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The Sound Design for H.M.S. Pinafore

Kyle W. Jensen

*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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THE SOUND DESIGN FOR

H.M.S. Pinafore

by

KYLE W. JENSEN

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN
THEATRE ARTS

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO

MANKATO, MINNESOTA

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The Sound Design for *H.M.S. Pinafore*

Kyle W. Jensen

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

___________________________
George E. Grubb, Chair

___________________________
Steve Smith

___________________________
John David Paul

___________________________
Nicholas Wayne

___________________________
Brad Ward

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of a Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Arts: Sound Design at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This thesis contains a detailed account of Kyle W. Jensen’s sound design process and research for *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The thesis gives a chronological overview of the designer’s process in four chapters; a pre-production analysis, a historical and critical perspective, a journal detailing the process, and a post-production analysis. The fifth and final chapter provides the process development of the designer’s career before and during his time in graduate school. Appendices feature the paperwork, a list of works cited and other items to detail the process of the sound design.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis serves as an accumulation of the past three years of dedicated work to achieve a Master of Fine Arts degree from Minnesota State University, Mankato and I couldn’t have done this without the help, support, and love from so many people. I would first like to extend my thanks to the faculty and staff in the Department of Theatre and Dance for playing a key role during my education process during my time here. Their leadership and support have been key components for my success here. I would like to give a special thanks to Julie Kerr-Berry for being a great department chair, mentor, and supporter. I would like to especially thank my advisor and mentor, George E. Grubb, for always having my back from the moment I decided to come here to earn my graduate degree and for being a continual source of support! I also want to say thank you to Scott Anderson and Melissa Gibson for dedicating the time to help me prepare this thesis!

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I wouldn’t been able to get through much of the COVID-19 Pandemic if it wasn’t for the weekly Early Career hangouts on Zoom! I would also like to take a moment to say thank you to composer Michael Roth, and sound designers Jessica Paz and Abe Jacob for lending me your advice and wisdom during this process! And especially want to thank Brad Ward for being on the thesis committee and making the trip to Mankato to be a part of this process!

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Chapter

I. PRE-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS ............................................. 1  
II. HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE .......................... 9  
III. JOURNAL ........................................................................... 17  
IV. POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS ......................................... 37  
V. PROCESS DEVELOPMENT ................................................ 44  

## Appendix

A. SOUND PLOT ......................................................................... 57  
B. QLAB PLAYBACK ................................................................. 58  
C. MICROPHONE PLOT ............................................................ 59  
D. DANTE PATCH ..................................................................... 60  
E. SHURE WIRELESS WORKBENCH ......................................... 62  
F. BOUNDARY MICROPHONE PLACEMENTS ............................ 65  
G. TRAP ROOM SPEAKER ....................................................... 66  
H. PRODUCTION PHOTOS ..................................................... 67  

WORKS CITED ........................................................................ 68
CHAPTER I

PRE-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

*H.M.S. Pinafore*, a comic operetta in two acts, libretto by W.S. Gilbert and music by Arthur Sullivan, will be produced by Minnesota State University, Mankato in the fall of 2021. Nicholas Wayne is the director and music director, Heather E. Hamilton will serve as the assistant director, John David Paul as the scenic designer, David McCarl as the costume designer, Steven Smith as the lighting designer, John Greer as the choreographer, George E. Grubb as the technical director, and Sarah Belfrage Honerman as the production stage manager. The sound designer and author of this thesis, Kyle W. Jensen, is a third year Master of Fine Arts candidate and this production fulfills the thesis requirement for the MFA program at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

*H.M.S Pinafore*, also known as "The Lass that Loved a Sailor", is one of the most popular works created by Gilbert & Sullivan. The operetta is set in two acts. After an overture, act one starts with the crew of the H.M.S. Pinafore, a beauty of a ship in Her Majesty’s navy, anchored in the harbor at Portsmouth. The audience is introduced to the proud sailors busy scrubbing the decks and then comes aboard Little Miss Buttercup, a bumboat woman who sells her stock of “snuff and tobaccy, and excellent jacky” (Gilbert and Sullivan 1). The audience is then introduced to Dick Deadeye, an ugly sailor who tells the ugly truth, and a handsome and talented sailor Ralph, who comes out to confess to his shipmates that he is in love with the captain’s daughter Josephine. Dick Deadeye
tells Ralph that sailors like him are prohibited from marrying captain’s daughters due to their social classes. Their conversation is interrupted when Captain Corcoran comes aboard to inspect his crew and sings that he never uses foul language nor is he ever sick at sea (well “hardly ever”) and he tells Josephine that she is going to be marrying Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. who is the ruler of the Queen’s Navy. She has no interest in him and is secretly in love with Ralph. Sir Joseph then arrives to the H.M.S. Pinafore accompanied by his sisters and his cousins and his aunts who follow him wherever he goes. Sir Joseph reveals that he may not be qualified for his job, as he rose through the ranks by doing desk work and never going to sea. He also believes that any British sailor is any man’s equal. Act One concludes with Ralph confessing his love to Josephine. She initially rejects his love and he threatens to take his own life. At the last-minute Josephine declares her love for him and with the help of the crew and the sisters, cousins, and aunts the two plan to elope that very night. Dick Deadeye warns that the plan won’t work but is forced to retreat and they all rejoice for the love between Ralph and Josephine.

Act two is set later that evening where we see Captain Corcoran alone on the deck of the H.M.S. Pinafore playing his guitar and singing to the moon about his troubles, when Little Buttercup comes up to confess her love for him. The Captain tells her that it couldn’t work because of his rank and that they can be nothing more than friends. But using the gypsy blood in her, Little Buttercup warns that a change is rapidly approaching the Captain. Sir Joseph returns to the captain unsatisfied that Josephine might not be the right bride for him; however, the Captain assures Sir Joseph that she is and tells him just to say “love levels all rank”. Dick Deadeye then comes to the Captain to warn him about
Ralph and Josephine’s plan to leave the H.M.S. Pinafore with the help of the crew to marry that night. Upon hearing of the plan, the Captain confronts the two and the rest of the crew. While he is confronting the crew and Josephine, he uses a foul word which causes Sir Joseph to overhear and order the Captain to his cabin. When Sir Joseph finds out that Josephine and Ralph love each other, he orders Ralph to the brig of the ship. When Little Buttercup hears about what has just happened, she reveals her lifelong secret. That she is the foster mother for both Corcoran and Ralph and she exchanged them when they were babies. When Corcoran and Ralph reappear, Corcoran is now a humble seaman and Ralph is now the Captain of the H.M.S. Pinafore. With their ranks reversed, Sir Joseph no longer sees Josephine fit to be his wife and permits her to marry Ralph. Corcoran, no longer a captain, can now love Little Buttercup, and with Sir Joseph out of options, he agrees to marry his longtime admirer and one of his cousins, Hebe. All ends with joy and rapture unforeseen, for he is an Englishman!

*H.M.S. Pinafore* is one of the most notable works created by W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. The production contains themes that are expressed in other Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, most notably *The Sorcerer* (Jefferson 74). *H.M.S. Pinafore*’s themes are expressed through the mixture of social classes and how one should only love the people in your class, and the idea of rising through the ranks without experience. These are some of the key traits that make the works of any Gilbert and Sullivan stand out.

This *H.M.S. Pinafore* production will be a large undertaking for everyone involved, with unique challenges for the designer. As part of the pre-production phases, the director emphasizes that he would like this production to be presented “the way as it
is”, meaning that this show would have that traditional Gilbert and Sullivan vibe, and not to take this production that would present itself in a crazy different setting. As the technical elements are critical for the director’s concept, the high expectations for the design team will help motivate them to produce a satirical operetta that a Gilbert and Sullivan work is known for. The sound design should be able to help the audience understand the satire that is written in the show and bring it out to a musical that sounds natural.

There are several challenges that the sound designer can think of for this production *H.M.S. Pinafore*. First is that the designer has never had the opportunity to produce a sound design for a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, and it’s a much different than previous musicals he has designed. The designer needs to figure out a strong approach for this. Mr. Jensen’s musical sound design has focused on more contemporary works such as *Mamma Mia, Hair, La Cage aux Folles, Fun Home*, etc. *H.M.S. Pinafore* is quite different from those musicals. Another challenge the designer faces with *H.M.S Pinafore* is understanding why sound designing this show or any other Gilbert and Sullivan production is just as important and exciting as designing for a contemporary musical.

