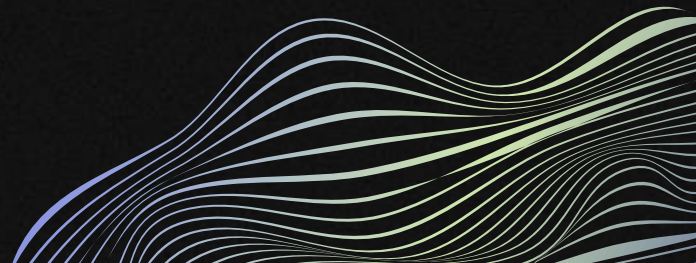


# Making Noise

An Introduction to Conceptual Sound Design

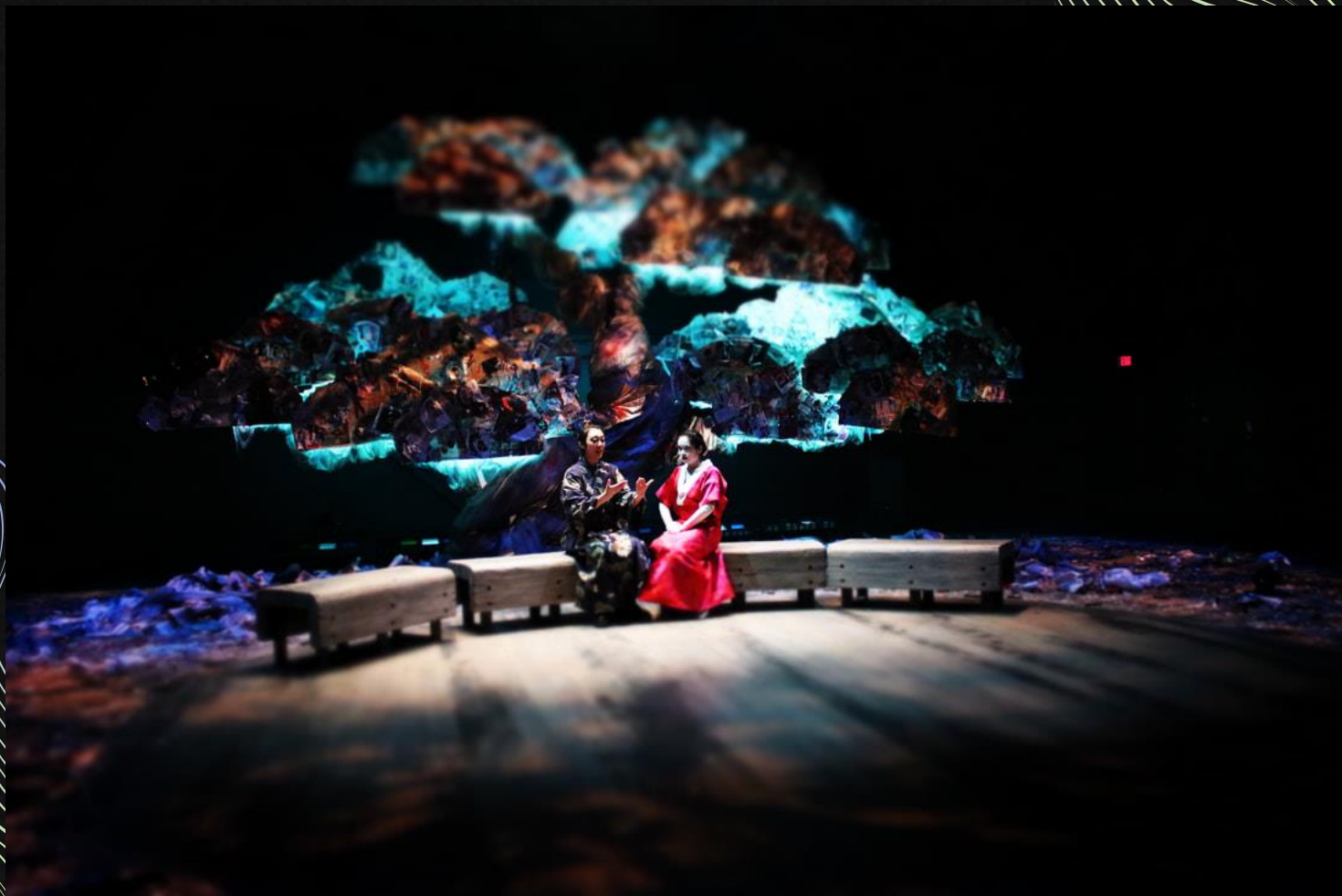


The background is black with abstract, wavy, light blue and white lines in the top-left, top-right, and bottom-left corners, resembling sound waves or fluid motion.

# Introduction

How many of you do sound?







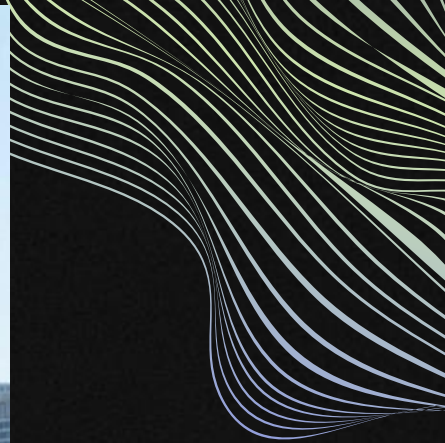
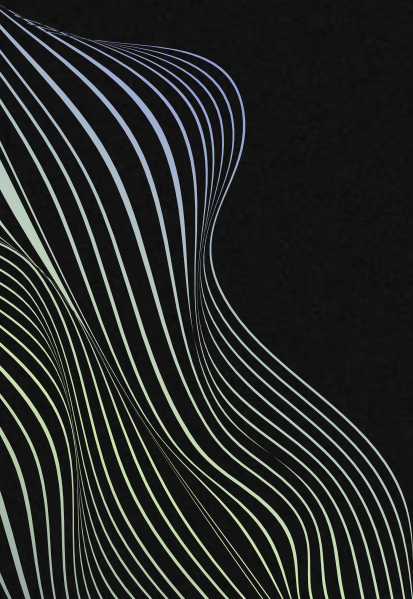
FRANKIE J. ÁLVAREZ

