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"To Control a Human Destiny:" Sound Design for Henrik Ibsen's Hedda Gabler

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“To Control a Human Destiny”: Sound Design for Henrik Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

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ABSTRACT

This undergraduate thesis details the sound design process for the University of Southern Mississippi's Fall 2021 production of *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen. Through analysis of the script style of the play, research of the playwright, and collaboration with the artistic team, this student created and implemented an effective sound design for this production.

Keywords: *sound, design, theatre, Hedda Gabler, Ibsen*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BFA Bachelor of Fine Arts

USM The University of Southern Mississippi

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I am a senior Honors College student, theatre design and technology major (BFA) with media and entertainment arts minor. My sound design for USM's 2021 production of *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen served as the creative basis of my Honors College thesis. *Hedda Gabler* follows the story of Hedda Tesman, formerly Gabler, newly married, yet already unhappy, through a series of events that result in the emotional unraveling of the strong, confident woman.

This production ran for four performances Thursday, September 30 through Sunday October 3, 2021. The creative team that collaborated on the design for *Hedda Gabler* consisted of third year directing MFA candidate, Joann Shaver as director, third year scenic design MFA candidate Jennifer Glass, second year lighting and sound design MFA candidate Tristan King as lighting designer, second year costuming MFA candidate Taylor Busch as costume designer, and senior undergraduate student Bethany Hartfield as hair and makeup designer. A full list of the creative team, cast, and crew is listed in Appendix A.

In taking on this project, I had two main goals in mind. The first was to create the sound design for this production to fulfill the creative basis of my Honors undergraduate thesis. The second goal was to produce an engaging and effective sound design for the audience. I have considered myself a sound designer for the past seven years, having begun this journey as a freshman in high school. I came to be a sound designer by accident, volunteering to help an older girl with microphones for my school's production of *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*. The next year, I became the only sound designer in our theatre club and remained so until I graduated. In the past seven years I have developed

my own philosophy around sound design. I believe that sound has the ability to impact an audience differently than other aspects of theatrical design. Sound is much more abstract than visuals and can fully encompass its audience. Sound is always around us, even when we may not be consciously aware of it. As a sound designer it is always my goal to create a sound environment for the audience that will immerse them in the world of the play they are watching.

CHAPTER II: ANALYSIS AND BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Background on Playwright

Henrick Ibsen was born in 1828 in the small town of Skein, Norway. He is widely considered to be the Father of Modern Drama, for his work in realism and prose plays. Realism refers to a style of theatre that emerged in the 1870s which focused on creating theatrical works that were similar to real life in design and performance style. His works featured plots and dialogue that resembled real life. In a letter written to Edmund Gosse in 1874, Ibsen describes his work within the style of realism: “The play is, as you must have observed, conceived in the most realistic style; the illusion I wished to produce was that of reality.” (“Letter to Edmund Gosse” 560). Because Ibsen aimed to replicate the illusion of reality on stage, he used prose dialogue, rather than verse. In the same letter he speaks to this use of style: “Speaking generally, the style must conform to the degree of ideality which pervades the representation. My new Drama is no tragedy in the ancient acceptation; what I desired to depict were human beings, and therefore I would not let them talk the ‘language of the Gods’ ” (“Letter to Edmund Gosse” 560). His career as a dramatist spanned fifty years, and among his noted works are *Peer Gynt* and *A Doll’s House*. He often writes critically on institutions, such as marriage and social order (Flom). His works were considered controversial at the time, and he was “denounced by moralizing conservatives and championed by socialists and feminists” during his time (Templeton 25). Ibsen has denied his work as being intentionally political, stating in a letter to Hans Lein Braekstad in 1890: “I was surprised that I, who had made it my chief life-task to depict human characters and human destinies, should, without conscious or direct intention, have arrived in several matters at the same conclusions as the social-

democratic moral philosophers had arrived at by scientific processes” (“Letter to Hans Lien Brakestad” 562). Ibsen wrote to depict real-life characters and situations, not to create political propaganda, as some believed. *Hedda Gabler* first premiered on January 31, 1891 in Munich a year after its first publication.

Script Analysis

As part of the design process, I performed my own script analysis of *Hedda Gabler*. I did this in two different ways. The first was a general breakup of the events of the play, identifying the given circumstances, exposition, inciting incident, major crisis, building action, climax, and denouement. In identifying the points on the script where each of these events occurs, I am able to gain a better understanding of how I can best tell this story through my sound design.

The given circumstances or initial stasis of a play refers to the action that has occurred before the play begins. Exposition refers to any new information that is obtained from the action or dialogue of the play (Hodge 21). Often, the audience learns of the given circumstances through exposition. In the case of *Hedda Gabler*, Hedda and Tesman are just returning from their six-month long honeymoon, during which Tesman received his doctorate degree. He is a historian who has been researching Medieval husbandry. Hedda is the daughter of the famous General Gabler and has always been a highly desired woman at the head of her own social circle. She is seemingly already bored with her marriage.

The inciting incident refers to a moment or scene in which the initial stasis is changed in some way that propels the plot forward (Hodge 33). I identified the appearance of Thea Elvsted, and the information that she brings about Eilert Lovborg as

the inciting incident. Thea, an old schoolmate of Hedda and an old flame of Tesman, brings news that Eilert Lovborg, an old colleague of Tesman and admirer of Hedda is back in town. Mrs. Elvsted reveals that she has formed a relationship with Lovborg over the past two years and that she has left her husband's house permanently to track him down in the city as she is worried that he will fall into his old habits of alcoholism.

