour nearly as intensely, it's a job that I can do happily and not be away from home for too long.

Through the people I've met with these bands, mostly the tour managers, production managers, and other crew members, I've had quite a few other opportunities come up. These are the people that hire and recommend audio engineers. If you want to tour, these are the connections you need to make. Find people who tour for a living and start making friends. Introduce yourself to production people in venues; they are often connected in the touring world as well. It's really about joining a community of like-minded people.

Of course, to be a professional touring audio engineer you need solid skills as well as making contacts. And if you've looked online for any kind of proper live sound training, you've probably noticed a distinct lack of good information out there. Which is why I created [The Production Academy](#).

We offer not only all kinds of free training on live sound fundamentals, but we have a flagship course called Essential Live Sound Training. It includes over 100 videos that cover the entire audio system we use for live music. I also hold live interviews with other touring audio engineers where we talk about our jobs mixing audio for shows.

This amount of touring level insight has never been so easily available before in one place. And it feels totally worth the effort because I've had people from all over the world write in and tell me how much this training has helped them improve their skills. After all, getting the chance to jump on tour can be a big deal, but you still need to show up prepared to make the most of it.

If you have any questions or comments, I'd really love to hear from you. Just email me at scott@theproductionacademy.com.

Jon Burton

Hi, I'm Jon

As I travel round the world meeting young would-be engineers, the most frequent question I hear is "How do I get to do what you do?", which roughly translates to "How can I get to make a living as touring engineer?". So: who am I and what do I do to be envied in such a way?

At the moment I am the sound engineer for British act The Prodigy, whom I have worked with for 14 years. I also currently work with Sheffield singer-songwriter Richard Hawley. In the past I have worked for numerous artists at either FOH or monitors. I also co-own the Laundry Rooms, a recording studio in Sheffield, as well as teach and do master classes around the world. More importantly, I earn my living from music.

Let's return to the question, "How can I make a living as a touring engineer?" The answer is not as simple as it seems, and many things have changed since I was the fresh faced, young, naïve, would-be engineer.

I decided that I wanted to work in a studio at quite an early age. A chance visit as a teen to Abbey Road studios in London sparked my interest, but it was fueled by a love of music. I knew I wanted to do something with music, though what I wasn't sure.

It is important now to add some historical context. I was seventeen years old, playing in a school band, studying Art, History and English. I wasn't allowed to do music as apparently I had no aptitude. I lived outside Oxford, England, where the main employers were a car manufacturer and a University. I wasn't bright enough to apply for one, and despite encouragement from the careers advisor had no interest in the other option, unlike many of my classmates. No, I had decided I would be a record producer. It was quickly pointed out to me that this wasn't a proper job the advisor had no idea how I would even go about doing that.

Luckily, I did. I had been to the library and found out that the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) had a training centre. I applied there.

A month or so later I was on the bus to London for an interview. I duly rolled up at the imposing marble columns and steps of Bush House, near The Strand. The entrance was guarded by the types of characters you see outside posh hotels. Commissars with epaulets and caps emblazoned with BBC in gold braid. I was

suitably impressed and somewhat daunted. I turned around and went up the road to buy a tie.

My first interview went well! I chatted with a very nice gentleman who was interested in my interest and my smattering of knowledge. He never questioned my qualifications, only my motivations, and was encouraging and considerate. I was through to the next round. I left on a high.

A few weeks later I was brought back down to earth with a letter gently thanking me for my interest. Due to oversubscription, only students with good higher-level maths and physics were to be enrolled. I was always thankful that they never rubbed it in that I had no qualification at all in physics, and in fact had not, due to a schooling error, received a lesson in the subject since the age of 12. Rejected, I did the next best thing that any would-be creative could do: I went to Art school!

For six weeks.

Then I got a job in a music shop.

I am sure most of you are thinking, why didn't I just do a course at college? Media studies or music tech? I will now have to let you into the secret of my age. When I was seventeen you couldn't study music tech except at one UK University, York. It was here that the music department and the science department first thought about combining resources to teach a degree course in this newly developing field. It certainly wasn't for a science lightweight like me. Remember as well that this was all pre-internet. You found a course by looking through a handbook. I certainly had missed this one, and there were no others.

The job in the music shop was my first foot in the door. Here I learnt the first of the most important skills required of a would-be engineer: networking.

The shop I worked in was pretty good. It wasn't the big shop in town selling sheet music and recorders, it was the slightly edgy one a bit out of the town centre that regularly failed to open on time and seemed more a hang-out than a place of retail endeavour. I fitted in well. I started meeting local players, and it was here that I met the musicians who would form the first groups I ever did proper sound for.

I saved money, I bought gear, I started a small PA. I got a few regular gigs and I met the big local sound company, Tiger Hire. It was these contacts that I was to build on for the next five years.

I joined a band and started gigging, but I was also getting more interested in the technical side and being an engineer. I discovered that being a live sound engineer seemed to offer more opportunities than studio. All the studio jobs seemed tied up. There were only three real studios in and around Oxford at the time. One, the Mission, was in a converted building rented from the local monastery; they closed down and fled to the horror of the monks who didn't realise they had built a control room in their sacred building! Another was a local studio in a dingy basement, the owner of which I never seemed to see eye-to-eye with. The last was Richard Branson's Manor Studios near my old school. That was way out of my league! What Oxford did have was lots of small, local gigs. Those pubs and clubs provided my early apprenticeship.

The greatest step up in my career came from Jim Parsons at Tiger Hire. They were a proper company, or so I thought. They had a big, 20-channel mixing desk and a small monitor desk! At the time I was pretty impressed. They had more than a van full of gear. When it was all fully loaded the last job was to hoist the drum fill onto the roof rack!

My first touring break came from Tiger Hire: The Belle Stars, an all-girl group formed from the remnants of Ska group the Body-snatchers. Don't get me wrong though, I wasn't to be trusted to engineer. I was the dogsbody, sound and lights! It was however a two-truck tour; two vans, one with sound, the other lights and backline. The tour started in November 1982 and finished mid-December, although to be honest it was mostly three shows a week centered around weekends, traveling home at every opportunity. But it was a proper tour.

This tour gave me two things: a taste of a life that I quickly grew to love, and the confidence that I needed to believe that it was something I could do.

Returning home, I quickly picked up my next tour. This time I would be the engineer! It was my friends' band, Play Dead, who were now picking up enough fans to set off on a small UK club tour. My wage: £2 a day. To put that into context, on my previous tour I earned £15 a day which was enough, after living expenses, to buy a good guitar at the end of the tour. £2 a day bought you a drink and a packet of cigarettes. Luckily at the gigs we usually got some sort of food. There were no hotels; we crashed on fans' floors. We would stay wherever we could, but we always found somewhere. In all my years of touring at this level I am pleased to say I only had to sleep in the van once, in Carlisle.

So, what did I learn from all this? What can I pass on to the generation that has educational opportunities way beyond my comprehension at the time?

I got through my first BBC interview on sheer enthusiasm and an amateur's knowledge. I also think that I showed the most important thing, a willingness to learn. I didn't get in, but I could have!

I stuck at it too. I could have drifted at art school, but I soon realised it was music that I wanted to do. I dropped out quickly, somewhat to my parents dismay, but I went straight into a job.

I learnt to network. I worked out quickly that it was who you know that was important, and knowing many people meant even more opportunities.

I learnt to put myself forward.

I don't think I ever lied about my abilities and experience, but I certainly let people assume I knew more than I did. However, I never got caught out as my brazen enthusiasm usually saw me through. It was this enthusiasm that drove me on.

I also learnt to change my plans to match the opportunities presented to me. At sixteen I wanted to be a record producer. By twenty-two a life on the road had become my goal. Thirty years later I still have most of that enthusiasm. I have changed my goals as I have moved through life, but I am still firmly involved in music.

I love music, and I love the technology, but most of all I love sound! I love manipulating, blending, amplifying, and creating sounds. In a neat circle of coincidence, I finally got a qualification in physics, and in particular music technology, at the one place that was offering such a degree in the late seventies, the University of York. In 2017 I graduated with an MSc in Music Tech.

I still have a passion to learn. I still have an enthusiasm for my subject. I am still learning my craft. I am still networking and I still possibly overstate my abilities, safe in the knowledge that my brimming self-confidence will see me through.

Dave Swallow

Hi, I'm Dave

And I'm a FOH sound engineer for artists like Amy Winehouse, Basement Jaxx, Corinne Bailey Rae, James, Erasure, La Roux, and The Bloody Beetroots. I'm also the author of *Live Audio: The Art of Mixing a Show*, and I have a fashion line called Audio Architect Apparel.

The Surrounding Circs

Have you ever had moments when the people around you are more excited about something you're doing than you are? Like the time Great Aunt Ermintrude gave you a present for Christmas that turned out to be a pair of socks from a TV show you never watched as a child. On occasions such as these, the average person would likely try to avoid eye contact, which is the exact reaction I have when an enthusiastic parent leans over my mixing console halfway through a show and asks, "Hey, Soundman! How can my son/daughter do what you do?"

