

Offstage Archive Interview- Ben Heintz
Music Director
March 21st, 2021

Olivia Kormos: How did you get involved in Offstage?

Ben Heintz: I had worked with TNT on their production in the summer. And in doing so, I got asked by Matthew and Chloe, who was one of the other musical directors at the beginning part of the process, whether I'd be interested in working with them in the fall and after I expressed my interest in doing so, they reached out and they offered me the role of head musical director for the season.

OK: And how would you describe your role in the production for people who might not be familiar with what exactly a music director does?

BH: So, on a usual production it is a lot different than it is on this one, a usual production being working with the orchestra as well as usually the writers of the show professionally, and the actors and actresses to help execute the music in a sustainable and healthy way that also meets the artistic goals of the show, and also being the bridge between the orchestra and the performers and helping the performers have clarity in their performances, and by clarity I mean clarity in their expression of their emotion, and through the music, through the singing. With this process not only is it that, but it is also contracting musicians, it is transcribing scores, editing scores, being a score supervisor and tracking the changes in set scores, getting scores to musicians, doing basic editing of the audio tracks as they come in, being the liaison between the instrumentalists and the audio engineers, going through the vocal recording process, orchestrating. Those are the big core things.

OK: What has your workflow on the project looked like? And if you want to talk a little bit about the fall versus this semester I think that would be good, because you were working with the composers to figure out what the songs look like and get them down in a score, versus now you're doing the recording [of the songs].

BH: In the fall, it was a lot of conversations with the composers and the actors on how they wanted to execute whatever story they wanted to tell musically. And as they started going through the writing process when we hit the spring, it became more of accessibility and bridging their ideas with tangible musical product. So, firstly, it was getting all the songs written down, and then, depending on the composer I was either getting some things written in scores, other things were just audio files, some were Logic sessions and taking the conglomerate and putting them all into written scores, and then taking those reduced scores and rehearsing with the performers to help them best execute the telling of their story, how they wish to tell it. In tangent

with that, some of the songs we were orchestrating as well in tandem with the composers, as well as at that point we were also hiring musicians, and then from there we were taking the individual instrumental scores and extracting them out and transcribing them onto their own scores to get those to musicians, and then starting to navigate how we were going to go about the recording process virtually. So now we're knees deep in the recording process, both instrumentally and vocally. And as we approach filming we're going to start adding in a lot of the instrumental parts in post.

OK: When it comes to adding in different instruments, was that a decision that the composers were making for their songs or you were making or was it some of both?

BH: For this particular project, everything was the composer's [ideas], so my job is, "how can we execute this?" Now, that being said, some of the songs, the composers didn't necessarily know or were comfortable with orchestrating themselves but had an idea of what they wanted to sound like, and then for those I took that, and orchestrated it on our end with the music team and then sent drafts back and forth until we found something that they were really happy with. So a bit of both, but mostly on their side. The most important part of this entire process really is that regardless of where the composers or the performers are coming from experience-wise, the songs that they're performing are a vessel for the story that they're telling and the biggest thing about this production is to be able to help create a platform for the stories without taking up any space on the platform so they are taking up all the space, none of it is us. So, it's a little different than usual production because instead of our artistic ideas that we're blending with their performance, it's just a matter of how we can best execute what they wish to convey, because whatever choices they make in orchestration or in performance is part of how they shaped the vessel of their story and their songs.

OK: What would you say the most rewarding part of your role has been and what the most challenging part has been?

BH: The most rewarding is definitely seeing the musical product that's being produced, and knowing that the entire space is being taken up by them in their voices, versus any of ours. Being able to see that and being able to see them be honest on a large platform is incredibly rewarding. And the most challenging being just with the nature of this production, there's a lot more that has to go into it basically than any other [show] and it means that I've been doing two or three full time jobs throughout the entire process, musical directing, score supervising, orchestrating, music contracting, working as an audio engineer and recording engineer, along with the sound designers and our actual audio engineers who are amazing. The challenging part is wearing many hats, but it's rewarding nonetheless.

OK: What has working on this project during the pandemic been like for you?

BH: Very difficult as musically, not being able to work with someone vocally in the same room is incredibly challenging, because you can't see their voice, you can't see the placement, so you can't really do any technique work at all. It's difficult- the barrier, the screen, is musically incredibly hard, especially because for a lot of these performances we've never met before, and being able to build the trust in what we're doing through the screen is very tricky.

OK: If you could give advice to somebody taking on a similar role to yours, what advice would that be?

BH: Hire more people. Hire more people, because if you stretch yourself too thin, then parts of your job will suffer. And for something like this, every little piece counts because of the nature of what it is and how important this work is to the people that are part of it. I mean, even though half-jokingly I say hire more people, seriously, hire people to work with you, because you will not regret it. And fortunately I have an incredible team of Chelsea and Tess, they're very wonderful, very helpful, very talented and passionate. But if someone is going to take on this role, know that it is not the regular musical direction role, there are a lot of different lines you will be walking on. And you will also be doing many different jobs that you would usually not be doing so, the more help you can get the better.

OK: I've been asking everyone, did I miss anything? Is there anything else I should know?

BH: No, I think you really hit the nail on the head, this project is incredibly important to everyone who's working on it, and I'm just privileged to be a part of it.