The major crisis refers to a conflict between major characters that remains unresolved. It usually occurs about halfway through the play. I believe that the moment of major crisis is the moment that Hedda goads Lovborg into drinking again. This action creates a whole new set of problems that will occur offstage between Act II and Act III. This single act of manipulation "controls a human destiny" in the way that Hedda desires to do. It causes Lovborg to lose his manuscript, Tesman to find it, and Hedda to burn it.

The climax of the play is undoubtedly the moments directly before Hedda takes her own life. The moment that she realizes that all that is important to her is lost. Judge Brack now has power over her, because of the information he knows. Her husband has decided to dedicate all of his spare time to reconstructing Lovborg's book with the help of Mrs. Elvsted, leaving her alone. Not to mention, she is newly pregnant, and motherhood had never been a role she felt that she was suited for. She has lost control over her life, is on the brink of scandal, and sees only one way out.

The denouement of a play refers to the action immediately following the climax, leading to the final stasis, which is the final circumstances for the characters at the end of the play (Britannica). The moment between Hedda's death and the end of the play is brief, only three lines total. There is absolutely no time for either the characters onstage

or the audience to process the events that have just occurred. It is simply enough time for the characters and audience to learn of Hedda's suicide.

In addition to this break down I also performed a general analysis of themes and characters both on my own, and through the collaborative process. Some of the ideas that I explored were marriage, privilege, expectations, isolation, manipulation, and control. I was especially drawn to the ideas of manipulation and control, primarily as they relate to Hedda herself. Hedda is a woman who knows what she likes, and knows how to get it. She used George Tesman to bring herself a life of relative comfort and social status, although it doesn't end up being what she truly wants. She flirts with Judge Brack just enough to keep herself entertained and keep him as a resource to herself. She has a way of using people to enact her own plans. She states multiple times throughout the play that she wishes to be able to "control a human destiny," (Ibsen 63) and completely control the course of another person's life. I wanted to use this general theme of manipulation and control in my sound design through the manipulation of silence. This involved the strategic placement of sounds, and subsequent taking away of sound to create emphasis throughout the play. I accomplished this through natural ambiences, music, and devised sounds. I centered the timing of this technique around Hedda herself, in order to bring focus to her and to her mental state throughout the play.

Transposing Time Period

During our first design meeting, Joann Shaver, the director of this piece, informed us that we would be transposing the time period of *Hedda Gabler*, most likely making it more modern. At this point, we did not have a particular time period in mind and would discuss possibilities during our next few meetings. After much discussion, we landed on

the 1960s, specifically 1963. The early 1960s would have been at the beginning of a women's liberation movement, while coming off the heels of the 1950's post-war emphasis on the nuclear family and traditional family values.

Hedda is both a traditional and progressive woman. She desires power and claims it through what one may consider "feminine" means, covertly puppeteering those around her. We see her adhere to the societal gender norms of her time, being a wife and a hostess. She has claimed these things for herself, but she isn't fully satisfied with this life. She is much more adventurous than she often allows herself to be. When Mrs. Elvsted informs Hedda that she has left her husband's home for good, she responds in shock and awe. There could be a touch of jealousy that Mrs. Elvsted has taken such brazen control of her life. Hedda is terrified of scandal and will do anything to avoid it. However, Hedda is not the typical housewife. Although she is pregnant, as hinted toward throughout the play, she does not find herself to be suited for motherhood, to the point where it may even disgust her. Hedda is utterly bored with her life in her new house with her new husband. She considers only one solace to her boredom, the set of twin pistols that belonged to her father, General Gabler.

When transposing the time period of this play, we considered this analysis of Hedda and her world. It seemed natural for her to be in a world that seems stifling in terms of her rights as a woman, while watching the beginning of the liberation of others. If she was a feminist of her time, she would never have admitted it to anyone. We also considered her status as the daughter of a renowned general. Setting this play in 1963 in some ways implies that her late father may have served as a general in World War II, securing their reputation in society when Hedda was a young girl. The year 1963 would

also have been toward the beginning of the Vietnam War. All of the male characters in *Hedda Gabler* are in some way or another scholars, which was a profession that allowed one to have a lesser chance of being drafted into the military (Sheilds 216). Due to all of these factors, we decided that we should set this production of *Hedda Gabler* in 1963.

CHAPTER III: DESIGN PROCESS.

Design Process

The design process for productions at Southern Miss Theatre are typically completed over the course of nine to eleven weeks. This process encapsulates the collaboration between the director and all of the designers. It includes script analysis, discussion of themes, imaging, and finally design ideas. We began the design process for this production of *Hedda Gabler* on March 20, 2021. Joann Shaver, the director, began by announcing that we would be moving the time period, and that we as a design team would decide when we wanted this play to take place over the course of the design process. During this meeting, we talked about our initial thoughts about the play and its characters and identified words, motifs, and sensual details that stuck out to us after our first reading of the script. We also discussed the motivations of each character, and the relationships they have throughout the play.

Our second meeting focused on imaging. This part of the design process focuses on thematic images rather than aesthetics, although the two are often linked. Each member of the design team brings in images that reflect themes that each find important. After bringing forth our images, we each respond to the ones that stick out to us and cull the images down to the ones that we find most important. Images that we picked during this meeting tended to reflect femininity, power, control, and upper-class boredom. Our third meeting consisted of both image culling and further discussion of sensory details and time period. Culling our images consists mainly of looking through our previously selected images and further narrowing them down and arranging them into our shared mood board for the production. This way, each designer can return to this combination of

images as a common point of thematic and aesthetic context throughout our individual design work. We also discussed other sensory details and figurative images from the text that stuck out to us. It was in this meeting that Joann Shaver, the director, shared some phrases that influenced a lot of my design concept moving forward. These were the idea of a broken record and the moment before a trigger is pulled. The broken record was something that stood out to me because it is so directly related to sound, but can also hold a lot of thematic imagery. It could be a needle scratch; it could be the end of a side, while the needle keeps playing nothingness; it could be the sound of a warped vinyl, distorting an otherwise beautiful melody; it could be a skip playing the same section over and over and over. This phrase seemed full of sonic potential to me, while also relating to an idea of cyclicity that had been discussed in a previous meeting. The moment before a trigger is pulled is full of tension, full of decision. It is the feeling of drawing focus to a target, the holding of breath, the decision to squeeze the trigger and fire. It made me wonder how I could translate this idea into sound.