I've been at parties where half the guests are people you know and the other half people you don't, but somehow everyone knows you as the "Music (Wo)Man". As the introductions go around, their responses all revolve around the words, Oh! Ah! and Yes!, followed by "You're the Music (Wo)Man!" Being typecast like this can present some pretty interesting conversations on the sonic integrity of choral music, but more often than not the conversation turns to that of a friend's misguided sibling who needs focus and some sort of purpose in life to stop them going down a dark and dangerous path, "...and you know what? They love music and I'm sure they'd love to do what you do!"

At this point I fear I must be honest with you, and neither of us would want it any other way: it would be very irresponsible of me to offer guidance on paths that you, your kids, or your friend's misguided sibling should take to get into the music industry. The circumstances are different for everyone and the way we react to these circs are decisions only the individual can make. To offer an opinion on the best interest of yourself could be reckless on behalf of myself.

This is a very different world; the industry has changed since I began my journey, and you could be reading this on the other side of the globe, so how could I possibly comment on any of that? I can only tell you how I made choices, why I made them, and offer advice on traits that I see as good to have in this industry and the mindset that accompanied me along the way.

T Minus 3 Years, 2 Months, 4 Days

The sun barged through the window as the school bus rounded the corner on the way home. Pushing the hair out of his face, my seat mate passed me a headphone. The sound that came out of those headphones was like a personal revolution. His elder brother had been raving about this band for months and he'd finally managed to pilfer a tape. Now, strapped into his Walkman, the magnetic strip passed over the tape head and brought a new love into our lives.

I grew up in a seaside town in Essex, England. All we knew of American culture was what we had on TV and what we listened too. In early 1993 my impression of America was limited to Bill Clinton, The Cosby Show, reruns of the Golden Girls, and Michael Jackson. This sound, the sound of Seattle, was full of the frustration of being hemmed into a large town. The band was called Nirvana, and life as I knew it would never be the same again.

InDeep Dept

It must have been the third time that day I'd missed the number 7 bus. Not because I was late, but because I was standing at the bus stop squinting in the direction of a bus shaped object but by the time the bus-shaped object was close enough for me to make out the number on the front it had passed the stop. The young DS needed glasses. The thing was that wearing glasses isn't, or at least wasn't, the most rock 'n' roll thing to do. None of the Seattle bands I listened to wore glasses, and I had (some might say have) no sense of fashion or style whatsoever. A horrific thought for someone so young and socially awkward, but nonetheless, the missing of buses had to stop!

It wasn't long after I donned my first pair of spectacles that a friend of a friend extended an invitation to a house party. Stocked up on underage hooch, my friend and I entered the house. Exiting the house a few hours later, I was in a band. I was pretty rubbish at guitar, but they needed a bass player and as all guitarists know, bass is far easier than guitar, so I was in the band! We eventually decided on the name InDeep.

We started going to gigs together and expanding each other's musical outlook. I remember the first time I got elbowed in the face at a gig. It wasn't a particularly fun experience and made slightly worse by the fact that my glasses went from perching atop my nose to becoming a feature of my face in a process much like cattle branding except using an elbow, my glasses, and my face. Literally blood, sweat, and tears.

Never really been into crowds much. That's why a career in sound engineering was so appealing. I could listen to live music and be safely behind a barrier away from all the common folk. There was this studio we use to rehearse in from time to time. They ran promotions at the local venue and also had a PA company, so I spent a summer badgering them to give me a job.

Three Years, 2 Months and 4 Days

Twenty years ago this very year (it's 2018 for those of you reading this in the future) I started my very first job in the music industry. And boy did it start in an epic way!

Broom in hand, I swept the studio floors like no one had ever swept studio floors before. The rehearsal studios, on an old railway siding platform, were damp and cold. The tiny heater above the door of each of the five studios had to be turned on at least two hours in advance of each band's arrival just to bring the atmosphere of the place above that of a graveyard.

Those studios were my life and soul. I learnt how to fix amplifiers, solder multicores, and use mixing desks. Although I wasn't allowed on a mixing desk for some time, I watched and learnt what the others were doing and eventually I was trusted to pilot the console.

As the years passed, I became more adept at using the console and understood the fundamentals of sound to the point where bands playing the local venue would ask for me to mix them. Eventually, some of the bands got record deals and went on tour.

This is when I was asked to go out on my first tour. I suppose it all seems pretty straightforward. Get a job sweeping floors, learn how to use a mixing console, get asked to go on tour. Well, **the gap between starting my unpaid job and getting paid was about 6 months and the gap between getting paid and going on tour was about 3 years.**

Here is the greatest point I can offer: this first tour didn't change my life. My life was already heading in the direction. I suppose some might say luck and being in the right place at the right time had something to do with that, but fundamentally luck doesn't exist. You make your own luck for want of a better phrase. You put yourself in a place or a situation where you feel most comfortable, luck has nothing to do with it. You are in control of your own life and when you feel you are ready for a new challenge you put yourself there. You work out how to do it. I suppose sometimes it feels like you're just a passenger in your life, but it's at those points when you need to change the game. Dream a different dream.

A GLOBAL SOUL

My dreams since I was very young involved seeing the world. I wanted to experience all the world had to offer. It was a far more exciting place than South East Essex. I'd got to a point in school where I needed a change and I dreamed of moving out to Australia. This never materialised, but the dream to travel remained. The world offers far more than just the ability to see places you might not normally go; it's also a place to learn and become part of a Global Soul.

The idea of a Global Soul is of someone who is born of many cultures. Their aim in life is to use these many selves to become more than the sum of all of them. I, on the other hand, am from one definite place. I never got tossed around the globe because of my parents' work or a devastating conflict. My family have been British, as far as we know, for hundreds of years. I feel an attachment to my Britishness, but with a hint of disdain. I can't say I'm proud to be British. Maybe I could stretch to lucky (but there's no such thing as luck, right?) to be British. The idea of patriotism is alien to me. I feel that patriotism is a mechanism for training people within a border to hate, or at least look down upon, those from other borders.

Don't get me wrong. Having Lizzy's Crest on your passport does have advantages across the world, but it's only really by luck that I have one. I could have been born somewhere else, rendering me French, for example, or I could have been diagnosed German. I jest, but here in Britain we refer to Europe as "The Continent" as if we weren't a part of it. We have more in common with the Dutch, Germans, and French than we do the Aussies and Americans, though American TV is constantly on in our homes.

Lugging your personal belongings across the globe has furnished me inquisitive. The idea of multiculturalism is less an idea than actual reality. We talk about London, New York, and Paris as the greatest cities on earth, but these great cities wouldn't be great without the outside influences they have received. We, as travelling members of the music industry, in some small way influence the cultures of the cities we visit. We take our music and culture to another country and in some way influence the people in that audience. It could be a negative or a positive influence, but the outcome is the same: change. Everyone in that audience is different on the way out of the building. Our role as an audio architect is more important than just making music loud; it includes a social and moral responsibility to cultures as a whole.

Through the 20th century, travel has become far easier, and that constant motion has been so important in the evolution of music and our cultures. What all this travel does for musicians is expose them to different sounds, ideas, feelings, and

attitudes. This influence is then taken home and written about. The Beatles, in my mind at least, showed the world how to bridge cultural gaps through music and sound. Think about their adventures in India as one tiny example in a huge career. They consumed the culture, understood, to some extent, the knowledge that forms the thinking and the sounds around them and presented them in some of the most widely sold albums ever.

Anyone who chooses a life where travel plays a big part will know what I mean. Here I am, back at home, taking in the new summer air with a brisk walk into the town centre for coffee and cake where I have an important appointment with an improving book. The thing is, I'm not sure whether I've just got home or I'm just about to leave. It's this state of feeling constantly departed. On my bedroom floor my bag is still half-packed, and my washing is drying in the bathroom. It definitely feels familiar, it feels like home even, but it doesn't feel like I should be there. I feel like I should be going somewhere else.

SONIC MORALITY

'Fist me' were the first words I heard from the cheery, bearded face of the man that collected us from the aeroporto. The dissonance between what I saw and what I heard rang round my mind like a drunk man with a bell. Holding out a clenched fist, his oversized, long-sleeved Lamb of God T-shirt hung off his wrists like a pair of excited spaniel ears as I returned the fisting. Thirty-five minutes before, I was drifting over utter blackness. Staring out the window of the 747, all I could see was the reflection of my face until the lights dimmed for descent, revealing in the distance the shimmering, amber coastline of São Paulo.

The relevance of music globally and historically is obvious. Historically, music has told stories, been part of religious ceremonies, used as a call to arms and a call for calm. I can see how music can do these things on a local, or even national level to bind a people, but a band or an artiste from the other side of the planet, to have a resonance with an alien population is, in my opinion, an interesting thought.

On this particular trip, the Liverpoolian band whose employment I was in for a month could just about pull an audience of 800 in London, yet here, in South America we are playing sold out venues between 2000 and 5000. Why does this band connect with these people more than their fellow countrymen? They live on the other side of the planet with a completely different upbringing and background, yet musically they resonate with the South Americans. This is not just a story of this one band, this happens the world over, to musicians from all walks of life.

