

# Book Proposal for *Experience Makers: Careers in Live Events*

## Aims and Content

The start of the COVID-19 pandemic saw devastating layoffs and closures throughout the live arts, culture and entertainment industry. However, this shared calamity also demonstrated the inherent kinship among the five million Americans employed<sup>1</sup> in this sector of the economy. Despite the sprawling variety of industries and venues we populate, we all share a common task: making false worlds for real people.

Nonetheless, our industries remain self-segregated and this seclusion extends to the existing literature. No book draws together the diverse fields of live events to reveal the fundamental affinity among their makers who design, engineer and fabricate.

The primary aim of this book is career development—to expose makers to a broad range of careers in live events. This would not be a guidebook for landing an industry-specific job, but rather a study that reveals the working lives of makers in these disparate fields and demonstrates the transferable skills they all share.

As a theatre maker and educator, I help students connect their skills to adjacent fields. In this book, my field of theatre serves as a lens to study makers in the fields of performing arts, themed entertainment, museum exhibitions, parade floats, haunted attractions, live music concerts, houses of worship, retail experiences, immersive environments, living history sites, and other live events.

Foundational research reveals these key findings:

- Student makers are eager to learn about careers in live events, especially students of theatre but also engineering, architecture, design, art and fashion.
- Leaders in live events are eager to expose their companies to students and potential employees, in part due to a lack of clear training pathways to their field.
- Professionals from most live event industries acknowledge theatre training as central to their or their employee's preparation for the industry.
- Although existing literature demonstrates a burgeoning interest in drawing connections between fields of entertainment, most focus on the job search, many overlook the careers of makers, and none address a full range of fields.
- Despite the substantial amount of literature on makers, the strength of the maker movement, and the ubiquity of makerspaces and support (especially within STEM fields), a significant gap exists in connecting makers to professions in live events.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, et al., "Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, U.S. and States," March 30, 2021, [https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/acpsa0321\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://www.bea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/acpsa0321_0_0.pdf).

## Abstract

*Experience Makers: Careers in Live Events* pulls back the curtain on the artists and artisans who create the fantastic worlds of live arts, cultural and entertainment events to reveal an abundance of careers available to makers of all stripes.

This book follows the working lives of makers in the performing arts, themed entertainment, museum exhibitions, parade floats, haunted attractions, live music concerts, houses of worship, retail experiences, immersive environments, living history sites, and more. The skills of a maker are universal and this book shows how people enlist those skills to cross the porous borders of live events into new fields and professions. Readers will discover careers in design, engineering, fabrication and operation across a wide range of disciplines from costuming to welding and from painting to automation.

Beyond enumerating the occupations of makers, this book provides a lucid examination of contemporary careers in live events, informed by the tools of ethnography and supported by original research, quantitative data, and photographic documentation. This study reveals false divisions between the aligned fields of live events with impacts on education and training, on organizational relationships and collaborations, on workforce development, and on techniques and best practices.

This book is for makers and students from any background who are curious about applying their skills to careers in live events. It reveals an industry that thrives on bringing people together with diverse talents to create extraordinary experiences.

## Provisional Contents

### Chapter 1 – Performing Arts

- Theatre
- Dance
- Opera
- Case Study: Hudson Scenic Studios

### Chapter 2 – Themed Entertainment

- Theme Parks
- Water Parks
- Zoos
- Case Study: Bungalow Scenic Studios

### Chapter 3 – Museums and Exhibitions

- Static
- Interactive

- Living History Sites
  - Case Study: Design and Production (D&P)

#### Chapter 4 – Live Music Concerts

- Case Study: Lightswitch

#### Chapter 5 – Seasonal and Haunted Attractions

- Haunted Houses
- Holiday Experiences
- Escape Rooms
  - Case Study: Thirteenth Floor Entertainment Group

#### Chapter 6 – Parades

- Case Study: Fiesta Parade Floats

#### Chapter 7 – Houses of Worship

- Case Study: House of Worship Technology

#### Chapter 8 – Corporate Events

- Case Study: LIVE

#### Chapter 9 – Retail Experiences

- Case Study: Costume Specialists

#### Chapter 10 – Immersive Art

- Case Study: Meow Wolf Denver

## Chapter Abstracts

### Chapter 1 – Performing Arts

In addition to exploring what may be the most familiar field, the first chapter will establish a structure and vocabulary that future chapters will use. Each chapter explores the varied disciplines and processes of making, highlighting the unique aspects of each and identifying the similarities that connect them to one another.

