

Nevin Steinberg: Making the most of the old to design the new Broadway Sound Designer, "Hamilton"

Photo: James Capparelle



Sennheiser's Pro Talk Series on YouTube features interviews with the industry's most respected sound engineers, including Broadway Sound Designer Nevin Steinberg.

For Broadway Sound Designer Nevin Steinberg, whose long list of smash hits include "Hamilton," "Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella" and "Dear Evan Hansen", success stems from his ability to take something old – like the acoustics of Broadway's collection of Depression-era theatres – and create a beautiful new masterpiece of sound. "I think all Broadway theatres present a lot of challenges, both acoustically and technically, but mostly architecturally," he explains. "Designing sound in a building that's meant for the unamplified voice and unamplified music can be tricky. There's always a dance that you do to honor the architecture and then also trying to overcome it as much as you can; then I'm applying new techniques, or maybe there's new equipment, and I'm going at it fresh."

Such has been the case for "Hamilton," which is staged at the Richard Rodgers Theatre. "There's a certain obsessive quality to what we (Sound Designers) do, and

I think that's what makes some of us succeed," he says. "You don't tire of the pursuit of something better, and I guess that's what keeps you coming back. As long as you have that motivation, hopefully you'll serve everyone well."

For Steinberg, who is forever in search of new stories, writers, material and venues, the opportunity to work on "Hamilton" has been a dream come true. "I know it seems like the obvious choice, but Hamilton is one of my favorite projects," he adds. "The thing that people may not know about Hamilton, besides that it is a huge cultural success – the people who made it are excellent people and I've been fortunate to work with them on other projects as well. So, this is the culmination of a working relationship over many years. To be part of that team on a daily basis, it's very hard to describe. If you've ever played team sports, you might understand it, that feeling of everybody pulling in the same direction and achieving a common goal. All of those clichés are absolutely true. I only wish that people who see the show could also get a feel for that environment."

Steinberg's mantra? "I try to remind myself every day to try to play offense, not defense," he says. "I say that to my staff and crew a lot, and I try to remind myself of that when I walk into a theatre. To use that pressure and continue to thrive, I think that's something you can do regardless of your circumstances. When the curtain rises and the orchestra starts to play, or the actor starts to speak or sing, I try very hard to reduce all of the noise and make myself just an audience member in that seat that night."

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