GUSTAVO MÁRQUEZ

# SEPTEMBER

A FILM BY COREY ATKINS

CHRISTOPHER STAUFFER PRESENTS A FILM BY NEW LANGUAGE PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS "SEPTEMBER"  
WITH FRANKIE ÁLVAREZ AND GUSTAVO MÁRQUEZ. DIRECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY EASTON CARTER ANGLE  
EDITOR KEVIN HORKAEW. PRODUCTION DESIGNER ELIZABETH MAY. COSTUMES CANDIDA K. NICHOLS. HAIR & MAKE UP AGNES LIN  
MUSIC ADAM KROMELDOW. DANIEL RUFOLO. SOUND DESIGN STEWART BLACKWOOD  
PRODUCED BY NAT MAJETTE. COREY ATKINS. ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS GABRIEL & SHILO TRONFI. JEFFREY R. SEAL  
ADAPTED FROM THE POEM BY JENNIFER MICHAEL HECHT. WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY COREY ATKINS









# Making Noise

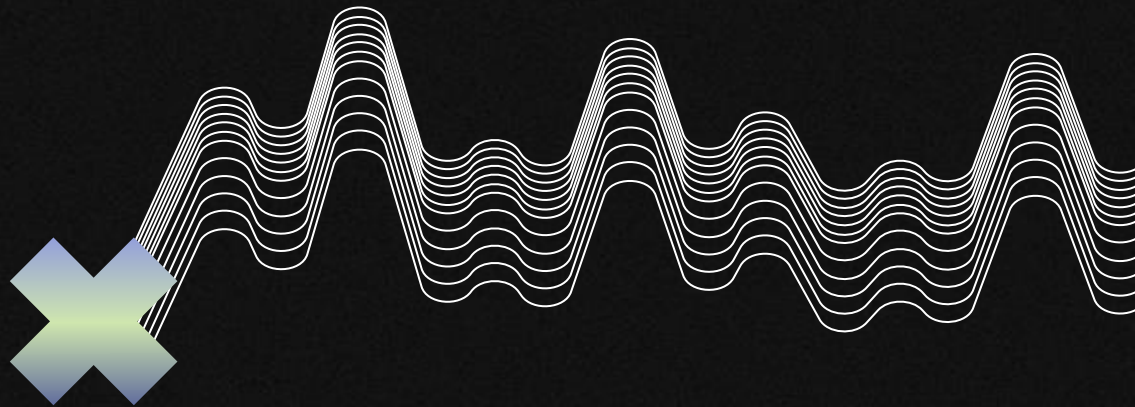
An Introduction to  
Conceptual Sound Design





## Defining our Terms – Sound Design

“The artistic practice of creating and manipulating sound to create audio tracks/effects for a variety of needs.

