

A brief history of how I became an entertainment rigger

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My first stage work came in 1985 at the age of 14 working as a spot operator on a Menudo concert @ Fairpark Coliseum in Dallas Texas with my dad. Production Manager - "Can you run a spot?" Me - "Sure..." By going to work with my dad, I got to watch some of my favorite bands perform. A highlight being Mr. Mister @ Billy Bob's Texas (of all places) in 1986. When the show was over I was invited by the stage crew to help load out ("get your lazy ass up here & get to work...") That was really my first real stage hand gig because I was allowed to be part of the crew & not just a guest of my dad who ran a spot light. I think I even got paid a few bucks in cash. That one gig set the stage for the rest of my life.

After that, I worked a variety of shows @ Fairpark Coliseum as a stage hand including:

W.A.S.P / Raven / Slayer 1987

Stryper / TnT / Loudness 1987

Alice Cooper / Guns and Roses 1987

OUTDOOR RIGGING

By the age of 16, I was thoroughly invested in live production work & having had an early foot in the door, I began building scaffolding towers as an "up rigger" for stadium shows.

Texas Jam featuring Boston, Aerosmith, Whitesnake, etc... - Cotton Bowl Dallas 1987

Pink Floyd "Momentary Lapse of Reason" - Texas Stadium Dallas 1987

Willie Nelson 4th of July Picnic - Carl's Corner 1987

Texxas Jam featuring Van Halen, Dokken, Metallica, etc... - Cotton Bowl Dallas 1988

INXS, GnR, Iggy Pop, Ziggy Marley, etc... - Texas Stadium Dallas 1988

Rolling Stones "Steel Wheels" - Cotton Bowl Dallas 1989

The Who "Farewell" - Cotton Bowl Dallas 1989

Madonna "Blond Ambition" - Texas Stadium Dallas 1990

INDOOR RIGGING

My first indoor rigging gig came in 1987 when I was given the opportunity to hang Ozzy Osbourne's new show in one of the sound stages @ The Studios of Las Colinas. They had (2) weeks of rehearsals prior to the tour. This was Zakk Wylde's first tour with Ozzy.

After working with the same Mountain Productions rigger a few times on different outdoor stadium shows, I was invited to travel to the New Orleans Superdome for the 1988 Republican National Convention as a rigger. The highest rigging I have ever done @ 250+ feet. We used multiple 600' x 3/4" ropes! While in the building, we hung another show called "Budweiser Superfest" featuring Earth Wind & Fire. Part of that gig was to prehang lighting trusses along the sidelines. There was a Saints game in between the RNC rigging out & the Budweiser concert. Once the truss motors were hung & the truss was flow out high enough to avoid interfering with the football game, we rappelled in & pulled up the motor cables. After the game we rappelled back in & lowered the motor cables back in. Rappelling 250+ feet is something you never forget. With a doubled up 600' rope and a small figure 8 you can't go very fast due to the weight of the rope & the friction. The Budweiser Superfest ended, we dropped the rig & I flew home. It was only after completing all the Superdome rigging work via IATSE Local 478 that I learned that you're not allowed to work for IATSE until you're 18. Oops! :)

EDUCATION

I majored in RTF for middle school career (radio, television & film) @ Dunbar Middle School's magnet program & then spent 2 years in Polytech High School's RTF magnet program shooting & editing 3/4" Umatic video & audio.

IATSE

During the INXS stadium gig in 1988, our tower crew worked side by side with IATSE Local 127 crew (who had the production contract). Some how we all ended up on Local 127's payroll which put us on their permit list. I'm not sure how I was allowed to work prior to being 18 but I was. From that point forward, I began to rig for Local 127 on the weekends.

My senior year, I attended a performing arts school called "PYC - Professional Youth Conservatory" on the campus of Texas Wesleyan University". PYC had a very loose attendance policy. If you are working professionally in the industry, you could miss school. It just so happened that my head school master was the President of IATSE Local 126. I would show up at school & he would say, "Don't come to school tomorrow. Be at the Tarrant County Convention Center Arena or JFK Theater and take your rigging gear". Again before I turned 18. So much for union rules...

Right after I graduated from HS & started college my old school master suggested I apply for a sound job opening at a local live theater called Casa Manana. I went in for an interview, performed a mock mix while live actors ran lines & triggered some sound cues from the Revox reel to reel deck. I ended up getting the union house gig, ending by college career with a 4.0 in Freshman Orientation. Being less interested in musical theater (at the time) than rock & roll, I only worked for the rest of that season but working as a house sound engineer in a union house solidified Local 126 as my main source of revenue.

