

# JEFF SHERWOOD

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## Statement of Research

Theatre has an empathic force that changes lives as audience members explore and work through big ideas heightened by metaphors. As a theatre artist, I strive to harness this power through sound and music in collaboration with creative teams in the art of storytelling. I live in the world of the aural experience of the audience, exploring the areas of sound design, music composition for theatre, and audio engineering. As I pursue my career in research and in academia, I plan to share my findings with the worldwide community by understanding teaching pedagogy and methods as well as innovations in curriculum and instructional design.

**Sound design and music composition for theatre.** I approach theatre by looking at the entire theatrical experience as a piece of music, a concept introduced to me by my mentor Richard K. Thomas. What are the musical markers, including tempo, tension, rises and falls as characters journey toward the climactic turn of the action? We cannot forget the contribution of the musicality of the actors' voices, their pacing, rhythm, and the tempo of their footsteps across the stage. This is quite difficult to extrapolate from the text alone and requires me to put myself in the shoes of each character.

I also pay close attention to how I react viscerally to the script. How do I experience the world the playwright is crafting? What will the audience members' reactions be when they experience this play in living form? It is these visceral reactions that are fundamental when creating the sound score and design. Music has the power to incite and evoke our emotional memory, even on a subconscious level, and can be used in conjunction with re-occurring thematic material along a character's journey. This understanding informs my approach to the design process, both with content and system.

I plan to further investigate and explore how to understand the thematic and musical structure of plays. I will also explore how their relationship with sound design and music affects audience members and allows audience members to fully engage and work through the heightened metaphors in plays. This research will be conducted through studying others' work and by actively participating in the process of designing and composing original sound scores for audiences in professional theatres across the country.

**Collaboration.** The most important process with sound design and composition is collaboration with the team of co-creators including the director, designers, actors, and technicians. Sound certainly does not and cannot carry the entire story the entire time, and determining together how and when the sound score will be crafted and heard is essential in harnessing the power that theatre has to inform, educate, entertain, and change lives.

As I engage with directors and artistic teams on creative activities, I seek to research this craft of building unity and strengthening collaboration among members of the team. There have been multiple Harvard Business Review articles posted about the art of communication and separating people from the problem. I plan to focus on the interpersonal skills and approach in cultivating relationships with fellow theatre artists in this way. This will flow into the classroom and help educate our students how to be successful collaborators and enjoy their work.

**Audio engineering.** This study of collaboration extends into how the sound team work together and how they work with other departments. In the 2014 Live Design Broadway Sound Master Classes, Abe Jacobs, noted as the grandfather of sound design, placed emphasis on the need to solve the lack of a common platform to communicate among the sound designers and audio engineers. Although the Sound Commission of the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) released Sound Graphics Recommended Practice Guidelines in 2008, the guideline is limited in its scope and there are no standards that exist in creating and maintaining paperwork for shows in the theatrical sound world.

Currently I am a member of a sub-committee within the Theatrical Sound Designers and Composers Association (TSDCA) to evaluate and propose revisions to the 2008 USITT Guidelines, in collaboration with the USITT Sound Commission. I am interested in further investigating and exploring the innovative usage of database and drafting software to create more coherent methods of communications via paperwork.

In addition to the methods of communication, I am also interested in the process of realizing the sound designer's vision from the perspective of an audio engineer. During my time in New York City, I studied the organizational structure and functions of sound teams. From working in various capacities, I learned the current practices of audio engineering in New York. During my time as a Graduate Research Assistant at Purdue University, I worked with my mentor Richard K. Thomas to create Guidelines for Production Sound Engineers, which is now used by students in the Theatre Sound for the Performing Arts major. I am planning to further develop and publish these guidelines to help aspiring audio engineers to quickly learn their craft and enter the professional field.

**Teaching pedagogy and instructional design.** As an educator, I am fueled by a passion to share my research and knowledge with others. There is also much to learn from interacting with others and the rising generation. I plan to study new and innovative ways to approach teaching in a classroom setting, and how to engage students to prepare them for the future.

**Sharing knowledge and research.** I am fascinated by theatre's empathic force that has the power to change audience members' lives. I plan to investigate and explore the areas of sound design, music composition for theatre, audio engineering, and teaching pedagogy. This will happen from studying previous successful accomplishments and current practices, and in the application of new innovations through professional practice. I plan to share my research through published journal articles, which may eventually lead to publishing books. I also plan to engage creative endeavors in sound design, composition, and audio engineering at professional theatres around the country and globe. I plan to present at annual United States Institute for Theatre Technology national conferences, as well as other conferences as I engage in this research exploration with other professionals and researchers in my craft. I look forward to the opportunity to further these research areas while serving in a university setting.