When discussing sound design, this show with some of his sound design colleagues, a lot of feedback he got was “We don’t need to do another Gilbert and Sullivan show”, or “I’m sorry you got stuck with that” and it made it hard to get excited about this show. After these challenges presented themselves, the designer needed to seek advice on how to proceed and to get excited about sound designing *H.M.S. Pinafore*. 
While in the early research phase, the sound designer reached out to professional sound designer Abe Jacob. In the professional theatre industry, Jacob is known to be the “The Godfather of Theatre Sound” (Thomas 9) having designed such original Broadway productions as Hair, Jesus Christ Superstar, and Chicago, he is credited with the development of the theatrical sound designer position. Jensen saw on Jacob’s production credits that he has worked on H.M.S. Pinafore during his career. In a discussion with Jacobs, the designer asked him two big burning questions. How should a sound designer approach H.M.S. Pinafore? And why is it important to do a show like H.M.S. Pinafore or any other Gilbert and Sullivan at least once in your career? During the conversation, Jacob advised the designer that it is important to make sure everything sounds clear and natural, and let the vocals of the cast do the work. He suggested that to pull off this show you really don’t need to go all out in terms of what sound equipment is being used and suggested just putting microphones on the principals and using foot microphones for the rest. His response to the second question on why it is still important for a sound designer to do a Gilbert and Sullivan show during their careers, was just a simple one. It allows for sound designers to go back to basics, and it allows you to design a show that doesn’t really require all the “bells and whistles” that might be needed when sound designing a more modern musical. This conversation with Jacob helped the designer see a clearer path in putting together a sound design that can represent H.M.S. Pinafore to its fullest potential.

Using the advice that Jacob gave, the approach for the sound design for H.M.S. Pinafore should be focused mainly on reflecting the satire that Gilbert and Sullivan are
not known for and not do anything that doesn’t go with the flow of the show. The main way this could be achieved is in how the designer picks what types of microphones to use and how they are used. In thinking about the ways this design could be done, the designer thinks that the only wireless microphones on actors will just be on the principals and the supporting members that have solos, which is about ten people. For the ensemble moments that require hearing the fullness of the vocals, this could be done by placing several boundary microphones along the front of the stage. Typically, boundary microphones have a cardioid polar pattern in the hemisphere above the mounting surface that focuses on sound sources within a 60° range above the surface its mounted on, which can also be known as a half-cardioid pattern.

Ex. A. Boundary Microphone

These microphones would allow the sound designer to pick up the ensemble vocals and would also rely more on the actor’s voice to carry the sound to the microphone. This method of using fewer wireless microphones and boundary microphones could be a good balance of using the basic equipment and could help give
the sound quality that is appropriate in an operetta. While this approach might be a good balance, it could also present itself with some problems.

The use of boundary microphones would require the Audio 1 (A1), the person who moves the faders on the soundboard during the show. This would allow for greater control and internally would provide the audience with balance sound but also maintaining the aesthetic wishes of the designer (Slaton 30). The A1 would have to keep track of when to use the boundary microphone and when not to. For example, if someone has a solo during a big number and is near a boundary microphone while wearing a wireless microphone, that could cause some sound quality issues and possible feedback. Another problem that the designer must be aware of this method is if the cast isn’t performing strong enough, then he might have to add additional wireless microphones to help. That could also cause more issues with the boundary microphones. If this would be the plan for the sound design, then it would take a collaborative effort from the sound designer, A1, director and music director.

Another element that could help support the satire that this show is known for is the possibility of sound effects. The designer must be careful if sound effects are going to be used, as the script for *H.M.S. Pinafore* doesn’t have any sound effects called for. While this will require the sound designer to push himself to think more outside the box, if the sound effects are not properly executed then it would stick out in a way that doesn’t feel like this belongs in a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta and the audience would be easily taken out of the moment. Some sound effects that could be appropriate might be sounds
of the sea, since the ship is anchored and that would help the audience feel more a part of that world.

The sound designer has two primary goals that he would like to achieve for this production. The first goal is to support the director’s concept, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter, to present this show in a more traditional way. This could be done by the utilization of both wired and wireless microphones and sound effects to help create a well-balanced operetta that helps compliments the other design elements. This first goal is always one of the most important goals to achieve as a designer, if the designer doesn’t support the concept of the director, then the show itself is already in danger of failing.

The second goal is to be an effective collaborator and leader. With *H.M.S. Pinafore* being his thesis show and a critical part for not only his Master of Fine Arts degree, but as a benchmark before continuing as a professional sound designer, it is important that the sound designer works closely with all members of the production team to ensure a unified design that blends with all areas. This will also give the designer another opportunity to be an effective leader for the sound department, with the A1 for this production most likely being someone who’s never mixed a show. This is a golden opportunity to teach someone how to properly mix a show by using a line-by-line mix approach, and to help train them to be an effective leader for when the sound designer is not in the room. These goals are going to be really critical for the sound designer to accomplish not only to be able to present a quality thesis worthy of a Master of Fine Arts degree, but as he continues to grow as a professional sound designer.
CHAPTER II
HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

*H.M.S. Pinafore* was first produced at the Opera Comique Theatre in England in May 1878 C.E. This was the fourth operetta that was created by Gilbert and Sullivan with *Thespis, Trail by Jury*, and *The Sorcerer* before the debut. *H.M.S. Pinafore* would be the first Gilbert and Sullivan production to be a success, not only in London, but all over Europe and in the United States of America (Jefferson 72). After the resounding success of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, the works crafted by Gilbert and Sullivan would become part of the classical theatrical cannon.

Named after his father, William Schwenck Gilbert was born on November 18th, 1836 C.E. To quote from his autobiography, “in the house of my grandfather” but he omits his grandfather’s name to deflect attention away from his family as during the time he didn’t consider it was socially acceptable to have come from a family of tradespeople (Ainger 13). Much of Gilbert’s childhood was spent touring Europe and much of his early education was at places where he and his family were touring, but when the family settled back down in England, he would become a pupil at Western Grammar School. There the curriculum focused on Latin, Greek, French, and mathematics; however that school did not encourage the performing arts. When Gilbert was about fourteen years old, he left home to further his education at the Great Ealing School in London and then attended King’s College in London. Towards the end of the Crimean War, he joined the military, where he raised to the rank of captain and acquired a military insistence upon
accuracy and obedience (Jefferson 13). After his military career, Gilbert joined the Civil Service as a clerk, and during his spare time he gained an interest in drawing. When he left the civil service, Gilbert began contributing for the comic journal *Fun*, where one of his most known projects with them would be The Bab Ballads (Crowther 1997). This would help start his career as a playwright with his first professional play would be performed in 1863 C.E.

Arthur Seymour Sullivan, the future partner of W.S. Gilbert, was born in London in May 1842 C.E. Unlike Gilbert, Sullivan would be brought up in the performing arts from an early age. His father was an army bandmaster and by the age of eight, Sullivan was learning how to play almost every instrument in the military band (Turnbull 2004). From then on, any career outside of music was basically forgotten and in 1854 C.E. he would be accepted as a member of the Chapel Royal, which serves as the spiritual needs of the British Royal Family and performing choral liturgical music. During his time there, he would begin his early stages as a composer. In 1856 C.E. Sullivan would be awarded a scholarship to attend the Royal Academy of Music for winning a composition contest, which made him one of the youngest composers to enter (Ainger 29). After his time at the Royal Academy of Music, he would then attend one of the finest musical training schools in the world, the Conservatory in Leipzig, Germany where he would compose one his most famous works for Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

As the years passed both Gilbert and Sullivan would have their individual successes either as a playwright and composer. The first meeting of the great duo would take place in 1869 C.E. (Jefferson 23). At this point, they were respectfully recognized as
masters in their respective professions and in 1871 C.E. the two would create their opera *Thespis*. While *Thespis* was well received, the operetta didn’t leave a major impression, while the first true major success that Gilbert and Sullivan would create would be *Trial by Jury*. It made its debut in 1875 C.E., and the success that it gave paved the way for *The Sorcerer* in 1877 C.E., and eventually *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

While other Gilbert and Sullivan productions were successful such as *Pirates of Penzance* and *The Mikado*, *H.M.S. Pinafore* was not only the first big success of Gilbert and Sullivan, but it also allowed their work to be seen on a global scale. *H.M.S. Pinafore* was the first Gilbert and Sullivan work to be produced in the United States of America. One might think that it would premiere in New York City, but it was Boston, Massachusetts where it would make its American debut in 1878 C.E. (Preston 24). After making debuts in San Francisco, CA and Philadelphia, PA, the production made its way to New York City in 1879 C.E. and when it got there almost every major theatre was producing *H.M.S. Pinafore*. With the huge success of the *H.M.S. Pinafore* in America, one might think that Gilbert and Sullivan would be making a profit from this. However due to some technicalities in the copyright laws at the time, the show was being produced without the permission of Gilbert and Sullivan (Bordman 25), and the American theatres were keeping the profits. Regardless of the copyright issue, this would introduce Americans to Operettas, and this would lead the way to musical theatre as we know it today.

One of the elements that make *H.M.S. Pinafore* or any Gilbert and Sullivan production unique, is the music and vocals of the shows. One of the unique musical
moments in *H.M.S. Pinafore* is the use of the patter. The *Oxford Dictionary of Music* defines the patter-song as a comic song, which is a rapid iteration of words, with the music merely being lightly supportive. This style dates to the fifteenth century and is used to repeat the Paternoster or other prayer in a rapid, mechanical, or indistinct fashion or to mumble or mutter one’s prayers’ (Fiss 102). Since prayers were often chanted or sung, the patter is referred to rapidly delivered songs from the outset. With this meaning, patter is the song sped up to a state at which words and song degenerate into noise. These moments would have one person singing a verse or two, then have it repeated by a chorus, so it has a basic call and response music element in it as well.