In the next couple of weeks in the design process, we had more discussions about the time period into which we wanted to transpose this play. We mainly considered decades in the twentieth century, such as the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Each of us did our own individual research on these time periods and defended our personal choices. I originally preferred the 1950s based on the post-war emphasis on the nuclear family and the baby boom that would have socially pressured Hedda into marriage and family life against her own wishes. As a team we eventually decided on the 1960s, specifically 1963. It was a transitional time in history in many ways: fashion, music, and social expectations. Emerging from the baby boom and the 1950s post-war focus on the nuclear

family, the 1960s was the beginning of many social movements. In 1960 the first oral contraceptive pill was approved by the FDA, giving women more control in family planning. However, in the early 1960s, it was still difficult for women to obtain a prescription, and “the pill” would remain controversial for decades after (Kruvand 3).

One of the reasons that we decided to change the time period of this show was to frame it in a way that was more familiar for our audience. In addition to changing the time period of *Hedda Gabler*, we also decided to move the play to the America. We discussed multiple locations, including cities that had large Norwegian populations as a nod to Ibsen’s origins. However, it was ultimately decided that having a Norwegian sister city, was not necessary to the story we were telling. In the end we decided that our version of the play would be set in the state of Connecticut, without declaring a specific city.

Once we established our time period, location, and initial concepts, we moved into cultivating our designs and identifying necessities found in the script. For sound there were few necessities listed in the script. The most notable of the necessary sounds was the gunshots emitted from General Gabler’s pistols. Another sound that was noted as important was the sound of the fireplace in Act III. A lack of necessities for sound is neither a good nor a bad thing as a sound designer. I decided to take this as an opportunity to spend more of my time adding sound effects that weren’t originally in the script that might highlight the time period and contribute to my overall design concept.

Toward the end of the formal design process, I had an individual meeting with Shaver, to discuss my preliminary design ideas. I brought her some ideas about certain moments that I wanted to highlight specifically and ideas about using abstract sound design. The moments that I specifically wanted to highlight were Hedda burning Eilert

Lovborg's manuscript at the end of Act II, and the moment directly before Hedda takes her own life in Act IV. Abstract sound here refers to textural sounds that may or may not be recognizable, which are used to create an overall mood for a scene, rather than literal sounds (Cornford 247). This would be a departure from the realism that Ibsen is usually associated with. Before this meeting, I had discussed some of these ideas with the lighting designer, Tristan King, as both had ideas that would require us to move away from realism stylistically. She seemed receptive to these ideas, and was open to having a slightly less realism-based style for this production.

Our final design meeting as a team was on June 14, 2021. This would be the final conceptual meeting as a design team. The costume and scenic designers would thereafter send their design to the costume and scenic shops to begin implementation, but sound and lighting would continue to flesh out ideas and begin to implement our concepts on our own. We discussed the necessities of the production once more to make sure that we had everything that we needed. I had been playing with the idea of using music as a practical element onstage in the form of either a record player or a radio. I had conceptual ideas for both options and brought it forward as a potential necessity on my end. I left the decision of whether it was a record player or radio to the scenic designer, Jennifer Glass, to make sure that it worked within the set that she had designed.

Sound Design Development

I wanted music to be a central element of my design and wanted to include it as a realistic element on stage. I considered either a record player or radio that would be turned on and off by the characters on stage in lieu of traditional underscoring. This

created a necessity for the scenic designer to implement into her design in order for my design concept to come to life.

When considering the music choices for this production, I researched the top songs of 1963. I mainly used songs that were included in the Billboard Top 100 for that year, but also considered whether or not they would fit the world of *Hedda Gabler*. The 1960s were a time in which girl groups were at their peak. I found myself drawn to their music for this production because of their mass marketability and feminine energy. In the marketing of these musical groups, the members have little sense of individual identity; they are dressed similarly from head to toe. They are both symbolic of feminine power and suppressive of it. I felt that Hedda in this decade would be drawn to their music in the same way that she would be drawn to feminism. In addition, I tried to include a number of instrumental songs that were appropriate for the time period to make sure that when music was playing underneath dialogue it would be less distracting.

As mentioned previously, there were only a few sounds that were specified in the script. These were notably gunshots, which play an important role in this play. Because of the significance of the final gunshot, when Hedda takes her own life, I wanted to play up the moments before with my sound design. I had discussions with Joann Shaver, the director, and Tristan King, the lighting designer to think of ways that we could add emphasis to this important moment. We decided to create a sense of hyper-realism in the lighting and sound design in order to heighten some moments. In this sense, we defined hyper-realism as exaggerated in comparison to reality. One hallmark of realism as a theatrical style is an accumulation of surface detail that mimics life (Wall 1). I wanted to follow this ideal in some ways, while expanding the boundaries of the style. By

establishing a basis of realism and creating surface detail in my overall soundscape of the show, I would then be able to manipulate the sound in ways that were less rooted in realism, and more rooted in theatricality. Rather than leaning toward the theatrical style of naturalism, wherein everything is designed to mimic reality to the finest details, we wanted this hyper-realism to be at the other end of the spectrum, where it begins to depart from reality, and enter a realm of theatricality. Using David Ball's definition of theatrical as "all things that elicit a strong audience response," I intended to create moments that would cause the audience to feel strongly about the action on stage (Ball 35). We wanted to use the basis of realism Ibsen intends for the majority of the play, but we also wanted to use more theatrical elements to heighten specific moments and create strong audience responses through our designs.

