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AIRNESS – STATEMENT OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Airness is the story of a tight-knit pack of nerds who compete in the air guitar circuit from bar to dingy bar across America. Illinois Theatre's production of *Airness* was performed at The City Center in Champaign, IL, and was brought to life in two separate spaces: a small bar and a concert venue. There was an inherent need for a connected production team to collaborate to assemble this production one piece at a time. The team started by touring the space a few times and grasping what equipment was available. Due to the venue's untraditional nature, every decision impacted multiple departments. The scenic design limited where we could put speakers; since the first space was not equipped for shows like this, lighting and sound had to plan our power usage carefully, and we needed to get all our equipment to the offsite location quickly and efficiently. Every department was intertwined from the first design meetings until the show loaded out at the end of the run. I constantly worked with the production's lighting designer and head electrician to find ways to solve problems together. As the audio engineer, I was trying to find the best ways to bring the sound designer's dreams to life while also making sure that our plans were feasible, given the limitations of the space.

Throughout the process, I met with the sound designer, director, stage manager, and scenic designer to figure out where we could logistically place speakers in our first small space to create the backbeat of the show while also not infringing on the space needed for the actors to move and rock out. Once we had locked in our speaker plot and how each power run would work in both spaces, we coordinated load-in alongside the other departments as every piece fell into place. I moved into having more conversations with the technical director about how audio could support not only our load-in but also the load-in of scenic and lighting since we only had six hours to load in both spaces. Many things that audio needed to do could not be done until the large scenic pieces were loaded in and lighting checked that each circuit could handle their equipment. I formulated our load-in plan to allow us to help other departments so that we could then get to work faster.

For this show in particular, it was important that the two spaces felt very different and as though they had their own identity. Our original space represented the many dingy bars the group traversed in their attempt to make it to the air guitar championship. When they finally reached the championship, the audience would get up and move into the second space to view the championship competition hosted in a much higher quality venue. We wanted to feel that shift in the space, so the designer wished for the second system to sound higher quality than the initial venue and make the championship space feel much more electric and alive. One challenge we faced was ensuring the actors were still getting what they needed. I communicated with them throughout the tech process to ensure they could hear the music and have what they needed. There was a lot of communication between the audio team and the actors, such as moving some monitors around so they could air guitar in time with the music. Making each slight shift would involve collaborating with the lighting and scenic teams to ensure that each design and technical element still had everything they needed.

Overall, this process was incredibly communication-heavy. If one department was not on the same page, it created a lot of challenges for every other department. As the audio engineer, I needed to take the time to communicate each update we had as the audio department, stay in the loop, and adjust to any changes the other departments made along the way. Keeping paperwork up to date so that everyone could access it was necessary, and being a good collaborator so that people felt comfortable working with me and communicating changes and updates. Throughout the run of the show, the production team continued to adapt to the challenges of being offsite, such as equipment needing to be changed out, troubleshooting equipment we did not own, and supporting each department as much as we could. Being able to adapt to each shift quickly and efficiently was vital to the success of the show. This was possible due to the community the production staff created during the design and tech processes, which stayed evident throughout the loadout.