The performing arts provide an excellent example of the making process for live events, in part because productions are often designed, engineered, fabricated and performed by the same company, operating with a complete vertical integration of the process.

The chapter will examine theatre, dance and opera together as a single field of performing arts while also identifying the aspects of the making process that work

differently in each. I will acknowledge theatre as my professional field and consider ways that it serves as an appropriate starting point to study live events.

Each Chapter will also include a case study that examines a specific company in greater depth. The case study for chapter one will be Hudson Scenic Studio, one of the main fabricators for Broadway, located in Yonkers, New York<sup>2</sup>.

## Chapter 2 – Themed Entertainment

Chapter two will define themed entertainment, a term that could apply to many live events, as an artificial, open-world environment based on an external theme or narrative for guests to explore for escapism and play. This aligns the chapter toward larger theme parks, water parks and zoos where theming is central to the experience.

This chapter also explores the separation of the making process from the presenting organization and the subsequent division of labor into separate companies and disciplines. As the world's first theme park, Disneyland demonstrates this progression from self-made world to sub-contracted franchise. This chapter examines the effects this alienation has on makers.

The case study will be Bungalow Scenic Studios, a major fabrication company for the themed entertainment industry in Orlando, Florida.

## Chapter 3 – Museums and Exhibitions

The third chapter will explore makers in a variety of museum and exhibition fields. Like themed entertainment, these sites can also apply a theme to their environment, generally an aspect of history, science or art. The primary goal of these events is generally pedagogical, though this goal is often achieved through play, exploration and immersion.

This chapter will also address living history sites which utilize costumed performers, some of whom are makers themselves and demonstrate their making process for guests while in character.

The case study will be Design and Production (D&P), one of the largest and oldest museum services companies in the country, based near Washington, D.C.

## Chapter 4 – Live Music Concerts

Chapter four addresses live concerts whose makers focus primarily on lighting and audio but increasingly on digital media, automation and civil engineering. Although events of other types can travel among venues, this is first field the book explores that

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<sup>2</sup> In June of 2022, Hudson Scenic was purchased by Great Point which operates Lionsgate Studios, one of the largest video and film production facilities on the East Coast. This move suggests a realignment or expansion of the company's work from theatre to moving image production.

relies almost exclusively on touring. This chapter explores the effect this has on the events and on the lives of makers in this field.

The case study will be Lightswitch, a major lighting and visual design company that began producing lights for arena concert tours and now also serves themed entertainment, museums and architecture.

### Chapter 5 – Seasonal and Haunted Attractions

Having examined four well-known fields of live events, chapter five will begin investigating the less mainstream fields of seasonal and haunted attractions. It will present a wide range of businesses, from mom-and-pop storefronts to corporate-owned franchises.

The chapter will address escape rooms, haunted houses and holiday experiences. Despite their differences, these attractions are closely aligned and even appear together at trade shows. Haunted attractions demand unique skills in pneumatics, isolating lighting and audio, costumes, makeup and prosthetics. Escape rooms rely heavily on comprehensive props and interiors along with interactive items. Holiday experiences range from exhaustively detailed interiors to outdoor lighting and audio.

The case study will be Thirteenth Floor Entertainment Group, the world's largest Halloween themed entertainment company based in Denver, Colorado.

### Chapter 6 – Parades

Chapter six reveals another field that extends across a broad range of sizes, from small-town events to national-level parades like Mardi Gras, the Tournament of Roses Parade, and Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Makers at one end of the spectrum enjoy year-round careers while others serve in seasonal or volunteer positions.

This chapter considers the unique challenges of making for parades including movement and travel, proximity to the public, municipal compliance, balloons and weather.

The case study will be Fiesta Parade Floats, the main builder of floats for the Tournament of Roses Parade, based in Irwindale, California.

### Chapter 7 – Houses of Worship

This chapter addresses live events that carry a deep meaning for participants and rely on makers to create experiences evocative of that meaning. Makers in these venues primarily enlist audio, lighting and digital media. Many organizations utilize volunteers to lead and support their making processes; however, the scale of events range widely, the largest of which employ all the technology and skills of a major concert event.