Design Concept Statement

Hedda Gabler is about a deeply independent woman who finds entertainment and a sense of control by manipulating the men in her life. When she finally loses all control, she takes it back with her own life.

We decided to set this production of *Hedda Gabler* in 1963 to view this story through a slightly more modern lens. By bringing this story to a time of social reform, we hoped to highlight the social position of women that is portrayed in this play. Through my design I hope to portray a sense of hyper-realism, by creating a realistic basis from which certain turning points throughout the play will be heightened. This will be achieved through the use of practical sound elements and the manipulation of silence.

CHAPTER IV: IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation

Once I had decided on the direction that I wanted to go with my design, I had to implement it within the show. One way that I implemented the idea of hyper-realism was through the manipulation of silence. Silence can be as effective in sound design as sound itself. Sound is all around us and can sometimes drift into our subconscious. When the sounds that have become part of our subconscious awareness are taken away, it is the silence that is noticeable. Silence allows space for focus and reflection. Contrasted with moments of sound, silence can almost seem “loud” and stick out to an audience as important by drawing their focus in. Creating poignant moments of silence was one of the ways that I wanted to subtly create emphasis. The first moment in which I used this technique was Hedda’s entrance in Act I. I used the ambiance of suburban morning sounds at the beginning of the scene to help bring the audience into the world and setting of the play. Hedda does not enter the scene until about a third of the way into the act, and when she does, the morning sounds fade out. I felt that this was a natural transition out of the ambiance, as it is becoming late morning and the sounds of birds outside would be less prevalent. Creating silence in this moment would also help to focus attention onto the titular character. Hedda is a cold and calculating woman who commands attention, and in her entrance, she erases all other distractions while practically sucking the warmth out of the room.

The second time I used the concept of manipulating silence in this production was in Act II, during an intimate moment between Hedda and Eilert Lovborg. Earlier in this

scene, Hedda states that she excels at boring herself to death and turns on the radio.

During the most intimate part of the conversation between Hedda and Lovborg, the music on the radio fades out, drawing focus to just their conversation. The music returns to its normal volume on Mrs. Elvsted's entrance into the scene, bursting their bubble of silence and bringing them both into the reality of their situation. Hedda is married to George Tesman and Lovborg is involved with Mrs. Elvsted. Their relationship is unrequited.

Another moment that I wanted to create emphasis and a sense of hyper-realism is at the end of Act III, as Hedda burns Lovborg's manuscript in a fit of mania. I wanted to bring attention to this moment through abstract sound. My goal was to convey a sense of weight and tension through a sound that was not music. This sound would grow louder, and subside slightly to create an undertone for the duration of the next act that is more felt than it is actively heard. It serves as an undercurrent, notating the way that Hedda's actions lead to everything that occurs in the fourth and final act. In the final scene, Hedda is going through the five stages of grief for her own life as she knows it. She realizes that between Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted spending all their time together to piece together Lovborg's book, her pregnancy, and Judge Brack's blackmail, her life and all that she wants is gone. This sound cuts off in the moment that Hedda shoots herself. In the denouement it is almost as if the world has reset after Hedda's death, and there is a return to normalcy.

Hedda's relationship with her father's pistols is constantly referenced throughout the play. She sees them, not as deadly weapons, but as a means of entertainment for herself:

“HEDDA. *(Crossing the room.)* Well anyway, I still have one diversion to keep me going while I’m waiting. TESMAN. *(Beaming.)* Well, I’m very glad to hear it. What’s that Hedda? Hm? HEDDA. *(In the doorway, watching him with concealed contempt.)* My pistols, George. TESMAN. *(Anxiously.)* Your pistols? HEDDA. *(With cold eyes.)* General Gabler’s pistols” (Ibsen 36).

She finds no problem in casually pointing them at her friends to taunt them, as she does with Judge Brack at the beginning of Act II. But Hedda also knows the damage that can be done with them, as she gifts one to Eilert Lovborg in Act III, to take his own life with. Later, she uses one to take her own life as well. For our production we used prop guns along with pre-recorded sound effects. I wanted the sound that I would use for the pistols to be as accurate as possible, so after the prop guns were selected, I used photo references to figure out which kind of gun it could potentially be within the historical context. As they were originally General Gabler’s pistols, and according to our new timeline, he would have been a General in World War II, I found that the Colt Official Police revolver was a good match for both the aesthetic of the prop guns and the timeline. The Colt Official Police revolvers were pistols that were used widely in the second World War and could very likely have been kept by General Gabler thereafter. It was with this knowledge that I selected the sound that I would use for Hedda’s pistols. I did not build this sound from scratch, but found a royalty free revolver sound, that I then altered with reverb and echo to make it fit the space better. Because the pistols were only ever fired in one corner of our stage, I was easily able to localize the sound of its gunshots using a corner speaker (see Appendix B).