The patter-song is a musical element that can be heard in many Gilbert and Sullivan productions. The most famous patter-song comes from *Ruddigore* with “The Matter Patter”, which includes the famous line “My eyes are fully open to my awful situation” (Fiss 104). In *H.M.S. Pinafore*, this is mainly used in Sir Joseph’s first song where he brags about how he became in command of the British Royal Navy. During this song Sir Joseph reveals the lunatic logic to his views when he sings the following “Stick close to your desks, and never go to seas, and you may all be Rulers of the Queen’s Navee”. If this part was sung slowly like a ballad, then the audience might instantly hear of Sir Joseph’s unusual rise to the top, but because it is sung in a fast pace manner, and with the call and response method with the chorus, it helps blend the lyrics into the patter method. This is also used in a similar fashion in *Pirates of Penzance*, which goes one step further by picking up the tempo and also admitting his unusual qualifications (Bordman 19). The patter-song would be one of the most impactful musical elements of *H.M.S.*
*Pinafore* as it would be used in other productions and be a useful musical element for any comedic moment.

Another element in the music of *H.M.S. Pinafore* is the use of characterization through music. Establishing an overall characterization through music is just as important as creating the characteristics of groups and individuals. A composer sets the tone, in which mood and atmosphere persuade the listener that the music belongs to one specific work. This exemplifies a part of Sullivan’s musical style. It is the local color that is the heart of any composer (Yates 137), especially Sullivan. Sullivan would create a prevailing tone which would be the base and heart of any production, and especially for *H.M.S. Pinafore*. *H.M.S. Pinafore’s* heart is the sea and is evident throughout the show. From the very first song “we sail the ocean blue” to the orchestration that is reminiscent of the British Royal Navy.

Sullivan would also achieve unity in his scores by binding together the musical tone of the work through the use of local colour. This is evident in *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Sullivan uses the traditional hornpipe. The *International Encyclopedia of Dance* defines the hornpipe as a dance that is unique to the British Isles. This dance can be characterized as belonging to the step-dance tradition, which emphasizes leg actions and beating, or sounding rhythms with the feet. The hornpipe has it ties with the Royal Navy in the mid-eighteenth century as sailors dance hornpipes from sunrise to dark (Pforsich 2005). Sullivan would use melodic fragments of the hornpipe in *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The examples shown below come from *The Cambridge Companion to Gilbert and Sullivan*. These
examples show how Sullivan incorporated a traditional hornpipe and how he used the melodic fragments in various moments of *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

Ex. B. Traditional hornpipe

![Traditional Hornpipe](image)

Ex. C. *H.M.S. Pinafore*, No. 4 Captain Corcoran’s song and Chorus

Ex. D. *H.M.S. Pinafore*, No. 9, Song and Chorus

![Song and Chorus](image)
While the work he did with Gilbert helped make it what it is, Sullivan’s brilliant music composition would help set the tone of all the operettas that the two created. Sullivan’s achievements showcases the lengths that he went to create music that would last through decades, to be enjoyed by everyone who heard it.

One of the biggest effects that *H.M.S. Pinafore* or any Gilbert and Sullivan production had was the impact it would make for years to come. Let’s call it the “Gilbert and Sullivan effect” At some point in our lives, we witness the works of Gilbert and Sullivan being appreciated and used in many ways. For example, many politicians have quoted songs from Gilbert and Sullivan. William Rehnquist the sixteenth Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was an admirer of Gilbert and Sullivan and modeled his judicial robe after *Iolanthe*. He added four gold stripes to his robes after seeing the Lord Chancellor character use it in that production (Bradley 10). The Gilbert and Sullivan effect would be seen mostly in the entertainment industry.

One of the most famous episodes of the hit TV show *The Simpsons* titled “Cape Feare” featured the character Sideshow Bob, voiced by Kelsey Grammar, singing the entire score of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The children’s show *Animaniacs* had an entire episode called “H.M.S. Yakko”, dedicated to singing songs from *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *Pirates of*
Penzance. Seth McFarlane sings different songs of Gilbert and Sullivan in his show *Family Guy*, during various cutaway moments the audience see either Stewie or Peter singing something that comes from the Gilbert and Sullivan cannon.

The Gilbert and Sullivan effect is also a huge part of musical theatre today. In the musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, the song “The Speed Test” uses elements of the patter-song “My Eyes Are Fully Open”. Even the smash musical *Hamilton* has been influenced by Gilbert and Sullivan as Lin-Manuel Miranda used that show to help pay tribute to his high school days when he performed Gilbert and Sullivan shows (Miranda and McCarter 61). This all contributes to the long-lasting impact that the two had.

Without Gilbert and Sullivan, who knows what the entertainment industry would be? As John Reed, one of the most famous singers to portray many roles in Gilbert and Sullivan said, “Gilbert and Sullivan as we have seen, will live on” (Reed 126). It is likely that no matter what the hit show is on Broadway or on TV, Gilbert and Sullivan will always have an influence. Musical theatre wouldn’t be what it is today without them.
CHAPTER III

JOURNAL

March 15th, 2021

This afternoon, I had a talk with my advisor George E. Grubb. It was time to officially decide what my thesis will be for my final year of graduate school. The two shows that I was considering for my thesis were *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *Good for Otto*. Ever since my first year here in Mankato, Grubb and I talked about having a musical be my thesis, since I have a huge passion for sound designing musicals. After doing some self-reflection and having a discussion with Grubb, we decided that *H.M.S. Pinafore* would be my thesis next year! I have never done *H.M.S. Pinafore* nor any Gilbert & Sullivan production in my career as a sound designer. This will be a new experience for me, since sound designing a Gilbert & Sullivan show is much different than a modern musical like *Hair* or *Mamma Mia*, the two musicals I sound designed this past year. But overall, I couldn’t be more excited to have a musical as my thesis!

April 10th, 2021

Today I was driving to Minneapolis, Minnesota to meet a friend for lunch. Since the drive from Mankato to Minneapolis is just little bit over an hour and a half, I figured it would be a perfect time to listen to *H.M.S Pinafore* for the first time. During this past week during technical rehearsals for *Mamma Mia!* I’ve been talking to the director, Nicholas Wayne about what version of *H.M.S Pinafore* I should take a listen to, and he recommended the 1959 D’Oyly Carte Opera Company production. This is
something I usually do when I start the process of sound designing a musical, especially since I am not familiar with this show. It helps me get mentally prepared for what lies ahead and things I need to start thinking about. My overall first impression of the show is that it’s very male heavy in terms of the vocals. And there are some very low bass singing moments as well. I am also slowly starting to think about what may be the best approach in terms of the use of microphones and how to approach the overall mix of the show. I know I still have some time to think about this, but as I approach the end of the semester, I will need to start thinking about this in the coming months.

April 15th, 2021

Today we had our first production meeting for H.M.S. Pinafore, held on Zoom. We’ve been doing production meetings this way all year long due to the social distancing restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, so this wasn’t a new thing for me. Everyone was in attendance except for Heather Hamilton who is the assistant director for this production. Wayne is directing H.M.S. Pinafore, and right away he started off the meeting with his excitement for the show, as he is a great admirer of Gilbert and Sullivan. As a sound designer, I just love when a director is excited for a show, and with this being Wayne’s first production as a director, it’s a fresh voice in the room, and it just makes me more excited to be a part of this show and to have this as my thesis.

Wayne discussed his concept for H.M.S. Pinafore and what he has in mind for the show. He sees this show as very traditional operetta that Gilbert & Sullivan are known for. He kept on saying that “it is what it is”. So, it would be set somewhere between the
1840s-1860s on a British naval ship. He also wants to bring back the pit orchestra for this show, which hasn’t been done because during the past year musicals here were done with tracks due to COVID-19 protocols and lost funding from the pandemic. If the pit orchestra were to make a comeback, it will take this production to the next level because *H.M.S. Pinafore* relies heavily on the score.

April 22nd, 2021

The second production meeting for *H.M.S. Pinafore* is in the books! This meeting, we started to get more into details about the design concepts and get a more concrete idea how this production is going to unfold. Wayne started off the meeting by giving the production team an update on the potential of having a pit orchestra. He informed us that it looks very likely to make its return with *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and I loved hearing this! It’s been a few years since I designed a musical that had a live orchestra, and I haven’t had the chance to do it at all here in Mankato. I really hope that I get that opportunity for this production. Another thing we talked about was the cast size for the show. He mentioned that, ideally, he would love to have a cast size of around twenty-six.

May 25th, 2021

Today was a great day to talk about Gilbert and Sullivan! It just so happens to be the anniversary of *H.M.S Pinafore’s* debut in 1878! Throughout the day I had conversations with a professional sound designer and a professional composer.
The first meeting I had today was with Brad Ward via Zoom. Ward is a professional sound designer whose credits include Associate Sound Designer for *Choir Boy* on Broadway. I first met Brad a few years ago through United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT), and we’ve been in touch throughout the years. He gave me some great advice when I sound designed *Hair* last year. I have really enjoyed the relationship over the past few years and I have asked him to be on my thesis committee for this show. He will be coming to Mankato to see the show! After we talked about the thesis logistics, we got to talk about *H.M.S. Pinafore*. His biggest advice for me on how to handle this show was to make sure nothing sticks out, everything sounds natural, and nothing takes you out of the play. This was a great conversation on how to approach this show from a sound design point of view.