The case study will be House of Worship Technology based in Lexington, Kentucky.

## Chapter 8 – Corporate Events

Chapter eight focuses on an industry that receives relatively little attention yet commands some of the largest budgets. Corporate events are often used to raise the profile of a company and generate excitement within its ranks and beyond. Competition creates a race to the top for businesses that want to demonstrate their prestige with high production value. Makers in these industries rely primarily on staging, lighting, audio and digital media. Although events are generally only produced once, venues vary and usually demand significant technology and equipment from outside sources.

The case study will be LIVE, an event support and fabrication company based in Columbus, Ohio.

## Chapter 9 – Retail Experiences

This chapter explores events and experiences that focus on brand marketing in a sales environment. This type of theming uses a product brand to provide retail experiences a veneer of narrative or meaning for customers who primarily attend in order to shop. Although common in many retail spaces, larger brands create retail experiences with all the detail and immersion of a major theme park.

The case study will be Costume Specialists, a custom mascot and character design and fabrication company based in Columbus, Ohio.

## Chapter 10 – Immersive Art

The final chapter investigates one of the newest fields of live events. Although nearly any type of live event can be immersive, this chapter defines these as events that focus on immersive world-building and allow guests self-directed exploration. Many events of this sort are rooted in art installations or theatre and often utilize makers with backgrounds in these fields.

The case study will be Meow Wolf Denver's Convergence Station.

## The Market

### Readers

The primary readers of this book will likely be students, chiefly theatre students and undergraduates. Within theatre, current literature demonstrates an increasing interest in theatre-adjacent careers, especially in themed entertainment and live concerts. This growing interest can also be seen at the United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) where conference sessions on the subject attract large audiences.

Theatre faculty, few of whom can directly address this growing interest, are also eager to learn. Moreover, they are eager to demonstrate to parents and their administrators the range of career options for theatre students.

In addition, I am consistently encouraged by the number of students from engineering, architecture, interior design, fashion and art who actively seek out opportunities to learn about theatre and live events with an eye toward broadening their careers. Our new interdisciplinary minor in Entertainment Design and Technology (EDaT) supports exactly these students and this book endeavours to speak directly to them as well.

### Courses

In my institution, I would require this book for students in my Introduction to Production Design course (Theatre 2211) and my Professional Aspects course (Theatre 5220). It would be especially valuable for students in our interdisciplinary EDaT program.

### Competition

The main aspects of this book that make it unique among the current literature are its focus on the careers of makers and its consideration of a broad range of live event industries.

Two contemporary works address careers of makers in live entertainment, although their focus is on preparing for and landing a job. *Get the Job in the Entertainment Industry* by Kristina Tollefson provides strategies and exercises to support jobseekers with a theatre background. It considers transferrable skills outside of theatre and includes brief profiles of a range of professionals with careers in theatre, themed entertainment, television, academia, and entertainment equipment. *Navigating a Career in Technical Entertainment* by Jessica Champagne Hansen and Camille Schenckan (forthcoming by Routledge) positions itself as a guidebook for landing a job and includes exercises and worksheets. It also addresses theatre-related careers and includes interviews with a range of professionals.

Three contemporary books study the careers of makers, although their focus is solely within theatre. *Working Backstage* by Christin Essin focuses primarily on contemporary union workers for the purpose of elevating under-appreciated laborers. *Blue-Collar Broadway* by Timothy White investigates twentieth-century New York to reveal the impact of craftspeople and adjacent businesses on the creation and growth of Broadway. In Elizabeth Osborne and Christine Woodworth's collection of essays, *Working in the Wings*, historians share an eclectic range of artifacts and information from the eighteenth century to present day that shed light on the artists and craftspersons of theatre whose work is normally hidden.

### Format and Timeline

With more than forty interviews already completed, as well as a preliminary site visit, I have a solid foundation of research that provides momentum to the project. Adding to this research is the [Live Arts, Culture and Entertainment \(LACE\) Survey](#) that opens

September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022. With support and cooperation from USITT, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and The Themed Entertainment Association (TEA), I have contracted with SMU DataArts to conduct a nation-wide demographics survey that will generate quantitative data on makers in the broader industry. Considering the remaining research required and my position at Ohio State, I am planning a timeline of twenty-four months to complete the research and manuscript.