Another element of sound that is directly stated in the script was the piano. In this production, the characters “used” Hedda’s piano twice. Having a piano be played on stage by the characters contributed to my concept of hyper-realism, by helping to create the basis of realistic detail from which I would create heightened moments. The first time it is “played” by a character on stage was a moment created by the actors and director in rehearsal, in which Judge Brack hits a note on the piano to punctuate a statement when talking to Hedda about her potential motherhood: “BRACK. No never mind about that. But suppose you were to find yourself with what might euphemistically be described as an important and ... heavy responsibility?” (Ibsen 46). At the pause before the word “heavy” he hits a low note on the piano, to poke fun at Hedda, a woman who despite her denial has found herself pregnant. The second time it is used by Hedda herself, playing a jaunty dance tune loudly and inappropriately mid-breakdown, almost as a final cry for attention. The piano used in the set was gutted, and therefore any sounds emitted from the piano were to be pre-recorded. I recorded these two sound effects with the help of Taylor Alleman, the actress playing Aunt Julia in this production, who is also a skilled pianist. I recorded both of these using a Zoom H1N Audio Recorder. For the song that Hedda plays mid-breakdown, I used the song “Blame it on the Bossa Nova” arranged by Kirby Shaw. I chose this piece, as it was already on my list of songs that I wanted to use throughout the play, and because it is an upbeat dance piece that is out of place tonally, and is stated in the script to be as such:

“(HEDDA goes into the back room drawing the curtains behind her. A brief pause. Suddenly she is heard playing a wild dance tune on the piano) MRS.

ELVSTED. (jumping up from her chair.) Ah... what’s that? TESMAN (Running

over to the doorway.) Please, Hedda dear, I don't think dance music is very appropriate this evening. What about Auntie Rina? And Eilert?" (Ibsen 100).

I only used the first nine measures and had Alleman play in a messy and disjointed way, ending in a smash of keys, to better portray the frustration that Hedda is feeling. Because these sounds had to be pre-recorded, I used a small speaker that was inserted inside of the gutted piano, to give the effect that it was actually being played.

Playback System

The playback system for this production was standard, mostly utilizing the speakers that were already set up in our black box theatre, but with a few specialized outputs to accommodate our radio and piano. I used the playback software Qlab 4 in order to program all of my sound files for the performance. This software allows me to pre-program all of my files and pre-determine output levels and patches so that the board operator can playback everything as programmed with the push of a single button. This software also allows me to edit and adjust sound cues within it; so, as needed in technical rehearsals, I can add signal processing to a sound file or change the section of time played without bringing the file into another editing software.

One of the major components of my sound design concept was the use of a "practical" element of sound on stage to play music. I left the decision of whether this element would be a record player or a radio to scenic and props based on what would work best within the set. They had determined that a radio would be the best option and found one within our props storage. I wasn't sure if it was a fully gutted prop, or if it had the capacity to be used as is, so I approached it with a few options in mind. If it was completely gutted or unusable, I could insert an operable speaker inside, or because the

radio was to be on a mantle, one could be placed on the other side of the set wall to hopefully give the effect that the sound was coming from the radio itself. Once I was able to see it in person and work on it, I found that it was not gutted and was rigged for a bare wire connection. I used a short stretch of extension cord to thread through the wall so that if seen by the audience, it would look accurate to the period, and connected it to a speakon cable via a bare wire connection to connect it to the rest of our sound system. This is where I encountered some problems. The speakon cable that we used ended up being defective, but because no one knew whether or not the radio worked, we were unsure of the issue. Piece by piece, I troubleshooted each part of the connection until I found where the issue was. After replacing the bad speakon cable, I was able to run sound from Qlab to the radio without a problem. The small speaker on the radio gave the music a slightly tinny quality, which I actually liked a lot.

I also patched a secondary onstage speaker for the piano. Twice in the play we used the piano onstage, and I wanted it to sound as if it was being played live. The piano in question was fully gutted, so I was able to place a small speaker inside of it and run cable through the back and through a hole in the wall behind it to patch it to the rest of my sound system.

There were five different speaker locations that I ran the show through. The first two channels were the main overhead speakers in the theatre or “mains.” Channel three was the piano and channel four was the radio. The final two channels were the stage right and stage left speakers that are permanently situated on the tech deck of the theatre respectively. The stage right speaker was mainly used for the gun shots, as the staging conveniently only ever had Hedda shooting her guns in that area.

Live Streaming

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our box office reduced the number of in-person tickets sold, and we supplemented our ticket sales by having each performance live streamed as well. Because the rest of the production would be fully realized in person, we simply needed the sound of the entire space to be recorded for the livestream. I decided that the most effective method for this would be to hang choir mics from the catwalks to pick up the actors' voices as well as all of the other sound design elements. This way I would mainly need to set the audio levels for the space itself instead of mixing audio specifically for the stream. I placed four choir mics centrally above the playing space, which allowed the majority of the sound to be evenly captured for the live stream. Not everything was captured perfectly; for example, much of the music played by the radio onstage was barely legible on the stream. However, I set the sound levels for the radio specifically so that it would be noticeable without being overwhelming for the in-person audience, and I did not want to muddy the actors' dialogue for the sake of the live stream.

Production and Technical Rehearsals

The technical rehearsal process for *Hedda Gabler* begins with paper tech, which is a meeting between the director, Joann Shaver, stage manager, Reed Jackson, lighting designer, Tristan King, and sound designer. In this meeting, we go through the entire script to mark where each of us have cues, so that the stage manager knows when to call them during the show. From here cues may be added, taken away, or changed through the technical rehearsal process. This meeting took place about a week prior to our tech rehearsals. The day before our tech rehearsals with the actors, is Dry Tech, which is essentially a cue by cue run through of the show without any of the actors present. This

allows lights, sound, and scenic, to run all lighting, sounds, and scene changes for the director, and make any changes the designers or the director sees fit before actors are also in the space.