The second conversation I had today was with Michael Roth, a professional composer who has done work for theatre and film, notably working with Randy Newman and serving as the music director for the animated Disney film *The Princess and the Frog*. I know Roth from the Theatrical Sound Designers and Composer Association (TSDCA). We’ve been talking over the past year and when I told him I was sound designing *H.M.S Pinafore*, he offered to have a conversation, which I couldn’t refuse. I gave him a call and we spent a good few hours not only talking about the show, but Gilbert and Sullivan in general, which was much needed as I am still slowly learning more about them and he had great insights. During our conversation, Roth talked about how the satirical aspect of any Gilbert and Sullivan show was basically like a late-night talk show or even the hit television show *Saturday Night Live*. One piece of advice Roth
gave me during our talk is that anyone who does this show should have an open mind, a sense of humor and musical integrity. After our conversation was over, I was thinking about my design concept, and it came to me. The sound design for *H.M.S. Pinafore* should reflect the satire that is throughout the show. This will give me a better idea how to move forward with this design!

June 22, 2021

This evening after getting done with my workday, I had a conversation on the phone with Abe Jacob, who is known as the godfather of theatrical sound design. I did a lot of research on him last year when I sound designed *Hair*. His work on *Hair* launched theatrical sound design and he has been a key voice in getting sound design union representation and a Tony Awards category. I got his email address from TSDCA and reached out to him a few weeks ago to see if he would be willing to sit down and talk about *H.M.S. Pinafore*. This was a much-needed conversation from one of the best sound designers of all time. One of the main struggles I’ve been dealing with for this show is how to make this design sound amazing. With the past musicals I’ve designed in my career such as *Hair, Mamma Mia* (three times!), *La Cage aux Folles*, and so many other contemporary musicals, there were opportunities to utilize technology to get a great sounding musical, but with *H.M.S. Pinafore* being an operetta, I wasn’t sure how to approach it from a practical standpoint.

During my conversation with Jacob, his first piece of advice was to make sure I have a great relationship with the director and music director, which won’t be an issue
since I’ve worked closely with Wayne over this past year and have a good relationship with him. Jacob went on to say that this show doesn’t need “all the bells and whistles” to pull off a great sounding show. He suggested perhaps only putting microphones on the 10 named characters, and for the ensemble sound use foot microphones, with a roll off of 200Hz, which is mainly taking away a lot of the unnecessary low end. This would really help set the blueprint to go forward with my sound design. One of the last questions that I asked Jacob was should a sound designer do at least one Gilbert and Sullivan show during their careers? His response was “Absolutely! It gives a sound designer the chance to go back to basics, and the roots of theatrical sound design” After having this conversation with Jacob, I now have a much better plan moving forward and can’t wait to put it in action!

July 14, 2021

Today, we had a production meeting for *H.M.S. Pinafore* via Zoom. This was at the request of Wayne, to take a few moments to touch base and to make sure we are on the same page before returning to campus next month.

When it came to sound, I didn’t have much to update on my end, but Wayne suggested that I create a preshow soundscape of the sea, to help the audience get in the environment of the show. He also updated me on the orchestra for the show. He expects at least a six-person orchestra which would include percussion, synthesizer, bass, piano, and two reeds. While we were on this topic, I asked him about the possibility of doing a sitzprobe for this show.
A sitzprobe is basically a special rehearsal with the cast and the orchestra where the show is sung with the orchestra for the very first time. This is commonly done in a lot of professional theatres, and before coming to Mankato, all the musicals I designed back in California had a sitzprobe. I always find this very useful for the sound designer, because this gives me an idea how everything will sound before adding the microphones during technical rehearsals. Wayne and I have talked in the past about how important this is and how not only we, but the entire cast could benefit from it.

When I asked this question today during the meeting, Wayne wasn’t sure it will happen because of the time frame of the schedule. I respect that decision, but I feel like it’s an important process that is easily overlooked, and with this being my first musical with an orchestra in almost three years, I just hate the idea I could be going in blind on this. Wayne hasn’t said no yet, so I can only hope we can make it happen.

August 17, 2021

This was a special day for us. After a year of Zoom production meetings, we had our very first “in person” production meeting today! I honestly missed the in-person meetings. This was also the last meeting before we start classes next week.

This meeting was another check in to make sure we are still on track with everything. I finally figured out a rough idea for how I was going to use microphones for this show, after thinking about the past conversation I had with Jacob. I’ve decided to go with the bare essentials for the show. Ten wireless microphones for the main actors and three or four-foot microphones for the ensemble. I feel like with the type of show H.M.S.
*Pinafore* is, that this was the best direction. Wayne thought it was good plan and I told Grubb that we will talk about it later since he is my advisor and haven’t really had the chance to sit down with him yet and get his thoughts. Towards the end of the meeting, we had to take a moment to talk about the current COVID-19 situation. With the delta variant and the unvaccinated, the cases were going up and the mask restrictions have come back to campus. We were waiting for word on what we can do on stage with people who are vaccinated. I really hope we don’t have to do the show in masks because they do bring some challenges for microphones and after last year, I am ready to move on.

August 20, 2021

As classes are schedule to begin Monday, today was the graduate students first day back. I finally had the opportunity to sit down with Grubb to talk about *H.M.S.* *Pinafore* and to prepare for this upcoming school year. I had a few things about the show I wanted to go over with him, and this was much needed. I went over the plan about basically using just the essentials for my sound design, and he agreed that would serve the vocal sound that Gilbert and Sullivan is known for.

One of the other things we talked about was who was going to be my Audio 1, or “A1”, for this show. He told me that undergraduate student Finley Alexander will be the A1. I’ve worked with her in previous shows in other roles, and this will be her first show as an A1. This is a great opportunity for the both of us, since the past A1’s I’ve worked with all had experience, so in a way this gives me a clean slate to really work on my teaching skills and help someone be comfortable with mixing.
August 25, 2021

Tonight, was the second night of rehearsals for *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and I had the opportunity to speak with the cast about my design concept. This was important to me to come in and speak with the cast. One of the main reasons why I do this is to help the cast to understand my intent. Plus, I feel like it gives another level of excitement to the cast as well. Wayne introduced me and I was welcomed with applause and cheers from the cast. I first mentioned that this show is going be special for me, because I have never done a Gilbert and Sullivan show during my sound design career, and this is serving as my thesis production. I then went on to talk about how for past musicals I would go big, and use a lot of the bells and whistles, but this will be the exact opposite of that. After I was done talking to the cast, I once again got applause and cheers and I can feel the excitement of the cast! It was also really nice that Wayne took the time after I was done to really be supportive of my plan and have faith in me.

August 30, 2021

Another Monday here at school and another production meeting in the books. Today I walked away more frustrated and confused than previous meetings.

When it came to my turn, I first updated the team that I plan to spend this week pulling sound effects for the show and by next week I should start loading in my show and getting microphones ready. I also took a moment to talk about the schedule. The schedule showed that Wayne will be rehearsing with the orchestra during my scheduled
sound technical rehearsals and the sitzprobe looks like it won’t happen. Since I cannot step away from one of my techs, I get no opportunity to listen to the orchestra.

During my career as a sound designer, I have never really encountered a situation like this. When I asked Grubb later in the day to see if that is usually the situation here, he said it is, which is surprising. Not having a sitzprobe or an opportunity to hear the orchestra ahead of time makes it hard for me to be as prepared as I would like to be. Also, Wayne won’t be in those tech rehearsals, so I really won’t have the opportunity to get his true and honest feedback. It will be very interesting to see how this goes for me.

September 2, 2021

The set for *H.M.S. Pinafore* is coming together. I am starting to plan out everything before I load in my show next week. I had a talk with Grubb to go over speaker and microphone placement. With my plan to use the four boundary microphones we have in stock, I wanted to make sure with Grubb that the placement was still good and get an idea of how to do the cable run for them. One particular area that needed to be addressed was the boundary microphone that is going to be placed on the top deck. I asked him what was the best advice to run the XLR cable for that one, and he suggested that I drill a small hole in the deck and run the cable under the deck and into the back wall. We also discussed when the orchestra pit will be going down, since that affects my install of the boundary microphones on the downstage edge. We decided to lower it the Monday before my first sound tech, which gives me a full day to install and make sure they work. With this in mind, I can plan out how load-in will go for this show.
September 9, 2021

Tonight, I got the opportunity to see a run-through of the show. This is my only chance before sound tech to get an idea if my plan for the show will work. This was also the first time that the cast was running through the show non-stop so there were a few rough moments. When Wayne announced I was watching the run, I received a warm welcome from that cast, which was nice to get. During the run-through there were some great moments like when Captain Corcoran enters for the first time, the whole song really sounded amazing. When the entire company was in sync, the overall sound was good. One of the main concerns that I had was that the cast weren’t singing out front. I talked to Wayne, and he’ll tell them to face out more, because the boundary microphones work best when the sound is straight at them. All the pieces are coming together, and only a few more days until we add microphones!