We pile into one of those mini coaches with our welcoming committee, equipment, suitcases and a whole lot of excitement. The journey was going well until one of our

newly met entourage began to weep, huddled up by himself at the back of the coach. Everyone was obviously concerned. The poor guy clearly was very emotional, but he wouldn't say a word. Like a dog on fire, speculation rushed around the coach; maybe a family member had died, or he had some kind of terminal disease. Why do we always jump to the worse possible conclusions first? Maybe his girlfriend had just left him? Eventually, one of the band took fate by the short and curlies and walked to the back of the coach.

'Are you ok? What's happened?' Placing a nosey, selfless hand on the guys shoulder.

'I'm so happy you are here! I've waited my whole life for you to come and you are now here!'

There was a kind of honest, sympathetic guilt that creeps through everyone at that point. 'How could we know?' it seemed to say. This amazed me, something written on the other side of the planet, with seemingly no cultural similarities has connected with this guy on an emotional and spiritual level.

Music is written because the person writing loves music. Musicians tend to have a need to be creative, and because of that their music is filled with emotion. Music without emotion is like beer without flavour: utterly pointless. I'm sure most of us have had a beer and wondered why the hell we've just drunk that, just the same as we've listened to music and realised that those three and a half minutes are gone forever. I worry about laying on my deathbed and thinking about all those minutes drinking shit beer and listening to shit music. It's a major concern...

Music is there to connect with the listener to give them hope that things will get better, to understand their social and emotional pains, to hold their hands when they are taking drugs, but most importantly to show that we are not alone. That's why Amy Winehouse's Back to Black album was so well-received globally. She actually meant and had felt every single word in that album, and we all understood exactly what she meant. Music is interpreted differently by each listener, it's an individual experience and a shared experience all wrapped up in three and a half minutes of harmonic beauty.

There has been a long line of thought that says music expands cultural thinking. This view is held with the music styles themselves, but I'm not sure that is the end of the story. Obviously, something somewhere started a scene, then that scene spread and then started to incorporate other styles, scenes, and cultures. The English and American music scenes, for example, developed alongside cultural change and permeated through the world scene.

Plato wrote in his dialogues of the republic that the arts should be censored because they are dangerous. Why? Because they breed thoughts and share ideas. This is why in any regime that wants to control its citizens the first thing they tend to do is control the narrative; soon after, we have fires of burning books. I hope it's obvious that I don't believe burning books is a good thing to make a point and it is our responsibility as global citizens and audio architects to get the message of our arts to the ears and hearts of others.

Musical Etymology

Cultural evolution tends to be a backlash at something. Whether political or cultural, scenes are something that the undercurrent of society grab onto and run with. As more and more people become aware, scenes become movements and then eventually the rebelliousness ends in inevitable consumption by the mainstream. What this does is introduce new sounds into new music. We have always searched for new sound, but ironically without some familiarity it would be hard to catch on. I remember this band from Southend called Vitro. I used to love that band. They were a kind of pre-runner to today's electronic rock bands. They died a very quiet death, but years later the sounds that they were creating in the 90s were being regurgitated by many much more popular bands.

Of course, listening to other types of music from all over the world will help you have the persona of a worldly person, but I think music has a much subtler effect on cultures than just that. We wouldn't have a clue what pan pipes sound like unless great uncle Derek went to Peru and brought some back. But Sting whaling over a set of panpipes introduces that sound in a far subtler way. So, when we see that Peruvian band in the local shopping district of London, New York, Amsterdam, or western supermart, we are already familiar with that sound and apart from wondering where Sting is, we know it's not an alien sound.

What these personal revolutions also do for us as a culture is introduce us to different sounds without really realising it. I think of The Police and how the drummer, Stewart Copeland, introduced a reggae style to a rock band. He wouldn't have been the first to do so, but the success of that band transcended into popular culture. The most amazing thing about the introduction of this sound was that it was barely noticed. If you listen to a Police track, then try to tap along, it's bloody difficult.

We all have tastes, some adventurous, some not. But if it weren't for the adventurous ones amongst us, we'd never know what is beyond those hills over yonder. Music and sound provoke emotions, so I think that the lonely, desolate sound of my Liverpudlian friends struck the right chord with the right people. That

young man huddled in the back of the mini coach had a reason to connect, and through their music the social isolation that he felt was shared.

Create Your Own World

Experience still counts for a lot. The role of a sound engineer goes far beyond the ability to fix a cable, set up a compressor, or use a mixing console. An education is only part of it, but the education part is important and that is why I believe that jobs for us oldies aren't in jeopardy (unless your attitude stinks, in which case maybe it is time to move on). Your potential employers will require experience, but how are you going to get experience if you haven't got a job to go to?

We are now in a time when access to education, jobs, and careers in creative industries is far greater than it ever was for me and probably most of the people teaching these courses. Many among my peers believe education in this industry to be a bad thing. These opinions tend to be grounded in conservative fear more than anything else. Fear that our industry will be flooded by an influx of "kids" who know all the tricks and can do our jobs for half the price. I prefer to think that if some "kid" can do a better job than I can, then it just kicks me in the arse to do better. It's only through education that we can do better. The sharing of knowledge is beneficial for everyone. I like to think of the cautionary tale about the uneducated person who had the cure for cancer locked inside their head with no means to get it out.

All this education comes with a big "but", however. Over the past few years I have seen the education sector of the audio industry grow and grow. Does this mean we are churning out people with practical training into an industry that can't support this influx? Simply, no. You cannot put a price on education, because not only is the knowledge that you gain important but the processes in which you gain that knowledge is just as important. That is what the education system provides.

I'm a big believer in go-getting. No one is going to give you anything on a plate. In fact, the people that you see around you that seem like they just get it all, they don't. They work just as hard if not harder and they never complain about it. You will find that potential employers want experience, but how can you get experience? Put it like this: there's always a deal to be done. I don't advocate working for free, and I don't believe anyone in this day and age should work for free. If you can't get the experience you need from traditional routes, then you need to think outside the box. I used to put on shows for my old band. This is how I got to know the local PA company. You probably know far more people than you think you do that will be able to help you out. I needed to be able to do a multitude of jobs to get to a point where I created my own experience. Sometimes you gotta give a lot before you can take even a little.

The advice I can offer you is this: learn. Learn all you can. The culture in the live audio world is to assume that you know it all. You don't. Your ears aren't as great as you think they are and really the only reason you got employed in the first place is because you're cheaper and probably friendlier than the last guy. I don't mean to hurt your feelings, but I if I had a great British pound for every time I've heard some young scallywag saying they get employed because of "their" drum sound I'd have retired years ago. Arrogance and misinformation, or misunderstanding, are more commonplace than they really should be in a profession like ours.

Smoke Me A Kipper, I'll Be Back for Breakfast

If you really want to know the true key to success, look no further than your own happiness. You aren't happy because you're successful, you are successful because you are happy. I've had success in my life, and I've also had massive failures. I've stayed up all night worrying where the next pay cheque is coming from. I've had stomach issues because the worry has got so bad. But you must be aware of self. If you can't look after yourself then you'll never be content, and the continent of contentment is a place to strive for.

The idea that your skills will lead you to a better, more fulfilling place is slightly misplaced. Excellence, the place you want to take yourself, doesn't need to be an extensive search. It's internal. Excellence is an attitude, not a skill.

If I have learnt anything on my journey through the sonic world, it's this: I can't call myself an engineer. It's an embarrassment to engineers. I'm more like a sound foreman. Joking aside, the more I've learnt about sound the more I've realised that I don't know. There's always still time to learn something new and improve.

The audio world is wedged between art and science. It's not a fine line by any means, it's all an attitude as to which direction you personally want to pursue. There is an art to mixing a show and chemistry in a concert, but there's also architecture in the audio and intelligence behind the design of our sound systems. The most important thing we must remember, though, is to connect with our audience.

The idea of what our cultures are is different to each of us. The uniqueness of our cultures is something that we cling on to for dear life, something that we want to protect, but it's also something that evolves and that uniquely binds us. We scare too easily over the thought that immigration will change our cultures, but don't have the same fears with technology when technology fundamentally changes our cultures faster than we can adapt to it.

Thinking back to my friends from Liverpool, which like many other places has had a turbulent past, and maybe it's this history that is felt through the music of the Liverpudlian. Maybe feelings of discontent, abandonment, hope, or love are the same no matter where you are from, so maybe we aren't that different after all?

The next time that parent leans over the mixing desk in the middle of a show, the answer isn't a simple one. It's not even a short one. Just like those socks, though they are-well intentioned, the point is bigger than the sum of its parts.

Michelle Sabolchick Pettinato

Hi, I'm Michelle

And I've been a FOH Engineer for nearly 30 years for artists like Spin Doctors, Indigo Girls, Styx, Melissa Etheridge, Gwen Stefani, Kesha, Jewel, Mr. Big, Goo Goo Dolls, Christina Aguilera, and Adam Lambert. I have been an active participant and panelist in industry conferences including Pro Production and AES and appeared as a guest speaker for Full Sail University and Capital University.

