ISSUE 17 // MAY 2022

# THE ECHO

ASD
ASSOCIATION of SOUND DESIGNERS

## LISTENING

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**COVER**
**Detail of 'Listening', acrylic and mixed media on soundproofing panel and accompanying photo series of A5 digitals, by Abbey Bursack**

**BACK ISSUES**
**Back issues of *The Echo* can be downloaded from www.associationofsounddesigners.com/backissues**

# Matthew Wadsworth

**Matthew Wadsworth is a lutenist and owner of classical record label Deux-Elles. Working in UK Europe and North America as a soloist and chamber musician, Matthew has appeared in most major concert halls and festivals and can often be heard on the radio, both in live performance and recordings. Matthew is a sound engineer and edits recordings for his label.**

**The ASD's Helen Atkinson spoke to him for this piece.**

**Matthew uses he/him pronouns and Helen uses she/her.**

I was born blind, I've never known any different. My parents were very clear when they were raising me that I would have the same opportunities as anybody else. I've always believed that you make your own luck. There have been many barriers along the way, mainly people's fear of not knowing how to deal with my disability. I've always taken the approach that if you're in any kind of minority, then you fit in with what everybody else does, you don't expect people to adapt to you.

I started on classical guitar when I was six, I played electric guitar for a few years in a rock band as a teenager. I studied at Chetham's School of Music, the first blind student to attend, and then I went on to The Royal Academy of Music, where I very quickly discovered the Lute and ultimately the Theorbo and I got hooked on it. You're providing the chords and the harmony, the backbone in Baroque music. It's really a sociable instrument. I had to develop a system of Braille Lute tablature for me to be able to read the notation.

Deux-Elles records was started in 1998, by Patrick Naylor. He was really interested in what we call early music, Baroque music. I made my first album for Deux-Elles in 2003, *Theorbo Concerto*, and then *Late Night Lute* in 2017. Four years ago, I bought the label from Patrick. I'd always been interested in sound. I wanted to offer an inclusive package to artists, so we brought the recording and editing in-house to the label.

I've taught myself a lot in the last few years. It didn't take me too long to get equipped with mics, preamps and audio interface. The editing side of it was more of a challenge. I rely on computer screen reader software, some of the audio editing software available just didn't give you the right kind of spoken feedback. I was looking around for software packages that offered good source/destination editing. Pro Tools is relatively accessible with an add-on called Flow Tools on the Mac. Then I started to look at Reaper for Mac. I found that for recording classical music it was pretty good. I came across this thing called Cohlor Classical, which is an add-on for Reaper. It's made by John Cohler, he's a clarinet player and does a lot of

editing. He had got frustrated, even as a sighted person, by what was available on the market so he developed his own code that sits on top of Reaper so you're using the Reaper platform and it's just full blown source/destination editor that's super fast and reliable. I contacted him and explained my situation and he took the bull by the horns and made it completely accessible. For anyone who uses a screen reader, you can do very complex editing, and really know where you are.

For example of one feature John has created; when you're recording if something goes above zero dB, it gives you an audible warning, and then it tells you 'at 2.46mins it went above zero dB'. Another example; you can hover over a channel meter and it tells you the peak level on each channel. It's been a complete revolution. I believe this software is not just useful to me, it benefits sighted sound engineers also.

We don't have our own studio we always record on location. When I go out to a recording, I transport everything on public transport. I've got the got two racks of preamps, which gives me 16 channels into my RME Digiface and my Mac. This all packs up into a little suitcase. Then I have a really huge back pack with all the leads, mics and stands, plus a large Manfrotto stand for my main pair. I spot-mic all the instruments with a collection of Scheops MK21 and MK2, I'm also a big fan of the Swedish microphones Line audio, and then I have a main pair – DPA 4006 – as reference mics. Spot mic-ing is not always common in classical recordings but for me it gives complete flexibility to control the mix in the edit.

> I DON'T HAVE ANY VISUAL REFERENCES OF WHERE TO PUT MICROPHONES OR THE INSTRUMENTS, I ONLY USE MY EARS. SO, BEFORE I EVEN GET THE MICS OUT, I'LL JUST LISTEN

I made the decision I would have help running the cables. When it comes to positioning the mics, there's no point me scrambling around, in amongst the cables, violins, cups of coffee on the floor. It's an unnecessary distraction when I can get a sighted person to take on this task and I can be listening. I don't have any visual references of where to put microphones or the instruments, I only use my ears. So, before I even get the mics out, I'll just listen and move around and get down or I'll stand on a chair, set the instruments positions and I just really listen to where it sounds best and use that as a starting point, and see what my ears are telling me. If I've got it right, then great, if I didn't then I keep trying until I know that I'm capturing that sound that I heard. I make sure that I am given all the visual descriptions, so I knew exactly where people were in relation to each other and the mics and the physical aspects of the room.

Sound engineering to me is just like playing the Lute, you're sculpting a sound picture. Of course, you need good players, you need a good room and good equipment. But if you put those together, then you've got a chance to come up with something really great.

**MORE INFO**
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