I estimate the completed book will contain around 70,000 words. Because the goal of the book is to show the working lives of makers and to help readers envision themselves in these fields, I plan on including 100-150 images, primarily photos but also production materials like drawings and drafted plates.

### Completed Interviews

**ATOMIC Design Inc.** - Joe McMonagle, Chief Business Development Officer  
**Bartha** - Chris Andrus, Audio Visual Manager  
**Blacklight Attractions** - Larry Kirchner, President  
**Boss Display** - Chris Jiang, Brand Manager and Business Development  
**Bungalow Scenic Studios** - Todd King, COO/Owner  
**Capitol Exhibit Services, Inc.** - Amanda Coggins, Vice President, Museum Services  
**Centerstage** - Olivier Ilisca, Owner  
**Chicago Scenic Studios** - Richard Mahaney, Vice President of Design & Production  
**City Museum** - Rick Erwin, Creative Director  
**Colonial Williamsburg** - Cheryl Ruschau, Director of Museum Theatre  
**Costume Specialists Inc.** - Greg Manger, President  
**Design and Production (D&P)** - Duncan R. Millar, VP Business Development and Marketing  
**ELOPE** - Kelli Borel Riedmiller, wholesale manager  
**Exhibit Concepts** - Andrew Sollenberger, Graphic Designer  
- Priscilla Esatto, 3D Designer  
**Exploring, Inc.** - David Walens, CEO  
**Explus** - Stephen Barnes, Account Executive  
**Hargrove, LLC** - John Aulbach, Vice President Production Services  
- Amy Sinnott, Director of Production Management and CAD Engineering  
- Maggie Hermanson, Experience Designer  
**Hudson Scenic Studio** - Ed Fisher, Senior Engineer  
**International Mascot** - Tom Sapp, Creative Director  
**John Creech Design & Production** - John Creech, President  
**kubik maltbie** - Gary Brooks, Executive Vice President  
**Lightswitch** - Chris Medvitz, Partner & Principal  
**L!VE** - Human Resources Manager  
**Mecca Design & Production** - Kenneth Mecca, Vice President  
**Meow Wolf** - Emily Reynolds, Director, Exhibition Engineering  
**Nassal** - Nick Wood, Design Manager  
**Otherworld** - Stewart Reber, Production Artist, Exhibit & Maintenance Manager  
**Paper Mâché Monkey** - Grady Barker, Owner  
**Paradiso Parade Floats** - Charles Meier, Owner  
**Phoenix Decorating** - Chuck Hayes, Sponsor Relations  
**Redthreaded** - Cynthia Settje, Owner



**Roto** - Jessie Hughes, School Programs & Exhibit Evaluation Manager  
- Jeff Pecchio, VP of Fabrication  
**RWS Entertainment Group** - Jeremy Doucette, Assistant Vice President  
**Scenic Art Studios** - Joseph Forbes, Founder  
**Scott Swenson Creative Development** - Scott Swenson, owner  
**SH Acoustics** - Steve Haas, CEO & Principal Consultant  
**Thirteenth Floor Entertainment Group** - Chris Stafford, CEO & Founding Partner  
**Wexner Center for the Arts** - Sonia Baidya, Lighting Designer/Director

## Author Information

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I am an Associate Professor at The Ohio State University's Department of Theatre, Film, and Media Arts where I serve as Head of Design and Technology. I teach in the Theatre's B.A. and MFA Design programs and lead our interdisciplinary minor program in Entertainment Design and Technology.

My designs have been produced around the country, off-Broadway and in the UK. My work has been recognized regionally by the American College Theatre Festival, nationally by USITT, and internationally by World Stage Design.

Publications include peer-reviewed journal articles, technical articles, a book review, and contributions to textbooks and exhibition catalogues. An upcoming peer-reviewed article will be available in the summer issue of *Theatre Design & Technology*. I served as a peer reviewer for *Theatre/Practice*, a publication of the Mid-America Theatre Conference (MATC), and for Staples and Hamer's *Modern Theatres, 1950-2020*, published by Routledge.

Professional memberships include The United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT), the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA), the National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME), and the International Organisation of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians (OISTAT). I also served as Assistant Curator for the US National Architecture Exhibition at the Prague Quadrennial (PQ).

## Curriculum Vitae

Included in accompanying materials.

## Sample Chapter

Included in accompanying materials.