September 13, 2021

Day before first sound tech! And it was a busy one for sure! It all started at 8 a.m. with our last production meeting, this was our last opportunity to make sure the entire production team was on the same page before we go into technical and dress rehearsals this week. The things that we discussed were the call and GO times for this week, department updates, and I asked Wayne if actors need to be masked when they are not on stage. It sounded like they need to be masked, which effects my choice in microphone.

Later that morning I had my weekly check in meeting with Grubb. I talked to him about the masks and microphones. I told him I was thinking about switching from boom
microphones to lavalier, because I was worried that the masks might cause damage to the microphone itself and affect the position as well. So, I made the decision to change the microphones from the booms to the lavaliers.

September 14, 2021

First sound tech has arrived! This will be a long day of putting final touches on sound effects, placing final speakers and microphones, and it will lead up to the first sound rehearsal! The day started around 12:30pm when I went to the sound booth to transfer over the QLab file from my personal computer to the computer we use for playback. One of the benefits of having my QLab file done ahead of time is that all I had to do was get it patched, set up the MIDI triggering, and just do a quick level check and within 20 minutes, sound effects were ready! That would be the easiest part of the day, but it went smoothly for the rest of the afternoon. I was fortunate to have some help today in the sound department. It made a lot of the final set up go much more smoothly.

One of the first things that we did this afternoon was set the three boundary microphones on the edge of the stage. This was a similar process to how the one on the upper deck was placed, then we placed the backstage microphone and the last few speakers that needed to be placed backstage. We then got everything checked and patched on the audio program, Dante, which allows me to program and patch my microphones and speakers in one program.

The rehearsal went smoothly despite some small issues. With everything pretty much prepared and ready to go, things went smoothly for the sound crew. Alexander did
a great job mixing the show for the very first time, and was well prepared to go into tech. It was also great to have Grubb there tonight to be an extra set of hands for me, I asked him to help my Audio 2 (A2), Finnola Coughlin with mic check and to demonstrate basic trouble shooting. The A2 is responsible for making sure the microphones are properly on the actor, and to troubleshoot any problems during the show. I am feeling good about the show.

September 15, 2021

Day two of sound tech for the show! I spent the afternoon working on notes from the previous night, setting the gain structure on the boundary microphones, doing some QLab notes and adding a vocal monitor down in the pit for Wayne. I also fixed some programming on the board and fixed a microphone. Before the call time, I sat down with Alexander to give her some general notes as well. Then it was time to have the second run with microphones.

Tonight, was mainly met with frustration, but had some great and hilarious moments. Let first start off with the good moments. The vocals from the cast were much better than the previous night, especially for the big ensemble numbers, and “Englishmen” sounded better after redoing the gain structure on the boundary microphones. The sound effects were also a huge improvement from last night as well. I brought up the volume on Ralph’s falling off the ship moment, and it got a good laugh from the people watching in the house. One of the reasons why I am enjoying working on this show is that there are always moments that make me laugh. Even when Jace Gray/Sir
Joseph’s transmitter fell out of the pack and he was able to catch it. Normally those moments would give me a panic attack, but because it was during a moment where comedic moments were happening, I couldn’t help myself but to laugh. When that did happen, I called a hold to fix the issue and did a quick test to make sure nothing got damaged and moved on. It helped me get through the frustrating moments of tonight’s run.

The reason why I left tonight’s rehearsal frustrated is that throughout the night, I was having huge radio frequency (RF) issues with the ULXDs. During the run, I always have Shure Wireless Workbench 6 running on my laptop. This allows me to monitor the microphones and when an issue comes up, this allows me to troubleshoot the problem. There were several microphones that kept having RF issues, on stage the sound kept cutting out, and on Workbench every time it would lose connection a red line would appear. I talked about the issue with Grubb, we think it could be several issues, and decided that I would take a closer look.

Despite the frustrations, I am pleased with the progress made tonight. With the simple nature of the show, I really don’t have to do much EQ on the microphones like I would do on a rock musical and with not a lot of sound cues, I am starting to enjoy the show much sooner than I would usually in the process. This is always a good sign for me that I am making progress with the show. When I start enjoying the show it’s a good sign that I will be proud of the work I’ve done.
September 16, 2021

Today, I entered the third day of tech. I started excited and ready to go but left more frustrated than the night before. During the day, I spent a good hour or two working on the RF issues I’ve been having these past few days. I basically did an entire RF reset by doing a rescan of the frequencies and assigning brand new ones to the transmitter. I brought them on stage to see if the issue was resolved and looking at Workbench it didn’t appear the issue was coming back. I didn’t see any RF dropout, so I felt much better about it going into tonight’s tech, but it would only go downhill from there.

In the captain’s first song his microphone was still having RF drop out and seemed worse than last night. I was monitoring everything on Workbench and looking at everyone’s RF signal, and in general everyone’s RF was low. I pulled up a photo from Mamma Mia last season and looked at the RF back then and it was much stronger. And if I put the transmitter near the booth, the RF signal is stronger. So now I know that it’s an antenna issue on the receiver end. At intermission, I tried doing a quick fix by putting the Captain on a different receiver, and it made it worse. I’m getting more and more frustrated now because this has been an issue going throughout the whole week and I feel like everything I’ve done isn’t working. I have a few ideas I’ll try to do tomorrow to fix before I resort to a dramatic change of the microphones. But at the end of the day, this is all part of the learning process, and this will only make me a better designer going forward.
September 17, 2021

Today was a huge success for sound! After the stress of the RF issue this past week, I found the problem, fixed it, and tonight was much smoother! After my morning class, I went into the sound booth to look at a few things to see what I can do to solve the problem and not have to resort to something drastic. The first thing I looked at was the antenna distributor and how it’s hooked up. To give some context, the reason why we use the antenna distributor is allows the use of one set of antennae for multiple receivers and the powered antennae also get better signal at a distance. Based on the data I collected last night, I know it’s some sort of antenna issue. Looking at the back of the rack in the booth I noticed the antenna distributor output was going to the antenna input in the first receiver, which I had turned off because it was having network issues. After looking at it, I moved the cable to the second receiver, turned on all the transmitters and placed them onstage. I started to see a difference right away. The overall RF signal was much stronger, and then I turned off one of the receivers and saw the RF signal drop to where it has been this week. It seems I found the cause of the issue. But I didn’t want to end there, I wanted to do another test to confirm the issue. So later that afternoon I had two actors from the show, Hunter Conrad and Ray Kloth come in to put on the mics and sing just to make sure all the issues were fixed. After doing that test, I’m confident the issue has been fixed! I can go into tech tonight feeling much better!
September 19, 2021

Tonight’s rehearsal is the first night with the orchestra. I got to the theatre a little early to make sure everything was patched correctly and just make sure we’re ready to go. All the cabling was prepared ahead of time and labeled so I knew the orchestra load-in would be easy. One thing I forgot to check was the console in the booth. Aside from one small patching error there, everything was working, and I was ready to add in the orchestra. Tonight, was great too because I had Grubb back in the space being a second pair of ears for me, which I can always use.

When the orchestra was warming up, I was able to get a good first listen to their mix. I was really surprised how much sound the orchestra has alone, I honestly didn’t feel like the orchestra needed much on my end. Throughout the show, I just made minimal adjustments, but I was really happy with how the orchestra sounded tonight.

In terms of the actors, tonight I was able to focus more on the fine EQ details. Having Grubb back really helped me with those fine-tuning details. For example, during Jace Grey’s first song as Sir Joseph, Grubb suggested to bring up the high-mids, around 1000khz to help make his diction clearer. Just bringing it up 1.5dB was an instant fix and helped us understand him a bit more. Overall tonight’s run was a huge success, and everyone was pleased with the work I’ve done. With just a few more runs, I can start to really enjoy this show.
September 20, 2021

One step closer to opening of this show! With tonight being second dress rehearsal and a step closer to opening, I started slowly stepping away from the show and handing off the show to Alexander. Tonight, I didn’t show up until close to sound check. Usually this goes pretty well, but tonight was stressful, not because of technical issues, but because of actors arriving late. Sound check takes place at 6:45pm, and usually takes only a few minutes to complete because of the small number of microphones used in this show. We didn’t complete sound check until 7:05pm tonight, because the actors were taking longer than usual. Honerman said she would address this issue with the actors, because if we were in show conditions, the house opening would be delayed and it’s also not fair for my sound crew to be waiting this long.

Despite the frustrations of this, tonight went pretty well. After a discussion with Wayne last night, I added three wireless microphones to some of the male ensemble members to help bring out some of the parts they sing as sometimes the balance with the men isn’t constant. I also got the chance to walk around the space which allowed me to hear how my sound design is being heard at different parts of the house. I was pretty happy with how even the sound was. With no notes from Wayne or Hamilton I’m feeling pretty good about it all.