Tech rehearsals ran from Friday, September 24 through Sunday September 26. During these rehearsals, I made quite a few changes regarding when cues end, and adjusting fade and volume levels, but only one cue was added during this process. This was the sound of Tesman opening the front door in Act III, that the director and I had previously been debating the necessity of prior in the design process. Because it wasn't added until later, it had to be played through the mains, as none of the localized speakers were near the placement of the front door.

CHAPTER V: EVALUATION

Overall, I am proud of the final product of this design. Going into this process, one of my main goals was to create an engaging and cohesive design for this show. I believe that through the design process and implementation of this show, I was able to create a product that was effective and met these goals.

In looking back on my work, there are a few things that I would have changed, given the chance. The first is that I was not fully satisfied with my choices or integration of transition music. The transition music after the first act, which was the song “If I Had a Hammer” by The Village Stompers, never felt like the right fit. I originally chose this song because of its upbeat nature as well as the fact that it is mostly instrumental, with little vocalization. At the time, it seemed like a suitable enough option, and if I were to find something that worked better, I would use it instead. I never found anything that I thought would be an improvement, but I was also never fully satisfied. It was functional in that it broke up the acts and prevented the audience from sitting in dark silence during a costume change, but I think that it could have also been integrated more smoothly into the flow and mood of the play.

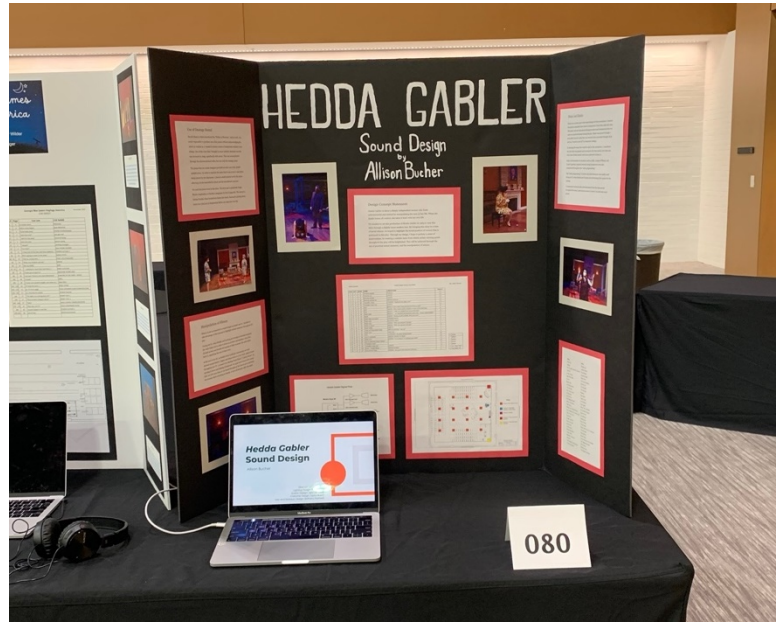
I felt similarly about my use of Patsy Cline’s “I Fall to Pieces” between Acts III and IV. This placement was a bit more intentional than the previously mentioned transition music, but also felt more utilitarian than design driven. Again, it was to fill the space of a costume change and transition between the acts, but I chose this song for much different reasons than I did the first. I used “I Fall to Pieces” in the creation of the sound that underscores the entirety of Act IV, starting in the final moments of the previous act before the transition music begins. I felt that if I needed to use music to transition

between the scenes, that it was only fitting for me to use the same song that was used to create the ambiance of the next act. Upon reflection, I think that I would have omitted transition music between these acts completely and made the ambient sound that plays through the fourth act louder during the transition before fading it down to a lower volume. I don't think that my decisions to use these songs as transition music were inherently wrong for my design, but I would reconsider them if given the chance.

I would also have changed the output placement of Cue J (see Appendix B). This cue was the sound of a door opening during Act III. I added this sound much later in the process than the other cues. During tech rehearsals, Joann and I realized that because of a line that indicates that the characters onstage hear Tesman entering the house, that we should also hear the front door open. I didn't have a speaker patched in the location of the front door, and because it was so late in the process, I didn't have the chance to add one. Instead, I played the cue from the mains array. Although this was still effective and likely unnoticeable to most, if I had added the cue earlier in the process, I would have made sure that it had a properly placed output.

I also would have liked to record more of my own sound effects, rather than relying on sound libraries. Sound libraries are great resources and can save a lot of time for sound designers, but I prefer to record sound effects when I have the chance. I was able to record some of the sound effects that were more specific to my needs, but in a perfect scenario, I would have been able to record and create nearly every sound effect I used in the show such as the pistols or the sound of the door opening. This would have taken more time and resources than I had available, but it would have allowed me to further personalize and curate every aspect of my design.

I presented my sound design work for *Hedda Gabler* at the 2022 Region IV Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival on February 5. My work was evaluated and responded to by industry professionals in its designation. I was granted the first-place award



in the category of Sound Design, which makes me the Region IV National Finalist for this category. I will once again present and compete with this design at the National Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival in April, which, like its regional component, will be held virtually. The competition will be held over the course of April 13-20 and the winners of the competition will be announced May 21, 2022.

I also presented this design at the 2022 Southeastern Theatre Conference held in Memphis, Tennessee on March 9-13 where again my work was evaluated by industry professionals. I was awarded third place in the Undergraduate Sound Design Competition.