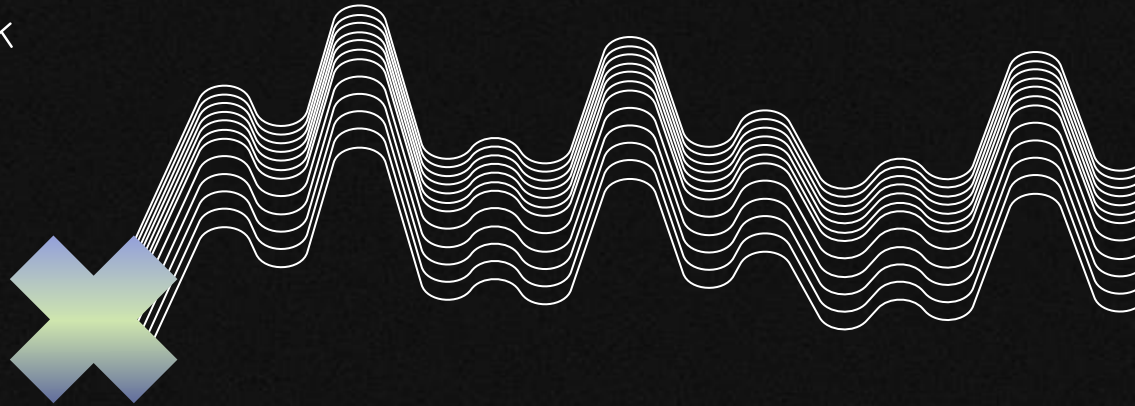


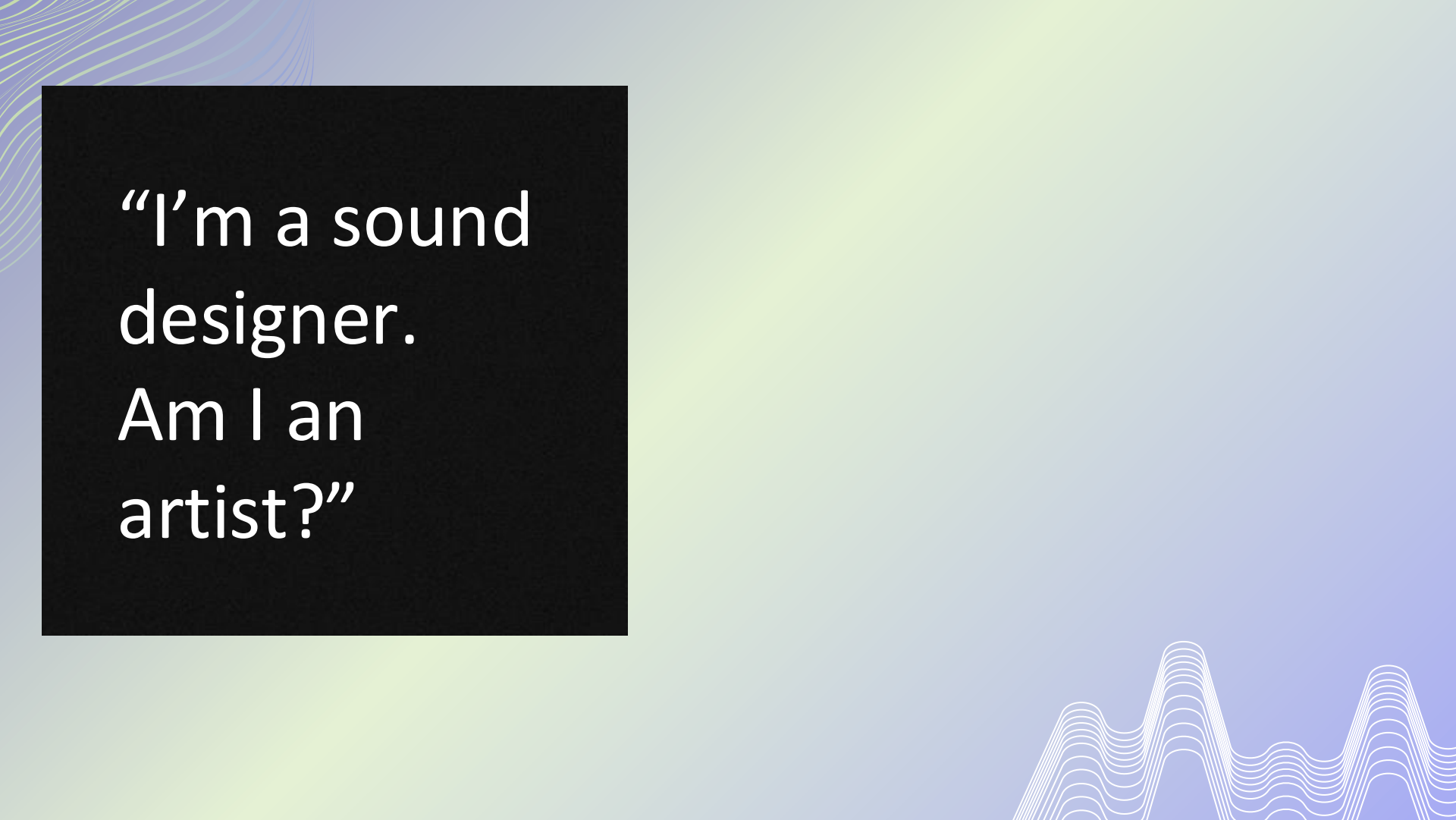




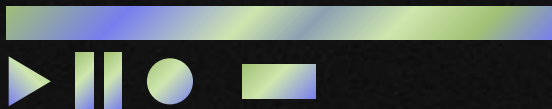
## Theatre Specific Definition

“Essentially, the theatre sound designer is responsible for everything the audience hears. Exactly what that entails can vary considerably, depending on the type of show, the performers in the show and the performance venue. In practice there is no single job description that encompasses everything that the sound designer does, as they will adapt what they do to the demands of a specific production. The Sound Designer has to be a master of many different disciplines and technologies, and to have exceptional teamwork and people skills.”

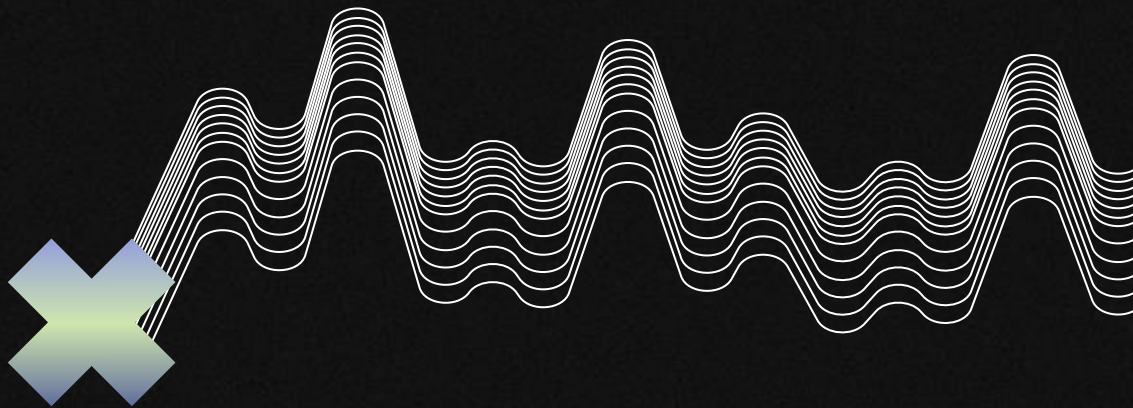




“I’m a sound  
designer.  
Am I an  
artist?”



Sound Design  $\neq$  Tech and Skills

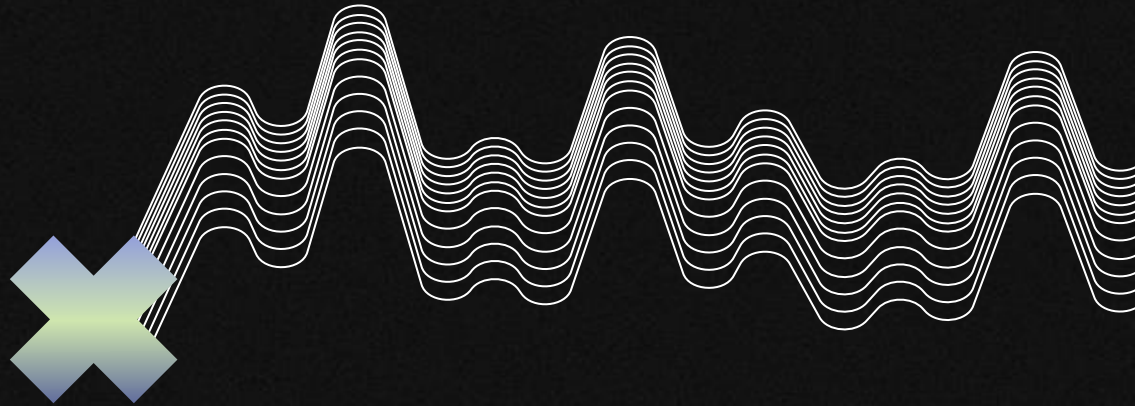






## Framing the Work

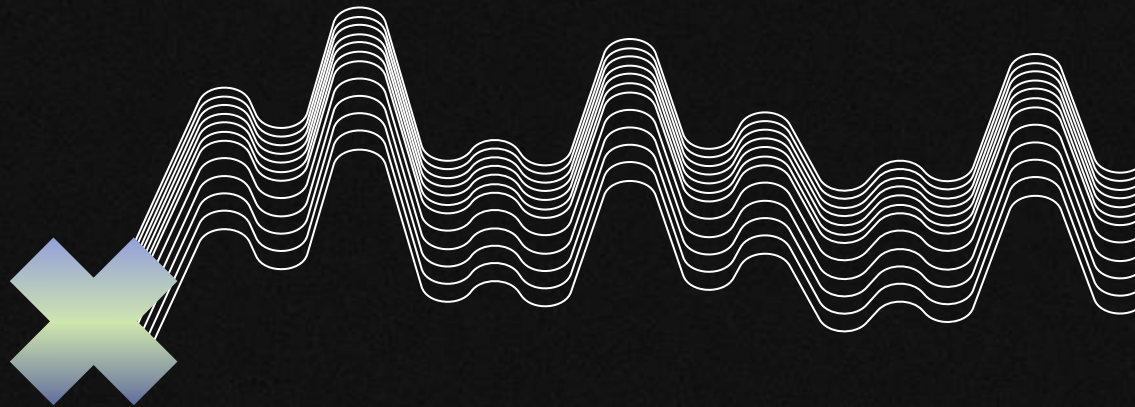
We often think of sound and music as skill or tech based. This is not true. These are the tools of the trade, but they are not the end goal. The end goal is an art making experience. You are responsible for the meaning of the sound in that art experience.