September 21, 2021

Tonight, was the fourth dress rehearsal and the last one before we get an audience tomorrow for student preview. For me this is really my last chance to make sure
everything is sounding good. Tonight, I didn’t arrive to the Ted Paul until about 6:45pm, which is when sound check begins. Unfortunately, we had one small issue tonight that took up a lot of the run through to get fixed. The vocal monitor for the conductor didn’t have any sound coming out of it. We discovered that the issue was in the Dante patching and that specific channel wasn’t sending signal. I changed the patch and that fixed the issue. With that being the only big issue during the run tonight, everything went well. With once again no notes from either Wayne or Hamilton, the show is looking like it’s all together now.

September 22, 2021

Tonight was student preview for *H.M.S. Pinafore*. This is when we get our first taste of how the audience will react to the show.

For student preview, I didn’t arrive to the Ted Paul until the start of the run. With everything going smoothly these past few nights, I wanted to step away and let Alexander and the rest of the sound team do their preshow setup without me. I also sat in the very back so I can get a chance to hear the show from the back of the house. I also wasn’t sure if I would stay for the whole run tonight so I wanted to be in the back so I wouldn’t cause a distraction. I was amazed at how strong the sound was from the back, and it was one of the best nights I heard the show. The vocals were being picked up well by the boundary microphones and I was loving the intensity that I was hearing. It was also great to hear audience members laughing and enjoying the show and that helped me enjoy the run a little bit more.
Act One ran smoothly so I decided there was no need for me to stay for Act Two. After making sure Alexander was good to go, I left for home. Now, other than maintenance, the sound design for *H.M.S. Pinafore* is complete! As I reflect on this design and on the show, I couldn’t be happier to have been a part of it. All there is now to let my sound team do their jobs and I will slowly start switching gears into my next design. But I couldn’t be happier for everyone who helped make this sound design a success! I have now become an Englishman!
CHAPTER IV
POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

Minnesota State University, Mankato’s production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* had one preview performance and eight performances in September/October 2021. The sound design for this production was successful, and it was a great way for the designer to get introduced to the music of Gilbert and Sullivan and served as a great production for his thesis requirement. As previously mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, the sound designer had two primary goals for this production. The first goal was to support the director’s concept by utilizing sound effects and microphones to bring together a well-balanced musical. The second goal was to be an effective collaborator and leader for the sound team. Overall, the sound designer was able to achieve these goals and is proud of his work. Of course, the process was not without its fair share of issues while the designer was trying to achieve these goals. The goal of this chapter is not only to evaluate the designer’s work on *H.M.S. Pinafore* but to also reflect on his abilities as a sound designer as he comes to the end to his Master of Fine Arts Program.

The first goal that the sound designer wanted to accomplish for this production is supporting the director’s concept using the microphones and sound effects. Overall, this was a goal that the designer achieved and it helped make his design a success, but there are also some things the designer would like to take into consideration as he moves forward with his career. With the sound design being mainly focused on reflecting the satire that the show is known for, the designer went with a “back to basics” approach in
his design. This was done by using a total of twelve Shure ULX-D wireless microphones, one for each of the named characters plus a few of the men to help with the balance. Four Sennheiser E-912 boundary microphones were used, three placed on the edge of the stage evenly spread out, and one on the top deck of the set. A Neumann KM 183 omni-directional microphone was used for backstage vocals. These allowed the designer to help capture the choral operetta sound without the use of too many microphones. For the most part, the boundary microphones were able to pick up many great vocal moments of the show. The most notable moments that the boundary microphones worked great for were songs like “Captain of the Pinafore”, “Englishman”, and the finale of Act Two.

However, the designer would have loved to have five boundary microphones so there would had been two on the upper deck of the ship to help pick up the sound from there a little better. With just one boundary microphone on the upper deck, there were moments where the difference in sound quality between the three downstage and the one on the upper deck was noticeable. For example, the finale of Act One, where all the female characters were on the stage floor and the sailors were on the upper deck. This was a moment the designer struggled with during rehearsals, and this is what lead to adding additional wireless microphones to sailors to help bring them out in that moment. Another issue the boundary microphone presented was sound of footsteps, especially during the moments when the sailors were dancing. The sound designer tried to minimize the issue with equalization of the microphones, cutting below 500 kHz, and this helped a little bit, but there were still moments that floor noise was noticeable.
When the pit orchestra was added, the designer was surprised by how much the sound from the pit carried in the Ted Paul Theatre. Combined with the vocal reinforcement, the sound helped pull the focus towards the stage, and just like a traditional operetta, the sound designer was able to create a sound environment that helped showcase the work of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Another element that was important in achieving the first goal that the designer set for this production was the utilization of sound effects. This was a challenge for the designer; when he first read the script, he didn’t have any ideas for sound effects to start with. The ideas of what sound effects could be utilized would either come from researching past productions of *H.M.S. Pinafore* or during the process when he would sit in on run-throughs. One of the sound effects that was successful for this show was towards the end of Act One when Josephine rejects Ralph’s love for her, and he wants to commit suicide. The script calls for him putting a pistol to his head. But the director changed it to Ralph jumping off the ship, and when Josephine tells Ralph that she does indeed love him, Ralph loses his balance and falls off the ship. To help showcase Ralph falling into the water while also supporting the comedic style of Gilbert and Sullivan, the designer recorded the actor screaming “ahh” like he was falling off the boat. Through the playback software QLab, the designer was able to add reverb and delay effects to sound like the fall was taking longer than it should have. This was one of the highlights of the show that got big laughs from the audience. The cast also did a great job reacting to the moment.
With the success of some of the sound effects, there were a few that the sound designer really didn’t agree worked best for the show. For instance, towards the end of Act One when Dick Deadeye is cast off from everyone for warning them about Josephine and Ralph’s plan to get married. He exits through the trap door, and once under, there is a bucket of fish dumped on him, followed by the bucket being dropped on him. This effect was pulled off by creating the sound of the fish being poured using a combination of mud and someone punching raw meat. A speaker was placed below the trap door to control the location of the sound. While the director and assistant director liked the sound effect, it never really worked for the sound designer. During the technical rehearsals, this particular sound cue was always overpowered by either the cast reacting on stage, or the orchestra would start when the cue happens. The director worked with the orchestra to make sure the music would hold at that moment, but it never really satisfied the designer. At one point he asked the director if that cue could be cut, but the director insisted on keeping it because it was something he wanted in the show. This is something all designers in their careers are faced with; they want everything to be perfect and, for this sound designer, it was hard to really enjoy this cue. Despite this, the sound effects were a success and with the help of the use of the microphones, the sound designer was able to achieve the first goal that he set for the show.

The second goal that the designer wanted to achieve with this production was to be an effective collaborator and leader. The designer felt like this goal was a huge success. When it came to being an effective collaborator, the designer was always bringing up ideas to the director and working closely with the director to work out any
sound issues or questions that might have come up throughout the process. There were many moments when the designer would be in Wayne’s office discussing potential ideas that could be used in the show. The designer also was very active in production meetings and communicating with fellow members of the production team. When the designer needed to plan out where to place the boundary microphones and where to run the XLR cables for them, the designer consulted with the technical director. With the cables going through the set, the sound designer had to make sure it was okay with Grubb to drill holes to be able to run and hide the XLR cables. The sound designer also consulted with lighting designer Steve Smith to make sure his equipment wasn’t in the way of the lighting equipment and consulted with Smith and Grubb on when the orchestra pit would be lowered so he could install the boundary microphones on the stage. The effective communication on the sound designer’s part was very helpful in making sure sound was ready to go for the first sound technical rehearsal. This helped the sound design come together smoothly for this show.

The second part of this goal was being a leader for the sound team. The designer had the opportunity to have an Audio 1 (A1) and an Audio 2 (A2) as part of his sound team for this production. Finley Alexander served as the A1 and Finnola Coughlin as the A2. The designer had worked with Alexander as an A2 on a previous show, but this was her first time as an A1 and Coughlin was brand new to the department so this was her first time being an A2. Having a sound team that was new to their jobs was a perfect opportunity to not only be an effective leader but to also teach a few things about sound. For previous musicals that the sound designer worked on here, he had an A1 who had
mixed shows already, and while some mixers were open and accepting of his advice, there were some who were more challenging. So having the opportunity to work with Alexander as the A1 was a great opportunity to teach someone how to mix a show, and *H.M.S. Pinafore* was a great show for someone new to mixing to work on the basic skills. Throughout the process the designer and the A1 worked closely with one another to make sure that Alexander was feeling confident and comfortable with mixing the show. This included giving her the script well in advance, giving her an in-depth training on the Yamaha CL-5 sound console, and having her attend run throughs before the start of tech. This paid off as Alexander did a great job mixing the show. The designer feels like he was an effective leader for this production which helped make the show a success and achieved his second goal for this production.