In 2013 I co-founded SoundGirls.Org to create a supportive community for women working in professional audio while also inspiring and empowering the next generation.

What I love about touring

For me, the best part of touring is that I get to travel the world and experience different cultures, visit exotic places, and meet all kinds of people, all with someone else footing the bill AND paying me to do what I love! I've been to Red Square in Moscow, Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City in Beijing, had a private tour of the U.S. Navy's Memphis submarine in Bahrain, had lunch with a Maharaja in India, watched the Super Bowl with the Rolling Stones in Brazil, climbed the Sydney Harbour Bridge in Australia, and had many other wonderful experiences.

I also love the camaraderie. There is a degree of teamwork necessary to make the show happen every night that lends itself to building some really close bonds and relationships with the people you work with. You are, in a sense, a mini community traveling the world. Every person on that tour has a specific job to do, and we all rely on each other to do our part.

What I hate about touring

Air travel is the worst part of touring for me. It's grueling, unpredictable, and terribly uncomfortable. In 2011 I was on tour with Mr. Big in South America, and due to the nature of the tour we had to fly almost every day. We rarely had more than three hours of sleep in a night for three weeks. The shows in South America run late in the evening, so by the time we finished the show, loaded out, and got back to the hotel it would be around 1 or 2 AM. We would then have a lobby call at 4 or 5 AM to drive an hour to the airport, and once we got to the airport it would take about three hours to get us and all of our equipment checked in. We'd get on a plane, fly for a couple hours, arrive in the next city and go right to the venue for load in and do it all over again. It gets to a point where you are so utterly

exhausted you don't know if you are coming or going. Ah, the glamorous life of touring with a rock band... :-)

How I got my very first tour

For several years before I started touring I worked at a local sound company, in the A/V department at an entertainment complex, as a stagehand, at a nightclub, mixing local bands, and occasionally as an assistant at a recording studio. I was basically moving around and going wherever I could find work in audio. A friend of mine who knew how badly I wanted to go on the road was on tour mixing an up and coming band. He was looking for someone to replace him and offered me the job. The band was the Spin Doctors and it was the summer of 1992, just before the band really hit it big. A month after I began working for them their album reached Billboard's top 100 and kept climbing. Shortly after, things just exploded for them. It was very much a case of being in the right place at the right time and being who you know. I made sure everyone knew that I wanted to be on tour. I talked constantly with friends and colleagues about touring, and when I worked with visiting bands and engineers I would pick their brain about how they got started. When the opportunity came, I seized it.

I realized this could be a real career

I knew from the beginning that I was going to make a career out of doing live sound. It definitely didn't come easy, there were a lot of years of paying my dues and building a strong and solid reputation, but once I started touring and getting a regular paycheck I put all my focus into making live sound my career.

For my most recent tour

At this moment I am the FOH Engineer for Mr. Big and have been their FOH Engineer since 2009. I was referred to them by one my peers, another engineer/friend who was offered the job but was not available. He knew how much I loved rock and roll and that I was desperate for a change. I had been mixing a lot of women artists, pop music, and acoustic guitars, and while the music was great and they were wonderful to work for I was dying to mix rock and metal, the music I grew up on. My name and resume were passed on to the band's manager who contacted and subsequently hired me.

I've been mixing FOH for 26 years since my very first tour, and every job has come from someone I knew. This business exists on word of mouth. When a position becomes available for a tour, generally what happens is the Production Manager, Tour Manager, or sometimes management contacts sound engineers they know and/or have worked with in the past. If none of those engineers are available, they ask for recommendations from people they know and trust. I think it's rare that

someone gets on a tour without personally having worked with (or at least knowing on a professional level) someone within the organization. It's all about your contacts.

How I make a living

My income is 100% from touring. I make my living as a touring FOH Engineer, spending an average of 250 days per year on the road, sometimes more and sometimes less, and have since 1992. I am independent and do not work for a company. I do, however, have very good relationships with various sound companies who at times have provided me with work.

I get paid a weekly salary plus per diem. All my travel to and from the tour (with the exception of any personal trips not related to the job) and my hotel accommodations while on tour are the band's expense. Being independent, I am responsible for negotiating my rate, which varies from tour to tour depending on the project's budget and how badly I want or need the work.

I hesitate to divulge specific figures, because it's all very irrelevant. There is a very wide ranging pay scale in this industry and there is always someone who will work for less than you will. Every tour is different and has its own budget. Working for a relatively unknown band on their first national tour is unlikely to pay the same as a very fast-moving, up-and-coming band selling out every show. That being said, I have done tours for very well known artists with multiple platinum albums who have paid less than other artists who were far less successful.

My advice is that you figure out how much money you need to make to pay your monthly bills. What do you need to survive? That is the bottom of your salary range. If you're already working locally in live sound and making decent money then that should give you a good reference. If you have no idea what to make the top end, add \$500 to the bottom that gives you a little wiggle room to meet in the middle.

When negotiating, always try and get the other party to give you a number first. When they ask you what your rate is, ask them what the job is paying or how much they are looking to pay. It takes some skill to negotiate well. They don't want to pay you anymore than they absolutely have to, so they will not want to give you a figure if there is a chance of getting you for less. When pressed for a rate, you can offer them your salary range, which helps prevent you from pricing yourself out of a gig. However, sometimes you'll need to agree to a figure that is lower than your range just to get your foot in the door. There is always room to renegotiate once you prove yourself.

When I got my first tour I was told “the job pays this much”, and I took it because I desperately wanted to be on the road. After I finished the first six-week tour and knew the band was really happy with me, I renegotiated for a raise. For me, money is not always the deciding factor. I have taken smaller tours for less money because I really wanted to work for that artist. I have turned down larger tours for more money because I knew they were going to be unpleasant, and taken smaller tours that I knew I would enjoy even though I was making less money. Everyone has different priorities and mine are more about mixing the kind of music I want to mix than getting the biggest paycheck.

One last thing about money—quite frankly, if money is your driving force for wanting to get on the road, you are in the wrong line of work. Touring, while exciting and fun at times, is grueling and sometimes dirty work. This lifestyle is not for everyone. The hours are long, conditions are generally less than acceptable, and it can be brutal on your body and health if you don’t take care of yourself. The people who survive and thrive are generally those who have a passion for what they do, whether it’s music, audio, travel, etc. You can make a great living as a touring engineer but it can take years before that happens and if your passion for this life is not driving you, you probably won’t have the motivation to stick it out.

The best decision I made

The best decision I made was to focus on mixing FOH. When I first started mixing FOH, I guess I had a knack for it since the bands I mixed really liked my work. Over the years, I’ve had a lot of offers to do monitors and could have worked a lot more in the early lean years if I chose to take those jobs. But from what I had seen, it was very difficult for engineers who were good or even just decent at doing monitors to make the move back to FOH. There always seemed to be more work for monitor engineers, you’re in the hot seat and not everyone wants that job. I liked doing FOH and wanted to stay there so I’ve spent nearly 30 years strictly mixing FOH and working on mastering my craft. By no means is this the right decision for everyone, we all have different goals. It’s just what worked for me.

The biggest mistake I made

After I got my first tour, I just assumed the tours would keep coming. I didn’t do a good job of making contacts and networking. There were a lot of opportunities where I could have, but I was kind of shy and not really good at approaching people I didn’t know. For example, the band was playing a festival where I could have met a lot of other tour managers, but instead of approaching them I just wanted to stay out of their way.

When that first tour came to an end, I no longer had a job. I actually had to take a job as a telemarketer (which I quit after ten days) to pay the bills. I had to learn

very quickly how to network and make connections with people who could provide me future work. Having learned that painful lesson, I now take every opportunity to build solid connections with the people responsible for connecting me with more of the work that I love.

What I wish I knew 20 years ago

Start saving for retirement as early as you possibly can. If you work as a freelance engineer, there are no pension funds, no 401Ks, no retirement savings other than what you save yourself. Open a Roth IRA and contribute the maximum amount every year (\$5,500 in 2018). The earlier you start saving, the more your money can grow. Touring can be very grueling and hard on the body. Most people don't want to be living this lifestyle in their sixties, but if you don't save for retirement you may not have a choice. It's hard to think so far into the future when you are in your twenties, and it's also not much fun putting a large amount of money into savings when you'd rather be doing something more exciting with it, but it is something you will never regret. Most people don't realize how important this is until it's too late.

Contracts

Contracts, in the literal sense, have been non-existent in my career as a freelance/independent engineer. It may be different in country or theater and corporate, but with regards to rock and pop music it's usually a verbal/handshake kind of agreement. The only contracts I've ever been presented are non-disclosure type agreements.