## Constructing a practice

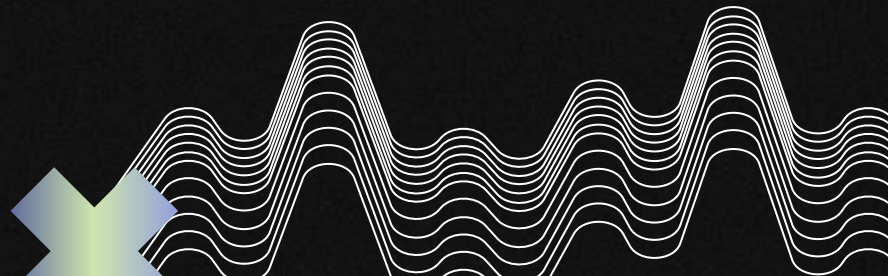
Consider yourself an ever improving artist.  
The work you do is your “practice”.  
Your work in sound is your artistic practice.



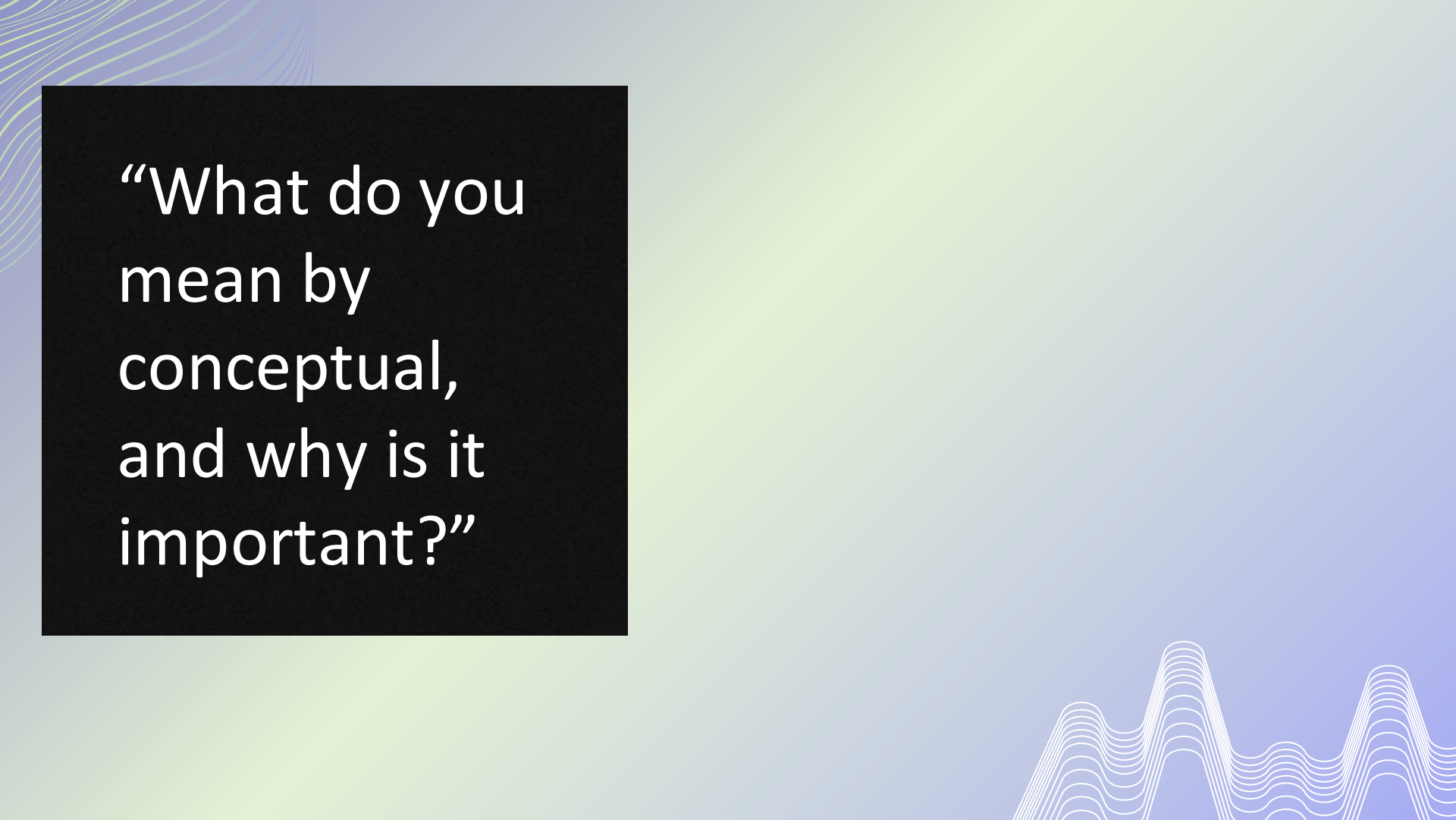


## Take Away:

Any sound practitioner can benefit from reframing themselves as an artist.







