

SITI Co: Under Construction

Q & A With Darron West

I managed to ask Darron West, resident sound designer for the SITI Company, some questions about his work on this show. Have a read:

How have you approached selection of sounds for this piece? What informed your choices?

Well I went into this show like all the rest of the SITI company works with a pretty large palette of ideas and choices based on everything from Chuck's thoughts in the script to my my own lateral ideas that came to me as I was going thru the early research period on the play.

But, as far as choices go, you fill up with many many ideas and a lot of research before you walk into the rehearsal room but, when you get there and you're on your feet and starting to work, the choices are informed by what's being created in the room with the company, the show can change on a dime at any moment so you need the ability to be flexible, I think there's no real hard and fast rule as how the music choices are made but, the one common denominator is that they're made in the hot seat of the rehearsal room and aren't premeditated.

What were some of your aesthetic considerations for tech used in your sound design? For example: the use of amplified voices versus acoustic, or when to have something prerecorded versus live.

I think the biggest job of a sound designer is to be the ears of the audience in rehearsals and try to hear anew every time you watch a scene. That coupled with thinking about the composition of the whole it becomes pretty obvious as you're working when you need to renew the aural world in the play for the audience so I'll try putting a scene on a mic, or recording the text rather than it being done live. In short it's really based on when the text needs to be "woken up" and what tool do you chose to do that... sometimes it's as simple as having a conversation with the acting company about the dynamics of the scene, they're an incredibly musical company so that helps.

How do you manage to navigate this piece stylistically? How has the sound design developed in relationship to the piece as a whole?

I had a tough time with this one in the early stages before we started rehearsals, it was so open and could be anything... it was a lot of potential to have to wrap your head around... I made a pretty specific choice not to know too much about say Jason Rhodes, Brian (the lighting/ video designer) was really grooving on him so I knew he had that aspect covered so I really stayed over in the 50's for a long time, lots of research there, gathering old production music library music that was period for the student film sections. Musing on the idea of Americana and Norman Rockwell naturally sends you over to Jazz especially of the 50's, it also makes you think of Aaron Copland. I did a pretty enormous pull of music from my library one day just going thru my collection and repeating the word America to myself. So I arrived in Louisville with everything from Jimi Hendrix Star Spangled Banner to Buck Owens and the Buckaroo's singing God Bless America and everything in

between. I felt I was prepared for anything.

But, I had to finally give it over to the gods to some degree and go with my gut and not attempt to or predict where the show was going it but, to sit back and see what it was becoming... it's a large cast one of the largest ever in a SITI show and we're a super collaborative group so there were a lot of opinions about what we were making. I'm usually more a cook on a SITI company piece but, this time around I was more of a Sous Chef until we came to an agreement about how the piece was going to work.

I know it sounds obvious but, I feel as though if you listen, really deeply listen to everything that is going on in the room the piece will begin to give you answers to mood and context etc etc and you can design from that place.

When you work with SITI during training, throwing music into a viewpoint session, what is your thought process like? How do you make choices?

It's usually based on feelings I'm having about potential scoring for scenes, playing things in viewpoints where I can learn how it feels and sounds rhythmically with the text and the actors' voices. I'm actually doing some serious work on the play during the VP's. I don't go in with pre-chosen ideas but, I will only use things that I'm interested in possibly finding a place for in the show, restricting myself to music from the palette of ideas that I'd put together, for example there was a week there that I was only working on what Ellen's dance with the Lamp music might be.

There are also days where you can feel the room is a little scattered from the previous day of rehearsals so I'll not sling a crazy loud inappropriate piece of music out there just because I'm interested in it. You have to have sensitivity to the whole room and where people are, sometimes they need a little aural cuddling before the day begins, sometimes every one is game and you can sling all your crazy idea's out in one 20 minute session. It's different from day to day but that's the nature of an improvisation.