Basically, you agree to do a tour for a weekly or daily rate and per diem, etc. But tours get canceled all the time and people get fired, and then there is no contract that requires that you be paid any kind of minimum or severance pay. It's important to be responsible with your finances because you never know what might happen. It's all in what you negotiate. You can try to negotiate for a minimum salary regardless of what happens to the tour (last minute cancellations, etc.), but the hard truth is that it can be very difficult for you to actually recoup or get management to agree to that.

In any case it's always good to have something in writing between you and management. It's usually just an email confirming what was discussed and agreed upon. If you are an LLC or incorporated, you would put all of this in your invoice.

When you are negotiating a deal, some key points to cover are:

- 1) Your weekly salary or day rate.
- 2) Per Diem- usually not negotiable, it is what it is.
- 3) Will you have your own hotel room or be sharing?

- 4) Is rehearsal pay full rate or half rate?
- 5) Is there a retainer for the down time?
- 6) Clarify that the band will reimburse you for travel expenses to and from the tour, including cab fare to and from the airport, air fare or travel to and from the tour, baggage fees, etc.

Mental and physical health is super important, which is why I have developed these habits:

It can be difficult to eat right on the road so I try to keep a supply of healthy snacks with me. Sometimes your options are very limited and sometimes there are just too many temptations. When catering sucks, there's always a cookie to make you feel better, and despite my best efforts I don't always win the battle against the after show pizza and beer. LOL. To counter that, on days off and when I am at home I focus on eating as clean and healthy as possible.

Days on the road can be very long and arduous. If you have a healthy lifestyle it's a lot easier to get through. Sleep is super important and not always easy to come by. I'm a light sleeper, so I sleep with earplugs in on the bus. I also need it to be cold to sleep and have been known to sleep with one of the stage fans in my bunk! I try and get a good workout in on my days off and always try and find some alone time and space every day just to clear my head. It's easy to get caught up in the late night drinking or whatever on the bus, but you have to remember—"hangovers are optional, load ins are not!"

Long distance relationships are hard. Here's how my spouse/partner and I stay connected while I'm on the road:

I've been married for 20 years and my husband is also in the business. He's a production manager, so we both understand the job and what goes with it. That makes a HUGE difference. It takes a very understanding partner to be able to deal with you not being there for holidays, birthdays, special events, etc. It also helps if your partner is somewhat independent and/or has a good support structure of friends and family at home. My husband and I try to talk every day even if it's only for a few minutes to check in with each other. Sometimes it's just a couple texts. There are so many ways to stay connected, Skype, Facetime, Facebook, etc.

If I were in your shoes

If you want to get on tour, you need to build a network of people in the touring industry or work for one of the major touring sound companies.

There is really no one direct path into touring. It's as much as being in the right place at the right time and who you know. With that being said, you need to put

yourself into situations where you will be exposed to touring bands and crew and you need to make contacts.

If you already have some solid mixing experience, some good places to start are mid-sized venues on the touring circuit. Small theaters or clubs where up and coming bands frequent are a good place to meet bands that may be looking to hire an engineer. Go where the work is! Work every show you can. Meet every Tour manager, Production manager, and engineer you can, make a good impression, keep in touch with them, and let them know you are looking to get on tour.

Another route is getting a job at one of the major touring audio vendors. Clair Global, Sound Image, Eighth Day, Firehouse, MSI, Solo Tech to name a few. You'll likely start out as an audio tech rather than an engineer but for those who show initiative and skill, mixing opportunities will present themselves.

Learn everything you can at whatever job you do. It's all valuable experience, even if it's just doing shop work or loading trucks. Good work habits and people skills are just as valuable as your mixing abilities. People may forget the specific things that you did, but they will remember how you made them feel, which is largely based on work ethic.

You need to be persistent when going after a gig. Make contacts with people and keep up with them. If you apply for a venue or company and at first they turn you down, keep calling every few weeks. You need to talk to them so much that they know you by your voice when you call. You never know when a job may open up. Be ready to go at a moment's notice and take every opportunity that comes your way. Be professional and reliable. Let's face it, you want the dream job. There are only so many FOH and monitor gigs out there so how are you going to set yourself apart from the thousand others who want the same job?

In terms of technical skills

Right now there is a desperate need for professional truck drivers. Our industry is experiencing a major shortage, but that's not really a direct path into audio...

There is an increasing need for programmers who are skilled in Pro Tools, Digital Performer, etc. More and more artists are using tracks and relying on someone who understands those platforms, rather than just being able to hit the spacebar. If you think this might be a good fit for you, track down someone who is a professional playback operator on tour and interview them.

There is no one direct path into touring. You really have to forge your own way. For some great examples of the various ways people have crafted successful careers in live sound, check out [the profiles on SoundGirls.Org](#).

For more on me, see [my LinkedIn profile here](#).

Robert Scovill

Hi, I'm Robert

And I'm a concert sound mixer, recording engineer and producer. Over the past 35 years, I've spent my entire adult life in professional audio mixing over 3,500 events with acts including Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, Matchbox Twenty, Jackson Browne, Rush, Def Leppard, Prince, Alice Cooper, and countless others. I operate my own studio, mobile, and mixing facility, MusiCanvas Recorders, and for a period of years was a co-owner of the independent record label Backstage Records. I've been very fortunate to be recognized with six TEC awards and three PLSN Parnelli Awards for FOH Mixer of the Year. I also work as a Senior Specialist for Avid Technologies and have been a primary designer of the VENUE line of digital live sound consoles, as well as consultant on many audio products throughout my career. I'm very happy to say I have a fantastic wife and three rockin' kids who somehow have survived it all.

What I love about touring

After nearly 40 years of this kind of work, I tend to break what I love about touring down into a couple of lines of thinking. I'll start with this: you don't have to be part of a touring entourage for very long to realize that by doing so you're seeing the world through a very unique prism. For me, that was always part of the attraction. You are in every sense a band of traveling gypsies. You're the antithesis of the "get up in the morning, slog through traffic to the same dreary office in order to get the day's menial task done" crowd.

Now, if you've already done some touring and "slogging to work to get the menial task done" actually sounds like your life on tour, I would challenge you to engage in a perspective reset. Here's why: on tour, you're in a different city every day of the tour, whether it be a show day or an off day. You can simply pack up and leave the triumphs, or the troubles, of the previous day behind and get a fresh start every day. And that's the crux of what I love about touring. Every day is fresh. Even on a "grinder" where you're setting up the same show and mixing the same exact set of songs as the previous show, everything attached to and surrounding those activities is fresh. You meet new people, you're exposed to different social culture, you're in a new building, and you have a brand new audience to work for. And every day you have to make the day work because there's no guarantee that what worked yesterday will work today. If you choose to view it positively, it represents fresh air and fresh stimulus every morning. Who could ask for more than that on a day-to-day basis?

Another major attraction for me with touring, and especially for audio, is the camaraderie that exists with finely-tuned crews. When you are traveling, working under intense stress, eating, sleeping, and socializing with the same set of oftentimes very diverse people for extended periods of time, a very unique bond develops. It's easy to call it a family, but it is much different, if not deeper, than the family bond. I would challenge any family to coexist under touring conditions and survive it. The sure sign of how deep that bond is occurs when you work with the same artist over a period of years. In those situations, the bond is built in a few months. If you're lucky, at the end of the last show of the tour, you get to see your tour mates, shake their hand, and say good-bye or "see ya later". Sometimes, ya don't.

But here's the really cool thing; when you see them again, you'll pick up right where you left off. Sometimes a year goes by. Sometimes longer than a year goes by. And in that time you may not have spoken to or been in contact with any of those folks you failed to say good-bye to at the end of the previous tour. When you suddenly reunite for rehearsals for the next tour, you literally pick up right where you left off. You could have started to tell a joke on the previous tour, and delivered the punchline next time you met and laughter would ensue. It's magical. Nothing like it. Ever. Family? Not even close. (And I LOVE my family.)

What I hate about touring

For everything I love about touring with regard to work, there might be as many things I dislike about the activities that surround that kind of work. Most of them are related to the mechanics of travel. For example, I really dislike having to travel by air, except to leave home and enter or re-enter the tour or to then to exit the tour and head home. Three letters for you: T.S.A. Need I say more? Well, that and that the fact that there are NEVER enough power outlets when you're enduring the "death hang" of waiting for a flight to board. It often resembles a scene from Braveheart with warring factions trying to claim the last available power outlet. And internet? For the love of all that is holy, folks, PLEASE have free WiFi at ALL airports. Just do it.

Having to fly to your next stop mid-tour is usually a bummer. You get into such a great groove living and working from the tour bus. This gets disrupted when you have to pack up and get ready to fly. You have to figure out what clothes you're going to pack into a smaller bag. "Do I even have a smaller bag?" What's the weather going to be like where we're going? Better take some work clothes in case the bus is late arriving to the new city. Will I be carrying my bag or checking it? What toiletries am I allowed to take if I don't check luggage? Do I have all my backpack stuff with me? All my fucking computer and phone dongles? What am I

taking to do on the plane? Read? Compute? What day will the bus meet us at the hotel? What time will it arrive? What if the bus is late getting to the gig? Is there anything on there that I'll need for the show day? Blah-di-effing blah. I really hate that disruption. Given the choice, many times I'll just stay on the bus if it's an option and enjoy the solace of a 1,200 mile drive.