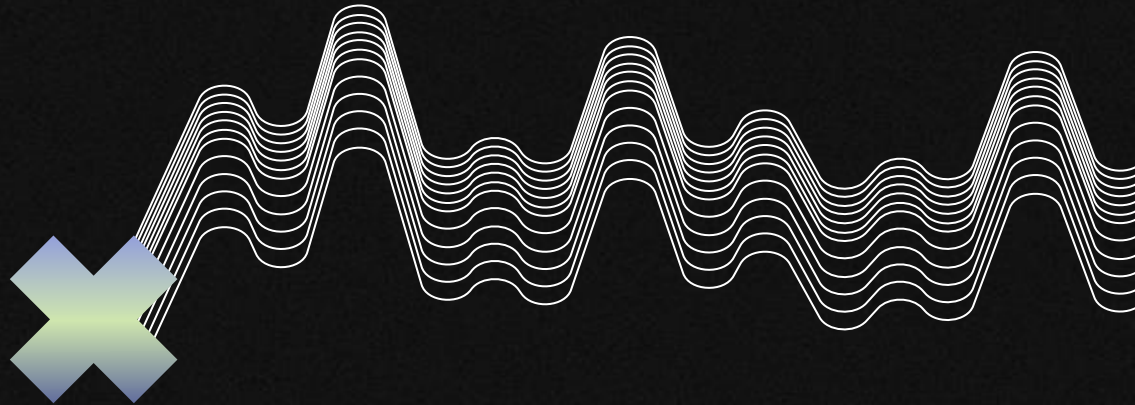
“What do you  
mean by  
conceptual,  
and why is it  
important?”



## Conceptual

“Conceptual art is art for which the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished art object.” – Tate Museum

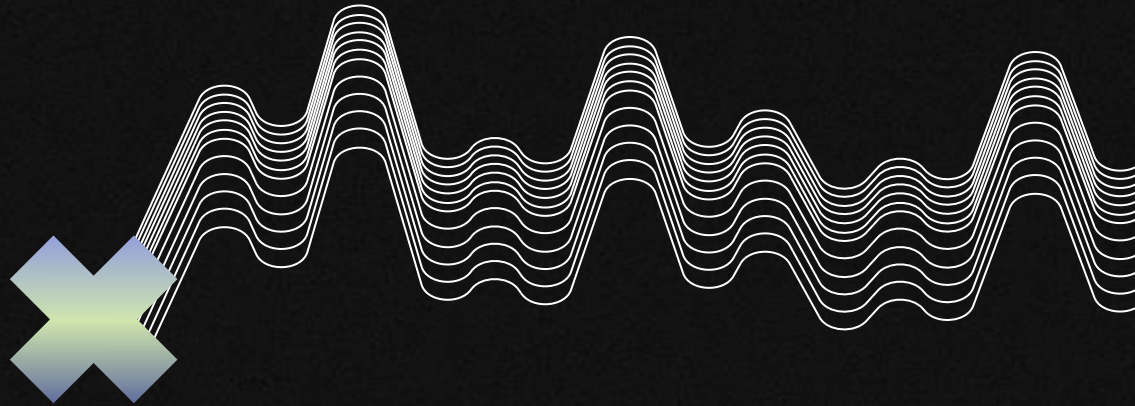
If we think about this in a theatre context, this is the idea that the “sound” is trying convey.



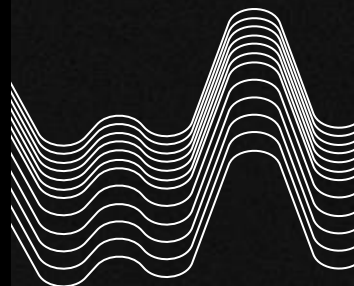
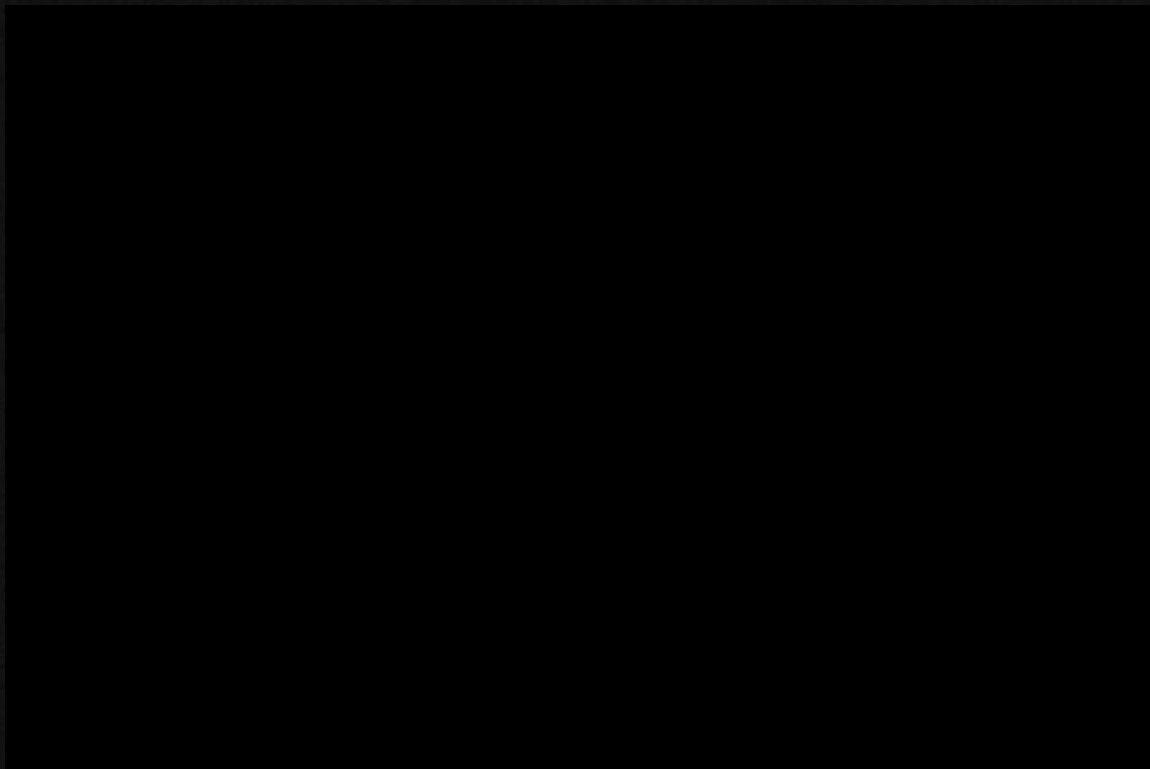
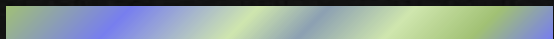


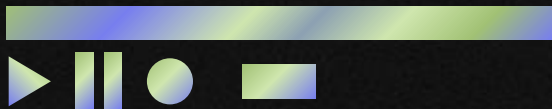
**Listening session:** If these pieces were in a scene what would they do to an audience?