Overall, I believe that the final product of my research and design was successful. I set out to create a sound design that would be engaging for the audience as well as insightful to themes of this play. *Hedda Gabler* by Henrik Ibsen is a play that explores themes of femininity, freedom, destiny, and control. I believe that through my research and analysis of this play and the time period in which we set it, I was able to engage with

these themes through my design concept. I was able to acknowledge the origins of the piece through a foundation of realistic elements, while highlighting specific moments using both sound and silence.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF COLLABORATORS

Artistic Production Team

Director –Joann Shaver

Costume Designer – Taylor Busch

Scenic Designer – Jennifer Glass

Lighting Designer –Tristan King

Sound Designer – Allison Bucher

Stage Manager – Reed Jackson

Cast

Aunt Julia – Taylor Alleman

Berte – Laney Birchfield

George Tesman – Kevin Rains

Hedda Gabler – Ellie Boykin

Mrs. Elvsted – Abby Anderson

Judge Brack – Cody Alexander

Eilert Lovborg – Everett Brown

Male Understudy – Easton Peacock

Female Understudy – Izzy Christensen

APPENDIX B: FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Sound Cue Sheet

Dir. Joann Shaver

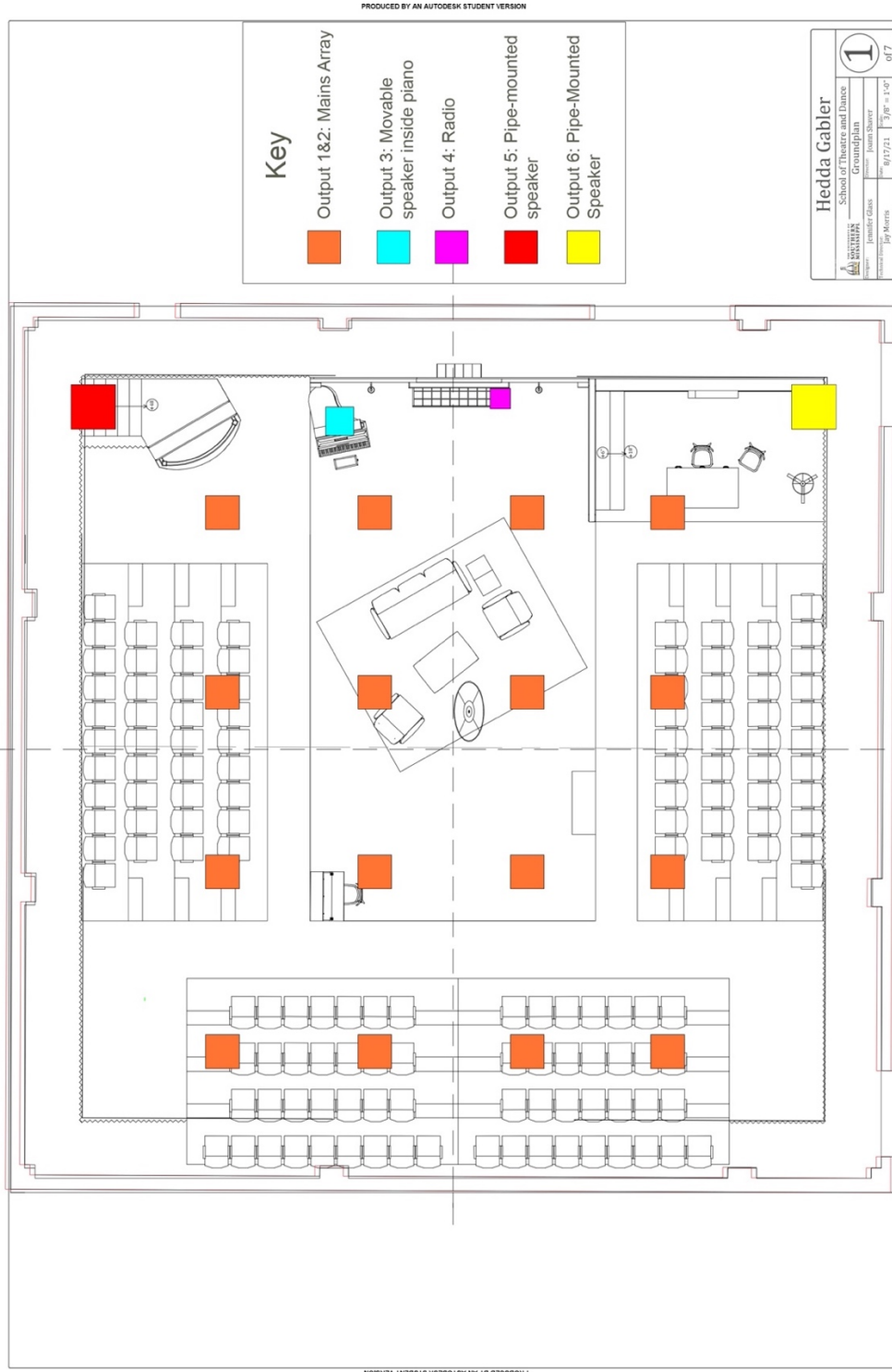
Hedda Gabler Sound Cue Sheet

Allison Bucher

CUE	ACT	PAGE	NAME	LINE/ACTION	Patch #
1	I	8	Preshow playlist	Preshow	12
2	I	8	Preshow out	LIGHTS	12
3	I	8	Morning sounds	LIGHTS	12
4	I	26	Morning sounds out	HEDDA entrance	12
5	II	36	Transition music	TESMAN: "Hedda for my sake, mm?"	12
6	II	37	Transition music out	LIGHTS	12