It gets worse if you are flying chartered aircraft every day on tour. I've only done it once, and I hope I never have to do it again. It sounds so sexy and glamorous to travel with the band's entourage, but trust me on this one, that awesomeness ONLY applies if you are an actual member of the band's entourage. If you do this, get ready for no sleep, ever. You're required to do the 14 hour day, fly all night, check into a hotel early in the AM, wake up early the same AM (usually with just a couple of hours of really shitty sleep) while the band entourage is fast asleep, check out of the hotel, and head over to the gig. Rinse, lather, repeat until you collapse.

And, don't get me started on hotels. I'll preface this little whine-fest with this: it doesn't take doing this kind of work for very long to realize that regardless of whether you're staying at the Travel Lodge or the Ritz Carlton, at some point a hotel is a hotel is a hotel. They all suffer from the same problems. I'm reminded of this on EVERY tour I take now, as all of my enthusiasm and excitement about being on the tour is completely sucked out of me the very moment I open the very first hotel room door and peer in. There is just this moment of "UGGGGGG!". It's the most lifeless, soul-sucking place imaginable. That's why you won't find me in my room very often while on tour.

If I must be in the room, I humbly ask the hotel gods for this; at the very least, LOTS of accessible power outlets by the bed. Not hidden behind the bed. Not across the room, just farther away than my longest power cord will reach. Not filled with lamps and alarm clocks. *Open* outlets for me and my dongle-strangled technology!

Lastly, showers. A shower that actually has enough water pressure and spray-width to keep one whole side of my body wet while I'm standing. Not hunched over, or worse yet, having to hold the shower head in place. If it's not *too* much to ask, a temperature comfortably in between hot as the gates of hell and cold as the Bering Sea. And when I find an acceptable temperature, please stay on that temperature for at least 10 minutes before suddenly and without warning switching to Hell or Bering Sea mode. Finally, those big square shower heads that come out of the ceiling, directly above your head? No. Just No.

Short of that, I LOVE touring. I'll paraphrase the great Charlie Watts here: for about two and a half hours a night on a show day, I'm actually on tour. The rest of the time is just waiting.

How I got my very first tour

From a very early age I knew that someday I was going to tour. I can recall having those sorts of thoughts as early as 13 years old during my freshman year of high school. How was I going to achieve a life of touring? I had no freakin idea how. Hell, I don't even know that I fully processed what "go on tour" meant at that point. But not long after my first couple of real concerts during the very early 1970's, I was unshakably certain that I was going to tour for a living. At the time, I just figured it would likely be as a musician. What would follow would be a series of incidents and activities that would, unbeknownst to me at the time, put me on the path to achieving my dream.

The story of how I got my first tour is more a story of preparation combined with luck and timing. As I look back on it, the preparation actually started in high school. I took literally any and every class that I thought could even remotely increase my odds of success in the music business. In the earliest days it was every music class I could take. I hated the music that was being taught, but loved the knowledge I was getting in music theory. And then something wonderful happened. I went to see SuperTramp in concert. Even at this young age, I took in the sights and sounds and had a bit of a "light bulb" moment. (Kind of odd for a sound guy wannabe, right?) At that point I had no real idea what a PA System was, or the role of a sound mixer. All I knew for sure was that as I stood there listening to this show, something was different. It just sounded different than any concert I had been to before. As luck would have it, as I exited the theater, I walked right by the FOH position and stopped dead in my tracks staring at what I would learn on that night was a mixing console. I met one of the great live sound mixers of all time, Russell Pope. He clearly recognized the inquisitiveness in my face and asked me if I wanted to come in and have a look around. Luckily I was brave enough to ask a few questions. As I floated out of the theater that night I knew my path was set on a different course than when I walked in.

The new path simply set me on fire. The job looked technical so I took every math, science, and shop class I could take. I took a media class, which in 1974 was a photography and basic film creation class. The computer in the school classroom didn't exist in anyone's consciousness yet. Hell, I took typing class in 1975! I'll fully admit that I took typing class because all the hot girls took that class. But as providence would have it, it was probably **the most** beneficial class I have ever taken in my life. The fact that I'm typing this now at about 90-100 words a minute is testimonial enough. It made my transition to computing much easier and has completely enabled and supported my writing efforts throughout my career.

Four years and whole bunch of concerts later, it was time to graduate. Okay, what now? I'm in the middle of suburban America and I want to get into the technical end of the music business. In 1978, exposure to any kind of information on professional audio was scarce at best and was simply not on anyone's radar who was not already established in the business. At any rate, I gathered up every relevant *Hit Parader*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Circus* magazine that I could and headed to my high school counselor's office hoping that he could unlock the mystery of "how do I get to do this for a living?" I remember him browsing the publications with a real display of intrigue and fascination on his face. I was excited to ask him "So, what do you think?" My enthusiasm drained from me like a gushing faucet when his reply was, "Well, it looks extremely technical. Maybe you need to join the Army."

Uh, no. Just no.

In the spirit of making lemonade from lemons, he agreed to do some investigating on my behalf and make some recommendations to me before the end of the school year.

At the end of the year I met again with the counselor and he suggested that I attend one of the new models of technical institutes that were cropping up around the country. Okay, so it was not exactly "here's the number for the Rolling Stones' tour manager, give him a call", but it was an idea that had some logic to it. It didn't take me long to rationalize the idea that "surely I can't be the only guy attending this school with this on my mind." Maybe the counselors *there* will be able to help me realize my dream upon graduation. Within just a couple of weeks of graduating, at the ripe old age of 17, I had my own apartment and was enrolled in a technical college studying toward a Bachelor's degree in electronic engineering.

Enrolling in that school was a catalyst in ways that neither I nor my school counselors could have foreseen or predicted. I met other musicians at school who were forming bands and playing locally. We were constantly disassembling, modifying, and repairing music gear and building PA systems. They introduced me to nightclubs and semi pro and pro recording studios in town that I would soon be moonlighting at. A regional sound company posted ads on the school bulletin board looking for labor volunteers on a big series of outdoor shows. I worked every single one of those shows **for zero pay**, and by the end of my first season was hired by the sound company. Next, while out on a show with the sound company, we were hired to do audio for a band that was just breaking out of Kansas City in a big way. Their record had just released and they were—wait for it—going to tour. Guess who they asked to join them to help drive the truck, set up the band gear, and (most importantly) mix monitors? This all happened within about two years of me enrolling in that school. I left on tour just a few weeks shy of receiving my

associates degree. I never regretted the decision to attend school, nor the decision to leave early to start my career.

Why am I sharing this long story? Because it supports a long-held axiom that I have urged person after person to embrace and use as a guide to reaching any dream. It's actually two axioms rolled into one. It goes like this: *To get your foot in the door, you have to be in the right place at the right time.* Wrapped in this one: *It's too late to prepare once you start the race.* Everyone I share this with has a tendency to gravitate to the literal translations. Meaning, they think of the right place as being a geographical location like a New York, Los Angeles, or Nashville. And while that can be important, the more important place is how far along you are in your development. Are you actually ready for the job? Are you as prepared as you need to be to simply survive your first gig? If not, you're not in the right place and you won't be ready when you stumble upon the right time or actually *travel* to the right *location*. As the old saying goes: the harder I work, the luckier I seem to get. #accurate

For my most recent tour

The lesson I learned from the most recent Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers tour was to not let your identity become consumed by who you work for. I've actually preached it to a lot of my peers throughout my life. I witnessed it have tragic consequences for many that do allow it to consume them. And my own wisdom and advice came back to haunt me a bit with the the untimely death of Tom Petty.

I've always strived to be known as Robert Scovill the great live sound mixer, not Tom Petty's sound guy, or Rush's sound guy, or Def Leppard's sound guy. I've always believed you have to be able to stand on what you've done, not who you've done it for. At some point, you're going to move on from those artists. I.e. "Tom passed away; what now?"

Here are some other challenges that most people don't recognize can happen when you work closely with famous people. Does your wife now possess a level of celebrity with her friends because YOU work for a famous artist? Will those friends still be her friends when the comped tickets stop becoming available? Do your kids use your association with the artist to make themselves more appealing to friends at school? How are they affected when you get off the road and start working corporate shows for Microsoft? How do your close friends know you and view you? Are you the guy who is the friend who works for so and so? And more importantly, when it all stops, how will they view your friendship?

Sadly, I've watched a lot of people crumble personally and professionally under the weight of that vacuum when the famous person is no longer a part of their lives.

They are unable to see past the tour they're currently on or the artists they work for. It's not that you shouldn't be proud of who you've worked for and what you've accomplished. You absolutely should. You're in rarefied air. You just have to keep it in perspective and be the one to help those around you do the same.

The best decision I made

In hindsight there were many make or break moments and many times my career was on the edge of complete failure. I never felt like I had it all locked in.