- What makes this piece interesting?
- What gives the piece its distinct sound?
- What is the artist's intention?



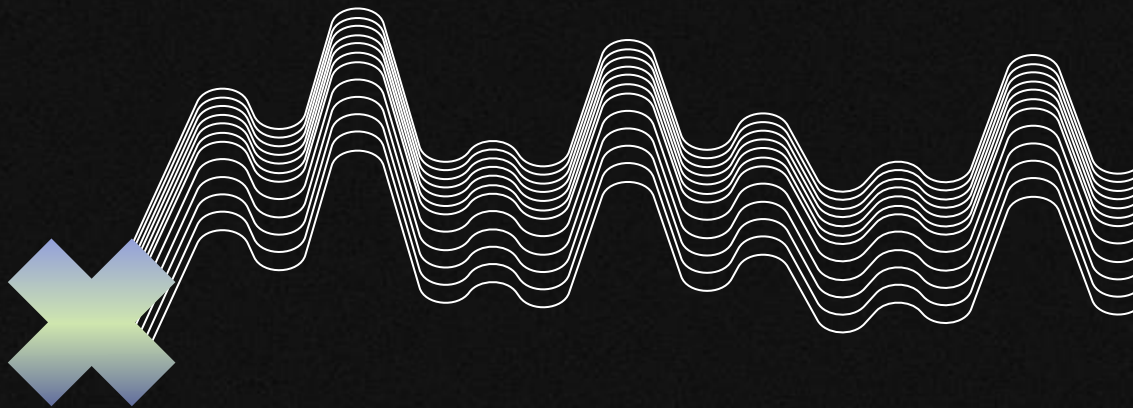


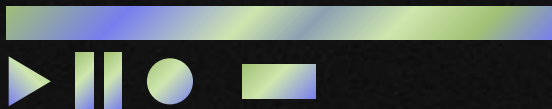




Further listening suggestions:

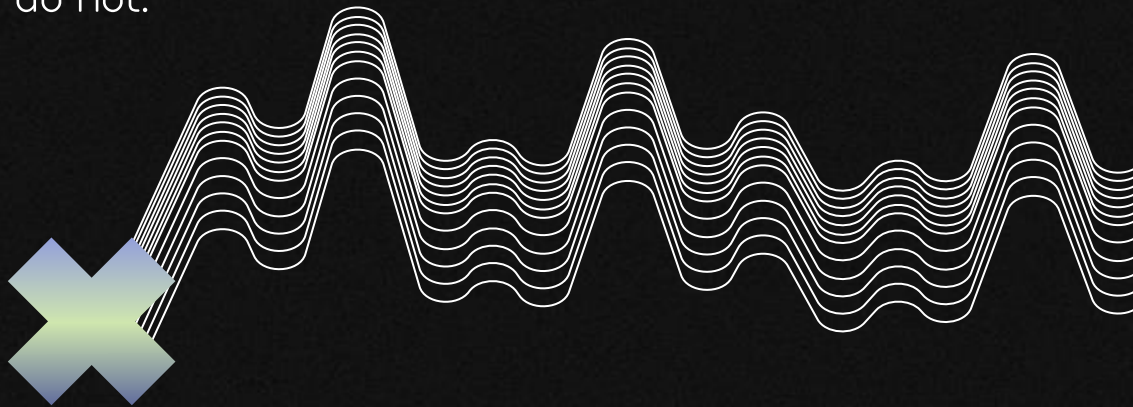
- Holly Herndon's Chorus
- Stockhausen String Quartet for Helicopters
- Miles Davis, Kind of Blue Album
- Alan Lucier's Sitting in A Room





The ideas that your content is representing and transmitting are the most important element of a sound cue. That is what makes the sound cue “work” in a scene or not.

The labels “good” and “bad” are unhelpful, as they don’t offer any information about how and why they work or do not.







## Take Away:

Sound is art. Every piece of sound has meaning. Treat every sound you create as a deliberate part of the whole.



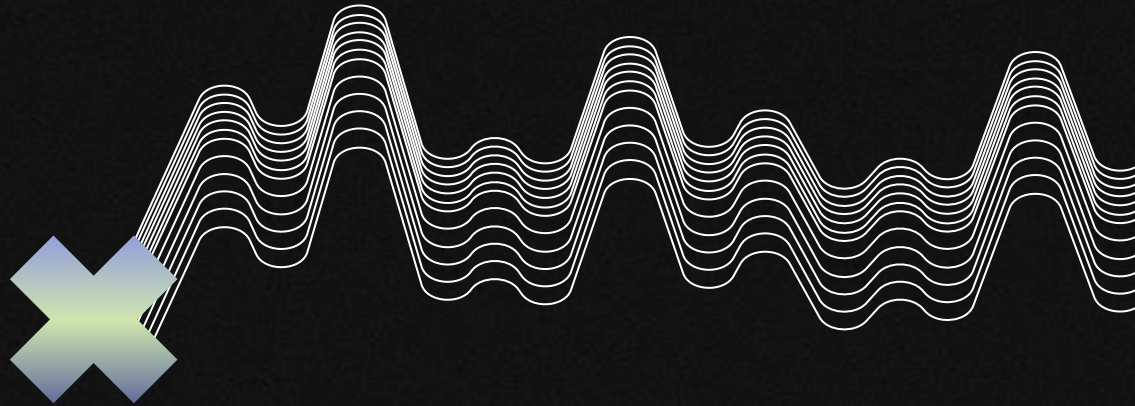
“How does  
one create  
meaning in  
sound  
design?”



## Concept Statements

Often we have a very clear directorial vision statement. This is a guiding light for the production as a whole, but it does not inform your sound design.

As sound designers, we need a clear SOUND DESIGN CONCEPT that is distinct from the production's concept.