The designer felt this show was a success. He was able to use the skills he learned on past productions to help get this sounding good and he maintained his professionalism during the stressful moments. This really helped solve issues that were causing headaches during the process. One of the biggest issues that the designer dealt with during the process was the RF issue with the wireless microphones. For a few nights, he tried many different options to resolve the issues but never lost his cool. This also helped the designer build more confidence in his abilities. One skill that the designer needs to improve more is his fine listening skills and his ability to properly EQ microphones. The designer often leaned on his advisor for help in this, but sometimes this was too much. While it's always great to get a second opinion, the designer needs to work more on his confidence in this skill so he doesn’t have to second guess himself as much.
When this process first began, the designer wasn’t really sure how this show was going to turn out. With the nature of an operetta like *H.M.S. Pinafore*, the sound designer had to think outside the box to come up with a design to be proud of for a thesis show. The enthusiasm of the director and the great advice he got from professional sound designers helped the designer feel that if he could change his thesis project to a different show, the answer would be no. He would do this show as a thesis again if given the chance. As the designer’s Master of Fine Arts program ends and he begins his transition into the professional sound design career, this show and the skills he learned during the past three years will help to really focus on the skills that are needed to become a good sound designer. While there is still much to learn and improve upon, the designer couldn’t have asked for a better production for his final MFA project.
CHAPTER V

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

Before his acceptance to Minnesota State University, Mankato, Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program, Kyle Jensen received his undergraduate degree, a Bachelor of Art in Theatre Arts at California State University, Fresno (Fresno State). Jensen spent a lot of his educational career in Fresno, as this was his hometown and where his passion for theatre and sound design grew. Before attending Fresno State, Jensen attended Roosevelt School of the Arts (RSA), a high school focused on the performing arts. A number of its students have gone on to professional careers in the arts, with its most notable alumnus being Audra McDonald, a Broadway actress who has won multiple Tony Awards. During Jensen’s time at RSA, he started to discover technical theatre and basic audio knowledge. By taking stagecraft classes, running microphones for shows, and setting up sound systems for when he played saxophone with the Latin jazz ensemble, he gained an interest in sound design that helped set his path for his undergraduate education.

During his first few years at Fresno State, Jensen was involved in both the theatre department and music department before shifting his focus entirely to theatre. He was a member of the Fresno State Bulldog Marching Band and the Fresno State Basketball Band, where he got the opportunity to play at football and basketball games, which included playing at Women’s NCAA Basketball Tournament and the Las Vegas Bowl in 2013. In the fall of 2012, Jensen was also initiated into Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, the oldest music fraternity in America. His time active in music from high school to his early days
of college really helped shape how he would approach sound design and train his ear to hear the fine details that are required of a sound designer. This would also help him land a part time job as an audio technician for the Performing Arts Center at Clovis North High School in Fresno, CA, which is home to the Paul Shaghoian Concert Hall. There he would work audio for many different types of events.

While Jensen spent a lot of time in the music department at Fresno State, his home there would be at the Fresno State Theatre Department. His first show he took part in was as the Assistant Sound Designer and board operator for *The Elephant Man*. His sound design teacher at the time, Marc Garcia, gave him his first mainstage production his second semester of his freshman year designing *Frozen* by Bryony Lavery. (Not to be confused with Disney’s *Frozen.*) His advisor required him to do his first sound design by using CD and not computer so he could really understand the true basics of creating sound cues.

His passion for sound design would only continue to grow from there. During his second year his permanent sound design advisor, Liz Waldman, joined Fresno State and was with him for the remainder of the time there. Over the next several years, Jensen designed sound for six mainstage shows at Fresno State which included *Our Town, Race, Playboy of the Western World, Really Really, Blue Willow,* and *Tar Beach.* Several of his designs earned him a KCACTF Region 8 Meritorious Achievement in Sound Design Award. Each production gave him the opportunity to learn new skills and work with different directors. And whenever he wasn’t designing a show, he was working as a paid staff for the theatre department's lighting and sound shop. Jensen’s love for theatre in
general also gave him opportunities to work on productions outside of Fresno State including being a frequent stage manager and sound designer for Good Company Players. There he not only designed the foley but got to perform it for It’s A Wonderful Life! A Live Radio Play! Towards his final semester at Fresno State, Jensen was hired by StageWorks Fresno to sound design Casa Valentina and The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee. Working for StageWorks Fresno was extra special for him because he got to work closely with his lifelong mentor, Joel C. Abels, who he first met when Jensen was a child preforming on stage with Abels directing. This was really important to Jensen, because Abels has always been supportive of him throughout his life and as a sound designer. As a director, Abels knew how to push Jensen to be better as a designer. Jensen’s collaborations with Abels proved fruitful, as he was hired back to design more shows, including Urinetown, The Full Monty, Fun Home, Mothers and Sons, Mamma Mia and La Cage aux Folles.

Jensen graduated from Fresno State in the fall of 2016, and even before his final semester he was already hired by Celebrity Cruises to be an audio technician for one of their cruise liners. Immediately after his final semester of college, Jensen went to work traveling across the Caribbean. This gave him a chance to work audio on various events which included dances, rock concerts, outdoor venues, etc. This also gave him the opportunity to absorb how some people in audio do things differently than those from a theatrical background.

After doing a contract with Celebrity Cruises, Jensen was hired to be the auditorium manager at Roosevelt School of the Arts in Fresno, his old high school. This
was a huge opportunity and honor for him, because he was able to take over for one of his mentors from high school, got to work with his former teachers, and had the opportunity to start teaching basic lighting and sound design to high school students.

During his time as auditorium manager, Jensen was responsible for day-to-day operations and maintenance; overseeing every event that was taking place in the auditorium, which included band and choir concerts. He also served as technical director for all plays, musicals and dance concerts and oversaw any events that were rented from outside vendors, running a part time staff.

During his few years at Roosevelt School of the Arts, the overwhelming amount of work and the politics of a public-school system made Jensen slowly start to lose interest in sound design. It became more of a chore than a passion. This is when he decided it was time to look into the possibility of graduate school. Going to graduate school and earning his MFA was always a goal, but Jensen felt like if he didn’t do it now, the window would close. That year, Jensen decided to explore options, and also made the time to attend the annual USITT Conference in Louisville, Kentucky. Here he got the opportunity to work setting up the mainstage audio system, but also had the chance to present a sound design before the keynote address that year. This would also give him the opportunity to meet George Grubb, and when Jensen said he was a sound designer, Grubb’s response was “apply right now!” And a few short weeks later, Jensen officially accepted the offer to come to Mankato.

During his tenure at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Jensen has had the opportunity to participate in many main stage and studio productions. His first sound
design was Cloud 9 by Caryl Churchill and directed by Seth M. Honerman, which took place in the first few weeks of Jensen’s first semester as a graduate student. It served as his minor project, but mostly it was important to him to dive straight in. With the help of Honerman and Grubb, the overall design was a complete success and he used that show as a benchmark to see where he needed to grow as a designer. Also, during that first semester of graduate school, Jensen was given the opportunity to be the sound engineer for the Fall Dance Concert and got introduced to Dan Stark and Julie Kerr-Berry. This was an incredible experience for Jensen, because he got the opportunity to edit music for dance pieces, and even to work closely with Kerr-Berry to sound design one of her pieces Road Song.

For his next sound design, Jensen moved from the studio season to the mainstage season to sound design The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Simon Stephens, directed by Paul J. Hustoles. This play provided the designer one of his best experiences with sound design. This show forced Jensen into exploring a music genre he wasn’t very familiar with, Techno. This was really important to Hustoles as it helped represent the lead character’s experience of the world through his autism. This show forced Jensen to get really creative with the music, editing certain parts out of the Techno music to help capture the emotions of the show. This also helped Jensen become a better collaborator as a lot of his sound cues were happening with lights. This gave him an opportunity work closely with lighting designer Steve Smith. They worked long hours on weekends sharing the space so they both could get work done while also talking about certain moments and playing cues for each other to fix their respective parts. Attention to
detail was the key for this show, but it would be one of the most memorable plays he ever designed.

That second semester Jensen was in the process of co-sound designing *Mamma Mia* with Grubb and having guest director Adam Cates for this show. Unfortunately, *Mamma Mia* along with the remainder of the 2020 season were canceled as the COVID-19 Pandemic started to breakout throughout the country. COVID-19 was slowly progressing throughout the spring semester, and during spring break is when everything was shut down and Jensen had to pack up and head back to California to finish that year on Zoom as classes were online.

COVID-19 heavily affected the shows that Jensen designed his second year. Jensen’s major project was the musical *Hair* with David T. Loudermilk directing. Loudermilk was a third year MFA Directing candidate at the time, and also one of Jensen’s closest friends during his time in Mankato. Before rehearsals started for this production, there were a lot of nights of grilling outside his apartment and talking about how to pull off *Hair*. *Hair* was also the first live production at Minnesota State University, Mankato since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The production had to adhere to strict safety protocols and guidelines which included doing the production in masks.

This was new territory for Jensen, and it required a lot of trial and error. With the help of Grubb, he was able to produce a good sounding show and minimize the negative effect of the masks. Although the COVID-19 protocols were a challenge, *Hair* was one of the greatest musicals that Jensen was ever a part of. Jensen was able to create a great rock
musical sound and connect to the world of the play. Jensen created a lot of memorable sound effects that made a huge impact on the show. Jensen also got the opportunity to work closely with Nicholas Wayne, who was the music director. The two spent hours in the conference room editing every single track and sitting next to each other during the technical rehearsal process. That same semester, Jensen was asked by Kerr-Berry to record and edit video for her piece in the virtual dance concert, which was a brand-new skill to learn, but gave him another opportunity to work closely with the dance department once again. Towards the end of the fall semester, Jensen with the help of a few other graduate students, produced and sound designed *It’s a Wonderful Life! The Radio Play*, which was a passion project for him. It gave him the opportunity to record audio and do some post production work as well.