There is one incident that comes to mind that could have gone a very different way, but instead gave me an opportunity to display some strength of character and show some humility and professionalism. In the end it served me very well and continues to do so to this day.

In the early 80s, at the ripe old age of 23, I was offered a position working for John Cougar Mellencamp by production manager Bob McCutcheon. Bob would remain a long time friend and future business partner with Backstage Records for a short stint many years later. Even though I had already attained a bit of status as a mixer in my own right, I accepted a job as Kenny Aronoff's drum tech on the Uh-Huh tour. Kenny was AWESOME to work for and man, what a drummer. It was a brief but brutally-scheduled tour, in big venues as John was riding high on the hit "Pink Houses" among others on the record.

The show itself was fantastic. I LOVED it. But what I also loved was that I was getting full-on exposure to working on a big, "hot" tour, using big production, in front of big audiences. It was the "big time" in every sense of the word and in being asked to come along for the ride, I heard opportunity knocking loud and clear.

During the tour, I would regularly come in early and work as closely with the Electrotec crew as they would allow. A few years later, Ted Leamy, the main PA guy, would be a member of my wedding party. Sam Buckner, the FOH tech, and I would share a house within a year or so of the tour ending. Instead of sleeping in till 11:00 when the band gear call was scheduled to load in, I came in early and helped in any way I could by flying the PA, running power, or miking the stage.

Mixer Ed Winn of Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, and Tom Petty fame was manning FOH, and he and I developed a very healthy and hilarious relationship over the course of the tour. Steve Butler was the band's monitor mixer of many years. The tour ran its course. After 40 shows in 43 days the crew and I collapsed in a heap of exhaustion.

Of course John and the band went off to do their next album, "Scarecrow". I had my ears peeled for the upcoming tour. As luck would have it, I learned that Steve

would not be coming back and that there was an opening for a monitor engineer on the tour. I was certain that this was my shot. I lobbied VERY hard for that position. It should be noted that John was a VERY tough artist to do monitors for—or for that matter, to work for in any capacity—but especially if you were at the monitor desk. You were clearly in his sights and were an easy and convenient target of his fury on a daily basis. His reputation as a hard ass was well-documented, and it was also well-founded. I saw it first hand, up close and personal on every day of the Uh-Huh tour. It was now 1985. I was 24 years old. I wanted that job.

It was a job I would be relieved of before we even got to the first gig.

Now, here's where the "decision" came in. As I saw it, I had three options;

1. Pack it in and go home with my tail between my legs. Frankly, under the circumstances, no one would have blamed for doing just that.
2. I could have lashed out and looked for anyone and anything to blame and scapegoat for MY apparent failure in a feeble effort to save face. Everyone involved would have certainly sympathized with that approach but none would have ever recommended me for another gig in the future if I chose that option.
3. I could stop and take a cold, hard look at what I brought to the table. Then with a very sober analysis try to understand what led to my failure at this seemingly critical juncture in my career.

Fortunately, somehow I had the wisdom and the wherewithal to choose number 3, and in so doing also realized that I simply had to find a way to stay on the tour and process and reconcile this incident in my consciousness before I moved on. If I didn't, it was likely going to dog me for the rest of my career, maybe my life. Luckily I gained the backing of enough people that I had connected with on the Uh-Huh tour to accept a sideways move into working as the tech for the person who would replace me at the console. I'm here to confess that that required a level of humility and discipline that to that point I'm not sure I knew I possessed, but it's a reserve that I would have to call on time and time again in my career.

I stuck around.

A mixer from Maryland sound, Jack McQue, a much older and much more experienced monitor mixer, came in to replace me. He was openly sympathetic to me and my situation and what had just gone down. It was clear he had seen and experienced all of this before and most importantly, he did not see me as a threat. I mean, why would he at that point?

I intently watched sound check after sound check, show after show, waiting to discover the key to his success. What I discovered would serve to recalibrate my

approach to my work from that day forward. The skill he possessed was not his technical skills, or his mixing skills, although he was clearly accomplished in those areas, but more so his ability to effectively communicate with John and instantly gain and command John's respect. This was no small feat mind you. John's respect was the key to all of this. Jack was also unafraid and fearless about losing the gig. This was his secret weapon. His indifference, in a weird way, disarmed John's rage. No longer could the threat of firing be weaponized against Jack. It empowered him in a way I had never seen up to that point. Now, in John's defense, John very much needed to walk on that stage every night, at the most critical moment of HIS career, and not have ANY doubts about what was going to happen behind that monitor console. It was no time to help "break in" the former drum tech as a monitor engineer. And most importantly, the skill needed to create and foster that kind of mindset in an artist was not in my bag of tricks yet. By contrast, I also learned I possessed more than enough mixing and technical skills to hold that job—what I didn't have was the maturity, charisma, and professional social skills to hold on to it and have it reinforce my actual work.

But after that tour, I was on a path to learn that skill. In time I would be challenged once again to put them to use with great effect and with great success while working for another famously tyrannical artist. To say the decision to stay was one of the most impactful of my career is certainly accurate. But don't let me kid you into thinking it was an easy decision to make. I assure you, it was not.

The biggest mistake I made

Hands down—not keeping a daily, weekly, or even monthly diary. No question.

What I wish I knew 20 years ago

Only 20 years ago? I guess maybe I wish I knew how fun my 50's were going to be while being on the road. It's been the most fun decade of my life. When I was young, I figured I would be retired at my age.

Here's a good one. Depending on your position on the tour, you should do contracts. It's called protection. And generally, there's a reason they (sound companies and band managers) don't want to agree to one with you. Because you're the one ending up protected, not them. And if you think the people that actually pay you are "trustworthy"...um...even on this side of the industry, this is the music business. One would be wise to live and die by the famous Hunter S. Thompson quote "the music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side." Believe it.

Long distance relationships are hard. Here's how my spouse and I stay connected while I'm on the road:

I'll be the first person in line to hold up his hand and proclaim "I won the lottery when it comes to choosing a spouse, given my chosen occupation." Thirty-three years now and counting, and what I can tell you without hesitation is that, for it to happen, it takes the three unwavering pillars of Love, Trust, and Respect with regard to EACH OTHER for it to survive. If any one of these falter even a little, on one side or the other, it rarely survives.

I've watched this episode so many times. I know, and have known SO MANY DAMN PEOPLE whose relationships with their wives and even their children have crumbled under the weight of one of them being gone for extended periods of time. It is totally analogous to spouses of men and women who serve in the armed forces. Except here, you have the added twist that the spouse that is gone is not out defending his country and putting his life on the line for a very noble cause. No, what you have here is a spouse that is actually living "sex, drugs, and rock and roll" while the other is home paying the bills, cleaning and maintaining the house, feeding, disciplining, and making sure the kids go to school, and on and on and on. Meanwhile, during your touring life, you never clean up your room, never do your own laundry, eat professionally-prepared food seven days a week, and hang out with rock stars. To say there is an easy path to resentment or abandonment on either side is a gross understatement. You have to totally respect that possibility and kill it and tend to the first sign of resentment like it's the first weed in your lawn during summer. If you don't deal with it early, by the end of summer you have no grass, only weeds.

And lest you think you don't come off of tour with a version of PTSD or culture shock: you do. Sometimes you go for so hard and go for so long that when you return home, you can't turn it off. You're still working. You're still partying. You're still touring, but you're at home. It happens. It happened to me. And it required a complete shutdown for a short period otherwise the whole thing would have imploded. I'm a survivor. My marriage is a survivor.

How did we survive? Firstly, we met WHILE I was touring. My wife-to-be was very young at the time and I was in my mid-late twenties. While the fact that we met while I was touring sounds benign in concept, it's actually a very important part of our success. And as it turns out, we met shortly before I landed one of the most time-demanding tours I've ever been on in my life. So, what that served to do was ensure everyone's eyes were wide open from the very beginning on what this was going to mean for our relationship going forward. If we wanted to move on to the next level, it was going to require that we throw traditional relationship paradigms

out the window. For example, we met during a day off before a show in Cleveland. Then I was right back on tour to the next city and we carried on that relationship by phone and letter (yes, this was pre-cell phone, pre-email) until we had the opportunity to meet face to face again. This meant pay phones, pens, paper, stamps, and envelopes. This went on for three years before we committed to marriage.

But here's the important part—and it's something that in a very weird way served us very well. We had nothing but conversation to focus on during that time. The pretense and "show" that you normally have when you're developing a relationship face-to-face didn't apply. We had no choice but to get to know each other through verbal communication during that time. And most importantly, the sex didn't detract from that. Why? Because there was none! (Okay, there was some, but it was rare by most dating standards.) So it made for wildly high anticipation when we did see each other over those three years, and we cherished every minute we were in the presence of one another, and that has carried through to today after being together for over 30 years now.

But hear me on this now; what it demanded was that when we hung up the phone, that an element of two-way **trust** existed. Without it, the doubt, fear, and insecurity of "yeah, but what about all the girls that are at the show—or what about all the guys she's hanging around at the club" would have simply undermined it to the point of collapse. That kind of trust is not a given, it's earned, and needs constant nurturing. Otherwise the relationship falls apart just like a house built on a rotting foundation. My wife and I were very lucky in that this level of trust came very quickly and very easily to us.