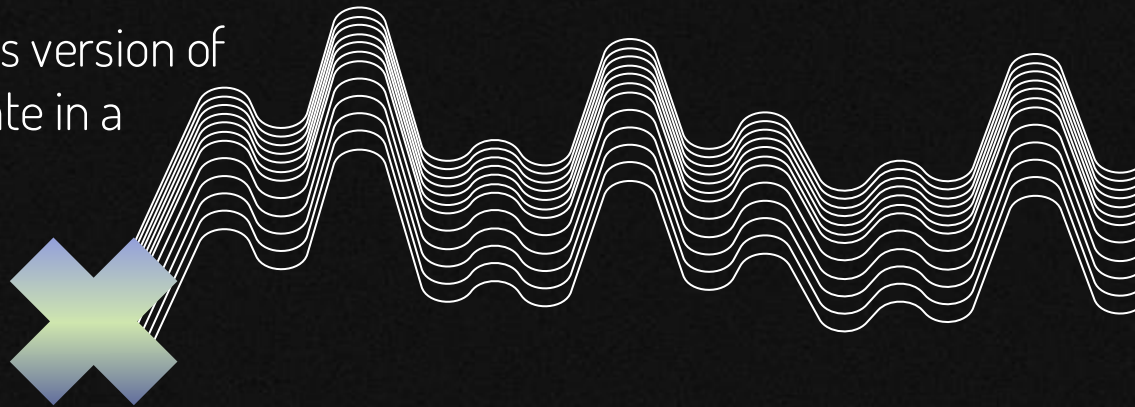




## Example - Hamlet

**SUMMARY:** Hamlet is a tragedy about the Prince of Denmark seeking revenge for his father's murder by his uncle, Claudius, who seized the throne and married Hamlet's mother; Hamlet feigns madness to uncover the truth, but his hesitation and vengeful actions lead to a cascade of deaths, including his own, his mother's, Claudius's, and his love interest Ophelia's, leaving the kingdom in chaos.

The **directorial concept** is that this version of Hamlet is set in a surveillance state in a technologically forward not-too distant future.



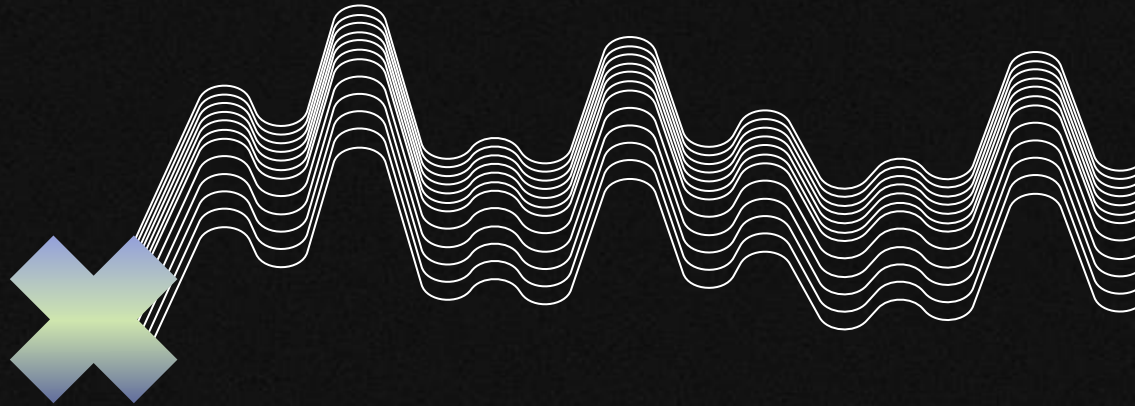




## Concept Statements - Hamlet

“Bringing the ever-present mechanical eyes of the state to life.”

Now we have a clear sonic palette in our minds. The whirl of machinery, servos, synthesizers, dark electronica, etc.

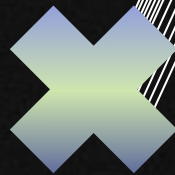




## Example – No Exit

**SUMMARY:** No Exit by Jean-Paul Sartre is an existentialist play where three deceased individuals, Garcin, Inez, and Estelle, are trapped in a single, windowless room in Hell, finding their eternal punishment isn't physical torture but psychological torment from each other, realizing "Hell is other people" as they confront their past sins and self-deception.

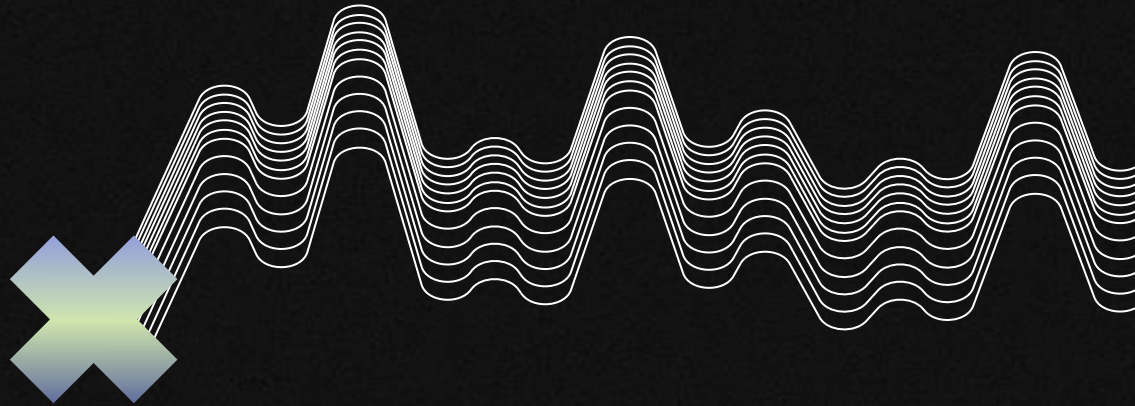
The **directorial concept** is that this version of No Exit is centered around people being "Hell", thus it is set in a luxury spa.





## Example – No Exit

“The feeling of being on hold.”

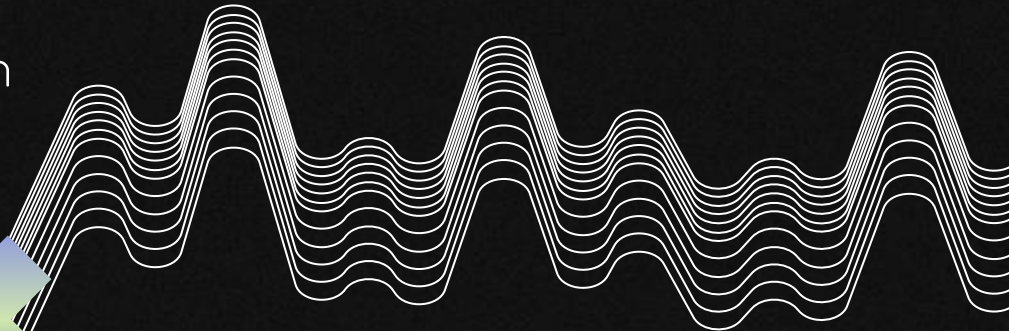
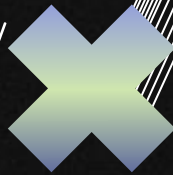




## Example – The Crucible

**SUMMARY:** A dramatization of the 1692 Salem witch trials, using the historical events as an allegory for the anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy era in the 1950s. The story follows the rigid Puritan community of Salem, where a group of girls, led by Abigail Williams, falsely accuse neighbors of witchcraft, leading to the execution of innocent people, including John Proctor, who refuses to falsely confess to save his life.