THEATER & ARENA RIGGING

Thanks to the opportunities afforded by IATSE Local 126 & 127, I've hung hundreds of shows over the last 25 years. Everything from Elton John, Cher, Neil Diamond, KISS, Peter Gabriel, Prince, Muse, Green Day, etc... to Broadway musicals such as Miss Saigon, Phantom of the Opera, Lion King, 42nd Street, etc...

SHOWCO

At 18, I began working as a freelance stage hand for Creative Services (an industrial subdivision of SHOWCO) & was hired out of that gig to do shop work @ SHOWCO in the sound department. My second day on the job Ozzy's FOH engineer saw me working & asked, "Do you have a passport?" Fortunately my response was "Yes!" I ended up doing the North American Ozzy - No More Tours tour until Sharon got sick & the tour was delayed & then a few months with the Beach Boys in 1994. As a systems tech, I arrived early to help the road rigger lay out points, help with ground rigging & then hang the PA on chain motors. I also got to work with crews all over the US, Mexico & Canada which helped shape my.

CARAVAN OF DREAMS

Bringing the SHOWCO experience home along with my other experiences, in 1995 I landed a house gig at Caravan of Dreams (internally renown night club) & worked there full time for the next 5+ years until a touring production manager / FOH engineer passing through hired me to go on tour as a monitor engineer for an upcoming jazz musician, Art Porter Jr. That association lead to a world tour in 1995 / 1996 with Branford Marsalis & Buckshot LeFonque as monitor engineer & stage

manager.

Returning to Fort Worth, I took up where I left off at Caravan of Dreams. COD was an interesting gig because one night you might be designing & focusing the lighting rig & operating the lighting console. The next night you might be mixing FOH audio or stage monitors for an international act like Todd Rundgren, Sarah McCloughlin, Booty Collins, jazz artists like Stanley Clark, Jean Luc Ponty, Al Dimeola, David Sandborn, Dave Koz, George Duke, Michael Franks, etc... We got to work with a lot of touring sound engineers side by side at FOH running lights. Consequently I was hired as a touring lighting designer for the Cassandra Wilson "New Moon Daughter" North American tour of 1996.

PYRO

I have been a licensed indoor & outdoor pyro technician in the State of Texas for more than a decade. I've acted as a local license for shows such as the original Broadway touring version of Phantom of the Opera & rock shows like KISS. I have designed pyro for multiple productions of the musical "Wizard of Oz" along side pyro superstar, Richard Huggins.

INSTALL RIGGING

Prior to 2004, I performed all rigging I did through Local 127 since the local carries the insurance & workers comp policies required to do overhead rigging work. In 2004 a friend in the audio industry asked if I would consult on a new project he was working on for Garland ISD. Then for Fort Worth ISD. Then some installs for projects came along & I began to work for the install companies directly. Employers include Texas Scenic, Pro Sound & Video, SRO, American Audio Visual, Bass Performance Hall, Scott Theater, etc... I've done a lot of work for A/V companies that have disappeared or reformed so I've lost track of who is who now. From time to time, I get a call from someone I worked with before that is with a different company.

An incomplete list of rigging install, consulting & inspection projects are listed at <http://www.entertainmentrigging.com> including pictures & some video. There is an important point I should make here. Rigging is problem solving. Thanks to my broad rigging experience inside & outside, working for IATSE & as a free lance rigger, I am fortunate to have had the opportunities to learn at my own pace but also have the chance to be challenged at times. What seemed overwhelming 20 years ago is business as usual now.

AUDIO

Since I graduated from high school I've spent the majority of my time mixing live audio. I'm the resident sound designer for Texas Ballet Theater & Fort Worth Opera. I also perform the live mix each year for the WRR broadcast of one of the Fort Worth Opera productions. I also record each performance for the archive. I worked for Dallas Theater Center for a season as the sound supervisor. I tour with a few different bands, some of which are symphonic tributes. My current pursuit is to master the principles set forth in Bob McCarthy's books, "Meyer Sound Design Reference" & "Sound System Design & Optimization". I've been working with FFT & transfer functions for the last 5 years so that I may understand how PA systems need to be assembled & aimed correctly. My long term goal is to be able to design a world class PA system, hang it, aim it & tune it. An exciting place to be in my career.

SUMMARY

As a rigger / sound engineer / sound designer / lighting designer / pyrotechnician / stage hand / musician / RTF major / etc... and having worked thousands of shows, large & small, I have a unique perspective on the entertainment industry & entertainment rigging. Having spent more than 25 years looking down on people (literally) I've come to have an extremely large "big picture" view of things. Working along side some of the finest riggers in the business, I've learned a lot. Working alone on many installs I've had to improvise & in doing so form my own methods for getting to the desired result. I don't advertise my rigging services. The work I do comes by word of mouth & repeat customers so I do less rigging than I would if I focused on that full time. I love live audio & rigging so I enjoy rigging speakers.

If you have any questions by all means contact me.

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