His next few designs came in the spring semester of his second year. He got the opportunity to fulfill his out of area requirement by creating the lighting design for *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* by Paula Vogel and directed by Sarah Belfrage Honerman. This gave Jensen the opportunity to brush up on his lighting design skills and gave him the opportunity to see the process of putting together a show from a different point of view. Then following that show, Jensen sound designed *Mamma Mia*, this time directed by Hustoles. This allowed him to fine tune his musical sound design abilities even more, and for the first time since his first semester here, Jensen got to sound engineer the Spring Dance Concert which finally made its return after being cancelled for the COVID-19 Pandemic.
While Jensen has become a better designer through the many productions he has worked on, his graduate school experience wouldn’t have made him a better student without the academic course work throughout his tenure at MSU, Mankato. One of the main requirements was taking design courses in each area. While he had taken design courses at Fresno State, this gave him the opportunity not only to review the skills he learned there, but also learn a few new things. His first semester he took Scenic Design I taught by John Paul, where he learned more about the importance of details in a scenic design and it also improved his drawing and drafting.

Over the course of his first two years Jensen would take Lighting Design I & II with Steve Smith. This was extremely helpful for Jensen since he was making lighting design his “out of area” project. He wanted to take the time to learn from Smith and to better prepare him to become a lighting designer. During the two classes, he got to learn more about color mixing for lighting, got a better knowledge of how to draft a light plot through Vectorworks and Lightwright, and to think about how to present moments through light. Jensen’s final design area was Costume Design with David McCarl. Here he got to learn how to approach the script from a costume design prospective and learn how to be a better sketch artist.

Along with the design courses, a huge part of his coursework was focused on becoming a better academic scholar and writer. One of the biggest help for this were the courses Theatre Research, Theatre Theory and Criticism, and Dramaturgy all with Heather Hamilton and Theatre History I with Matt Caron. Theatre Research was dedicated to writing four research papers throughout the semester about topics that
interested Jensen and served as a great way to dig deeper on topics and improve on finding primary and secondary sources. Theatre Theory and Criticism was similar but the writing focused on some sort of philosophy of art. Jensen focused on German Idealism and the work of German Philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Dramaturgy focused on the work a dramaturg does for a production and researching everything that has to do with the play. Theatre History I with Caron encouraged Jensen to explore the history of the technical theatre and he wrote a term paper on how scenic design took form during the Italian Renaissance.

Jensen also had the opportunity to learn more about the business side of theatre when he took Theatre Management with Hustoles. Theatre Management gave Jensen the opportunity to learn how a theatre company works. This included projects that focused on presenting a Broadway show as a Limited Partnership Agreement and how a show makes its money. This allowed him to have fun by creating Spaceballs: The Musical. Another project was creating a professional non-profit theatre company and putting together a season budget.

While all these classes helped shape Jensen as a successful graduate student, there were also numerous sound classes taught by George Grubb. Jensen had the opportunity to take Sound Design I and II, Advanced Sound Technology: Digital Sound, and an individual study in system design. Sound Design I and II gave Jensen the opportunity to review some of the basics of sound design and design more shows as projects, while also sharing his thoughts and experience with the undergraduate students who were just starting sound design for the very first time. Advanced Sound Technology explored
digital sound and Jensen got to learn more about digital sound transmission and storage and also to learn more about Dante. The individual study with Grubb focused on sound system design and designing sound systems for different venues. These sound classes really helped Jensen take his designs a step further.

On top of the design work and academic course load, Jensen was given an assistantship during his time at Minnesota State University, Mankato. In exchange for tuition waivers and stipend, he had to dedicate 20 hours a week to helping with the needs of the department. Jensen worked in the scene shop and sound shop. During his time working in the scene shop, Jensen help construct the set for all the mainstage and studio shows during the year, while also supervising any of the undergraduate students who were working in the shop. While in the scene shop, he was able to refresh his basic construction skills, while learning new skills such as welding. Most of his assistantship was dedicated to working as a sound assistant. This gave him the opportunity to help prepare all the sound designs for both main stage and studio seasons. This gave him the chance to learn more about speaker placement and acoustics, digital console programming, wireless microphone systems, Dante, cable repair, etc. Over time, Grubb delegated the leadership role of running the sound shop to Jensen, and overseeing projects helped improve the functioning of the sound area for the department. One of the biggest projects Jensen oversaw was updating the Andreas Theatre for digital sound. This would require Jensen running ethernet cable into different areas of the theatre, ordering the custom wall plates needed and terminating all the cable runs. This project took a few
years to complete, as shows took priority, and the COVID-19 shutdown paused that work as well.

On top of working in the two shops, Jensen was given the opportunity to teach during his tenure. Jensen would be Grubb’s teaching assistant (TA) for Dance Production: Sound which teaches basic skills and knowledge that hopefully will aid the dancer/choreographer in using sound themselves and also provide the necessary knowledge for effective communication with sound professionals. Jensen was also the TA for Sound Technology, which teaches the basic skills and knowledge required of any theatrical sound engineer and serves as a foundation for all sound related work in the theatre, and Sound Design I, which teaches the fundamentals of sound design. As a TA, Jensen had the opportunity to lead lectures on certain topics, grade projects and provide feedback, and improve his speaking skills when teaching. This all led to the opportunity to be the teacher of record for Dance Production: Sound and Sound Technology, classes he had been a TA for in the past. Teaching and running the sound shop helped prepare Jensen to take charge of the sound area for the department as Grubb was on sabbatical for his final semester. Jensen would get the opportunity in his final semester to start getting the mind set of being a faculty member instead of a student. Jensen had the full support of the entire faculty of the theatre and dance department in this part, as during his final year. He was awarded the Nadine B. Andreas Graduate Assistantship which covered his assistantship award for his final year. Jensen would be the first MFA design candidate to be awarded this honor.
One of Jensen’s proudest moments during his tenure was not only working closely with Grubb, but also working closely with Kerr-Berry, who took over as department chair his second year. The department was in the process of making changes to become more inclusive, which was led by Kerr-Berry. She asked Jensen to serve on a committee comprised of both graduate and undergraduate students to create Non-Equity Deputy (NED) positions and Committee X, which is a student committee to help create a safe space for students to bring up uncomfortable issues and to have more of a discussion about equity, diversity, and inclusion as a department. During this time Jensen worked closely with then graduate student David T. Loudermilk, and undergraduate students Ray Kloth and Maddie Stuart to create a proposed code of conduct for the department which led to some of these new ideas being added to the department policies and procedures.

Outside of school Jensen was heavily involved in the Theatrical Sound Designers & Composers Association (TSDCA), a national sound design organization that helps and support sound designers. While being a member of TSDCA, he gained some contacts in the sound design community which included professional sound designers working on Broadway and professional theatre companies across the county. During the time of COVID-19, TSDCA hosted weekly chats on Zoom and Jensen was a frequent member of those chats and not only got more training but also just found a group to socialize with outside of school. Jensen also had the opportunity to work with TSDCA by being a part of the communication committee, writing newsletters for members, and writing articles that TSDCA would help get published.
Jensen’s experience at Minnesota State University, Mankato is something he would never regret going forward into his career. When it came time to decide on a school for his MFA, he chose this program because people like Grubb, Hustoles, Loudermilk, and Seth M. Honerman went out of their way to support Jensen’s talents and desire to be a better sound designer and made him feel welcome the moment he submitted his application. During his three years, Jensen’s confidence in his artistic abilities as a sound designer has increased and he has a better toolbox of techniques and experiences that will help him shape his career moving forward. Jensen has also received training that brought more insight to his skills that he wouldn’t have learned elsewhere. Not only has he improved his skills as a sound designer, but also as a professional in the theatre industry. As his time at Minnesota State University, Mankato comes to an end, he hopes that he can maintain the strength and confidence gained to be better at his craft and perhaps teach the next generation of sound designers one day.
APPENDIX A

SOUND PLOT

Cue Sheet

Sound Plot
Production: HMS Pinafore
Date: September 13, 2021
Designer: Kyle W. Jensen
Page: 1 of 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cue</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Execution</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>Sir Joeph signal</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Ralph jumps into water</td>
<td>Ralph falls</td>
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<td>Fish being Dumped</td>
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<tr>
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APPENDIX B

QLab Playback
# APPENDIX C

## Microphone Plot

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<th>Element</th>
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HMS Pinafore Mic Plot
MNSU, Mankato Department of Theatre Dance
Designer: Kyle W. Jensen
APPENDIX D

Dante Patch

Wireless Microphones

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Speaker Patch
APPENDIX E

Shure Wireless Workbench

Radio Frequency (RF) Monitor Setup
Radio Frequencies

RF Cutoff

Red indicates RF dropout
Post Antenna Issue
APPENDIX F

Boundary Microphones Placements
APPENDIX G

Trap Room Speaker
APPENDIX H

Production Photos
Works Cited