7	II	37	Gun	BRACK: "Don't stand there pointing that thing at me!"	6
8	II	37	Gun	HEDDA: This is what comes of trying to creep in the back way	6
9	II	37	Gun	BRACK: "I wish you wouldn't fool around like that"	6
10	II	46	Piano note	BRACK: "... an important and (presses piano key)...heavy responsibility?"	3
11	II	47	Radio	HEDDA: "Boring myself to death. Now you know."	4
12	II	54	Radio fade and pause	TESMAN leaves	4
13	II	58	Radio start	ELVSTED enters	4
14	II	64	Radio stop	HEDDA: "With vine leaves in his hair"	4
15	II	64	Radio to mains	HEDDA: "With vine leaves in his hair"	12
16	III	65	Radio Static	LIGHTS	4
17	III	65	Fade and Stop Radio Static	MRS ELVESTED: "Yes, do"	4
18	III	67	Open door	open door	12
19	III	82	Fire	LOVBORG: "Goodbye Hedda Gabler"	56
20	III	82	Act IV undertone	HEDDA CROSS TO DESK	56
21	III	83	FIRE OUT	HEDDA: "I'm burning it, I'm burning your child!"	12
22	III	84	Act IV undertone lower volume	*	56
23	III	84	Transition music	*	12
24	IV	84	Transition music out	LIGHTS	12
25	IV	100	Piano - Chaotic Music	HEDDA at piano	3
26	IV	101	Gun & Act IV Stop	HEDDA: "now you're the only bull in the ring..."	5

#	Patch
1	Mains
2	Mains
3	Piano
4	Radio
5	Up Stage Right
6	Up Stage Left

Speaker Plot

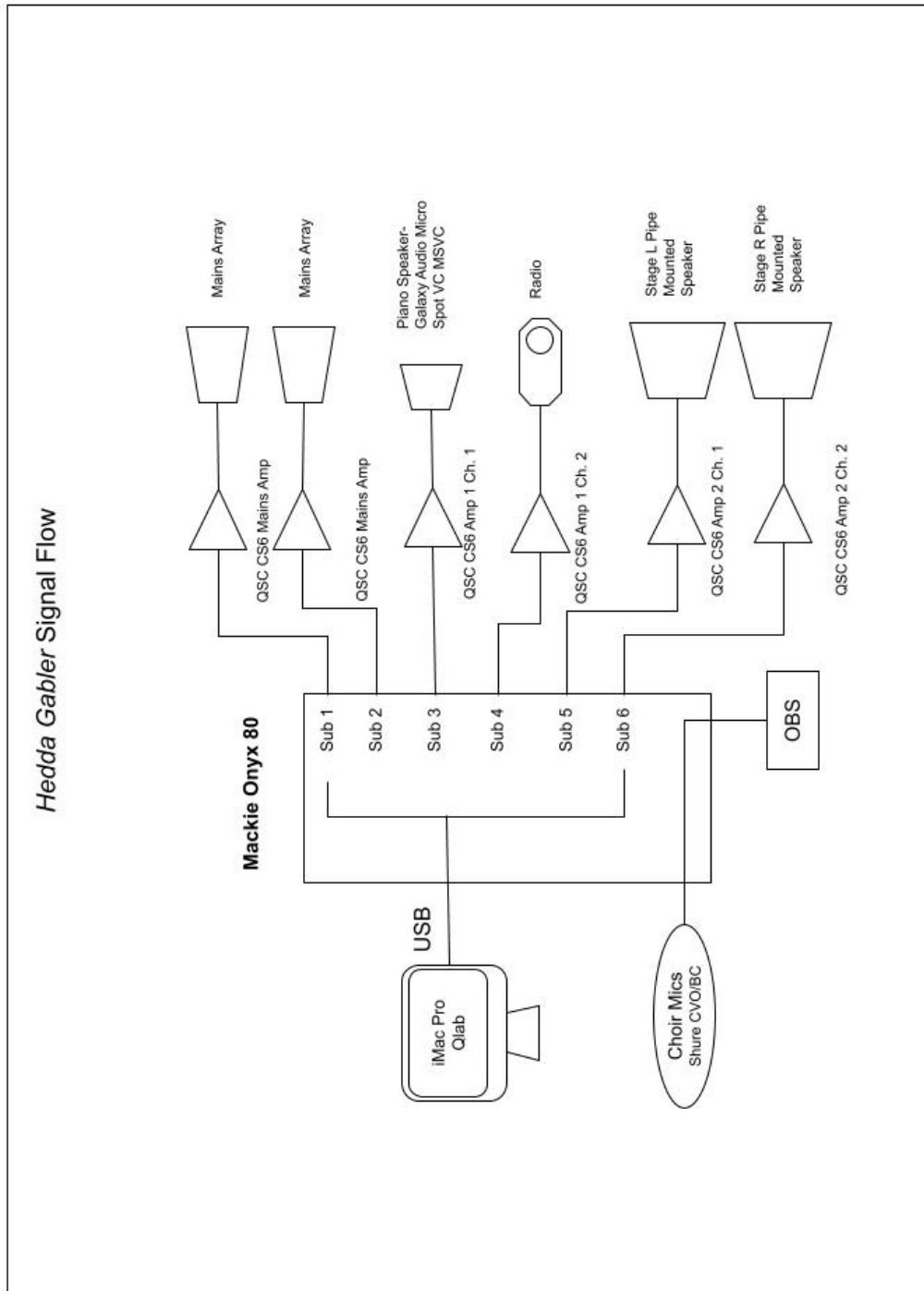


Key

- Output 1&2: Mains Array
- Output 3: Movable speaker inside piano
- Output 4: Radio
- Output 5: Pipe-mounted speaker
- Output 6: Pipe-Mounted Speaker

Hedda Gabler	
School of Theatre and Dance	
Groundplan	
Author: Jennifer Glass	Artist: Jason Shaver
Project No: 08/17/21	Scale: 1/8" = 1'-0"
Project Name: Hedda Gabler	Sheet No: 01/7

Signal Block Diagram



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