I would love to tell you that I had it all figured out before I married my wife, but I didn't. I do recognize some things we did in order for our relationship to not only survive but flourish. Your touring life with the money, the travel, the camaraderie, and the freedom of the lifestyle is intoxicating, even addicting. But as soon as you bring another person into it, especially a girlfriend, the dynamic changes pretty dramatically.

I got lucky, but we worked our asses off to make the commitment work.

If I were in your shoes

The available paths to where you want to go are very different than when I was leaving my teen years and getting my feet wet in this business. The touring "industry"—the artists, managers, studios, sound companies, clubs, and schools—have all grown and morphed into a very different thing. It's unrecognizable from when I started fantasizing about working in this business and

aspiring to be a part of it. I often wonder when I look at my daughter and my sons, "if they were trying to do this for a living now, what would I advise them to do?"

The first question that has to now be asked is: "What EXACTLY do you want to do? Which sandbox do you want to play in?" Because the roads to success are so disparate and in many ways very specialized now. When I was starting out, whether you were going to be a musician, a sound engineer, a lighting director, a sound company owner, or a _____ (fill in the blank), you were likely going to start from a very similar place.

Today, if you aspire to be a front of house mixer, you would be very well-served by a background in music supported by a background in music production and technology and a good hunk of studio mixing experience. It is nearly impossible to organically learn this kind of work on the fly now, because there are so few actual situations or venues for you to get your feet wet mixing in front of an audience. In today's environment, as a mixer, you're considerably more likely to be hired by the band organization than the sound company. So your path is much more along the lines of the starving musician.

Overall, sound companies providing the FOH mixer to the artist is much less common than it was 25 or 30 years ago, when it was almost a standard practice. But monitor mixers? Very different story. I would guess nearly 100% of them make their way to the artist via the sound company through direct hire or referral. How about PA systems engineers? Again, nearly 100% come up through the ranks of a sound provider or contractor.

A great deal of the new generation of truly great systems engineers I have met and worked with are coming out of schools and climbing the ranks of sound company rosters very quickly. And they do so because of the depth of their knowledge and exposure to the latest technologies. Belmont University and Middle Tennessee State, just to name two, are building stellar talent in this regard. Post-secondary educational facilities are also doing very well. Over the past few years we have actually seen the internship concept start to take hold in a real way in the sound company community. Although, it still has a long way to go.

All of this born from the fact that the shows, workflows, and systems are so dramatically more complex than they were even a decade ago. And here's the BREAKING NEWS: they show no signs of moving back to simplicity any time soon. This complexity puts considerably more demand on you to be prepared. Just knowing the basics and "faking it till you make it" while figuring out the rest doesn't work anymore. If we're being honest, it never really worked.

There are well-trained, educated guys coming through the door today with more fundamental knowledge than many long-time employees of the sound company they're entering. What they lack, however, is practical application and actual experience in the field. Once they get that, they are a force to be reckoned with and are constantly being given bigger challenges and more responsibilities.

My advice? In the modern era, don't be afraid to go to school. Time is on your side. But after you graduate, don't confuse education with knowledge and don't confuse knowledge with experience. They're mutually exclusive. One without the other in today's production world renders you nearly impotent. One of my favorite old sayings is "experience is what you get right after you actually need it". Don't be in too big a hurry to sit in the big chair. You need to get out in the world, work, and make a bunch of mistakes in order to lose your fear of making mistakes, and then gain an identity. It's better to make those mistakes when there aren't 18,000 pairs of eyes and ears watching and listening. Trust me on this one. Take the time to prepare. Don't be in a hurry.

In terms of technical skills

Technical skills? How about just the required balance of skills in general? Musical skills, social skills, negotiating skills, and marketing skills are central to your success. Asking what technical skills you need to succeed can be interpreted as "I'll only need technical skills to succeed", which has been proven to be a patently false concept regardless of what profession we are talking about. Any success, and in this instance I'll come at it from the perspective of becoming a successful front of house mixer, requires a balance of finely honed skills, and not many of them are technical in nature.

I ran into this challenge first hand at the technical college I attended right out of high school and held a keen eye for it in my life moving forward. Of course the institution was providing me with fantastic education with regard to all things technology, but when I inquired about other courses that might support the field and lifestyle I was trying to get into—music and concert production—they kind of looked at me as if I were from Mars.

Them: "You mean you don't want to graduate and work for Bell Labs or Honeywell?"

Me: "Uh no, no I don't, not in any way shape or form."

Nearly 40 years later, in a twist of irony, I'm witness to a similar challenge in a number of schools that are specializing in audio production. I don't want to make too wide of a generalization here, but if you fly up high enough and look down, it seems like the attitude is that "if we teach them how coil mic cables over/under,

signal flow, how to plug in the sound system, how an equalizer works, and then how to operate the console well, they'll make good crew guys".

For example; what would serve students who endeavor to "mix" music in collaboration with an artist would be to expose them to the history of music from the artist perspective. This exposure would give students insight into what drives artists and how to interact with them in non-technical ways. Then focus on historical and modern approaches to music production. A music production appreciation study would help them enter the field with a foundation of tried and true methods instead of simply surviving on what worked the day before. When your entire method is developed by just doing whatever it takes to survive the day, then there is no method. And guess what? Tomorrow will be here tomorrow. The process starts all over again.

In all fairness to the schools, the real challenge that they as well as the students face today is that there IS an inordinate amount of technical skill that is required in order to be fluent in the field of professional audio. It is expanding yearly and is probably more content than they ever dreamed they would have to fit into a live audio curriculum. What I've given you here is a very high level of generalization in order to generate a wider perspective, and it should be noted that many schools are moving toward these more comprehensive, yet more compartmentalized curriculum. If you've interacted professionally with as many graduates in your life as I have, it's pretty easy to spot this as a problem. From what I have seen, rarely are their skill sets in balance, given where they are trying to get to..

Buford Jones

What I love about touring

The music! The show itself! Although I like organizing the sound system and console each day, the fun begins at showtime. The two hours of showtime were always incredible fun and the other 22 hours of the day were the most difficult. That's what kept me motivated for over 47 years, and what caps off the hard work and travel. I was raised around musical instruments and took classical guitar in college in 1969. I always wanted to play. The sound console became my instrument.

What I hate about touring

Being gone from family. Travel and a little free time on the road can be good for family relationships. However, being out 10 months of the year can be very difficult. It is very difficult to bring family on the road due to work schedules and unexpected extended work loads. Missing my kids' first soccer and baseball games was a tough thing to have to do. You can't get those times back. I was very fortunate that I was able to be at home when both my kids were born. The odds were not in my favor. Things have worked out while I have traveled ALL of my kids' lives. They somehow seemed to understand, and could get away with more mischief when I wasn't at home. :)

How I got my very first tour

I started at Showco in 1970 thinking I would be a bench technician. Turned out, I was sent on the road my second day with Three Dog Night, who at the time were one of the top-billing acts of the world alongside Led Zeppelin, Elton John, and Moody Blues. After a year with Three Dog as system engineer assistant, I came upon ZZ Top and was mixing my first tour. Most of that was about being in the right place at the right time. Mixing became my forte and all I wanted to do on the road was deliver great music to the audience.

The best decision I made

I started playing golf in 1985, cut down considerably on the late night partying, and began to concentrate on something a bit different. But the real change in my career was in 1980 when I began traveling with the artists I worked for. The communication between musicians in the band drastically increased my ability to

reproduce a musical mix instead of a technical mix or just doing what I thought sounded good.

The artists spends an amazing amount of time and energy to write a piece of music, and I believe the FOH mixer needs to know those details to reproduce an accurate mix. I don't want to guess or put my signature on their work. Traveling with the artists was absolutely the biggest change in my career. A FOH mixer IS another member of the band and must play his/her part. Also, I feel so much more content doing what we all (artist & musicians) agree upon.

The biggest mistake I made

Not knowing enough about the legal side of music and not being able to negotiate a fair deal when I was faced with one. I have had several opportunities to become financially secure but didn't know what to say when I was approached with a very serious job (mainly studio work on live recordings of a tour). It's important to have sort of knowledge about what you are entitled to or what kind of money is paid in the music industry. The book *This Business of Music* is a good example.

In terms of technical skills

Please the audiences we are performing to. If our audiences are displeased with the sound of live concerts, attendance will decrease. It does no good to the industry if we don't provide an exciting experience to those who have paid for an enjoyable evening. We need them to come back!

Did you enjoy this book?

My hope is that this book has helped you decide if being a touring sound engineer is something you'd really like to pursue and that it gave you a bunch of ideas for how to do that. Maybe it even brought up some questions that you haven't considered yet? Maybe it left some questions unanswered? If so, tell me.

I want this book to make it into the hands of other audio engineers like you, so if you found it helpful, [send your friend this link](#) so that they can get their own copy.

Thanks in advance for your help in spreading the word.