The director is interested in desperation for this production. She wants it set in the 1690's. No antibiotics, no soap. She believes everyone in the play is at fault.

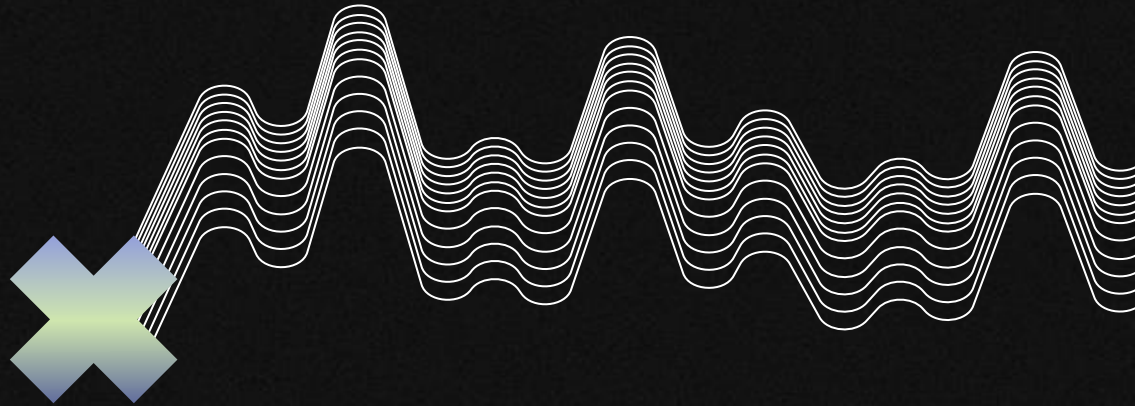






## Example – The Crucible

“Claps, breathes, chants, gurgles. Sounds produced by the human body from a close perspective.”

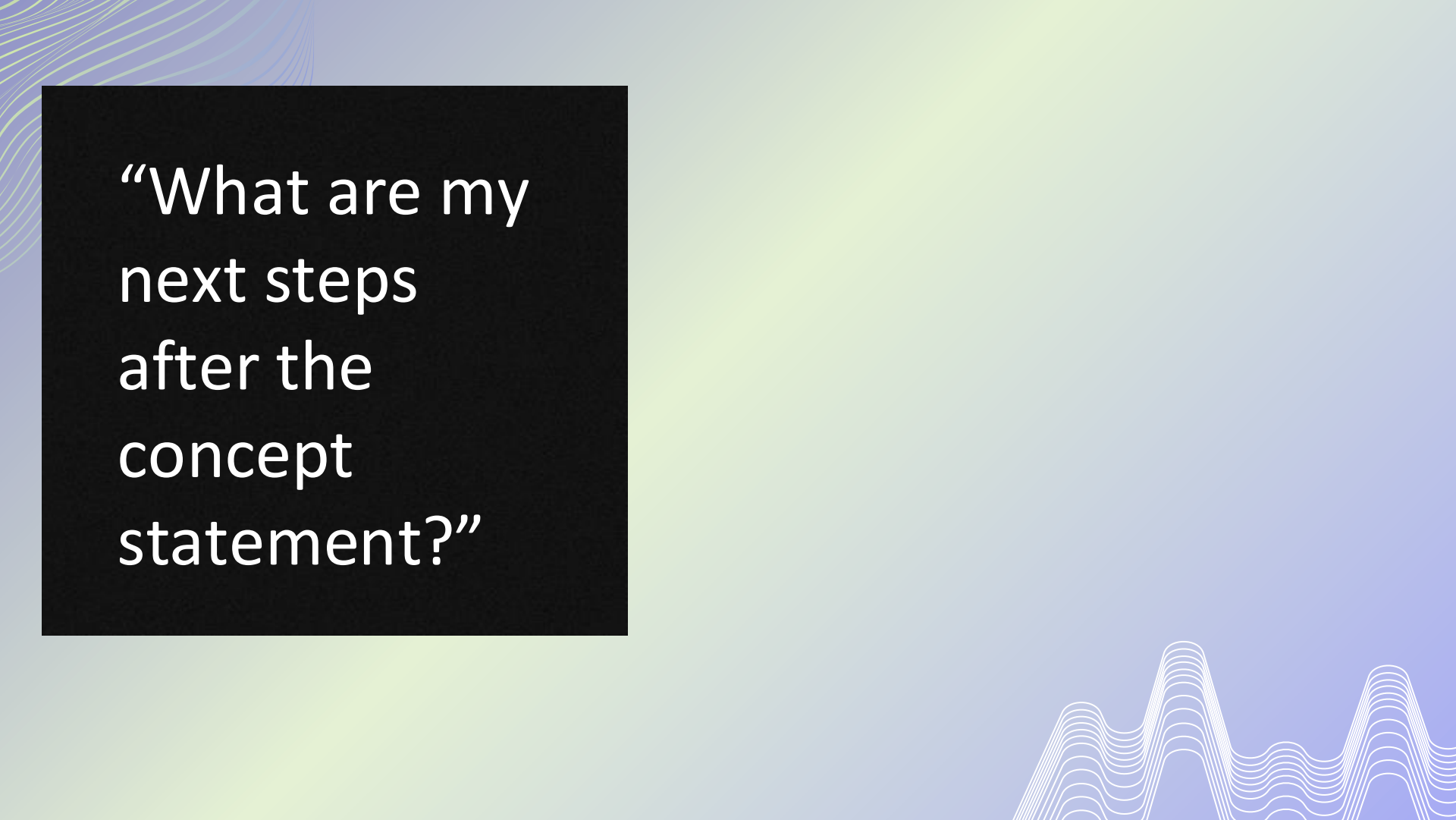




## Take Away:

Your concept statement is perhaps the most important tool. It guides content, creates better collaborations, and gives your work meaning.





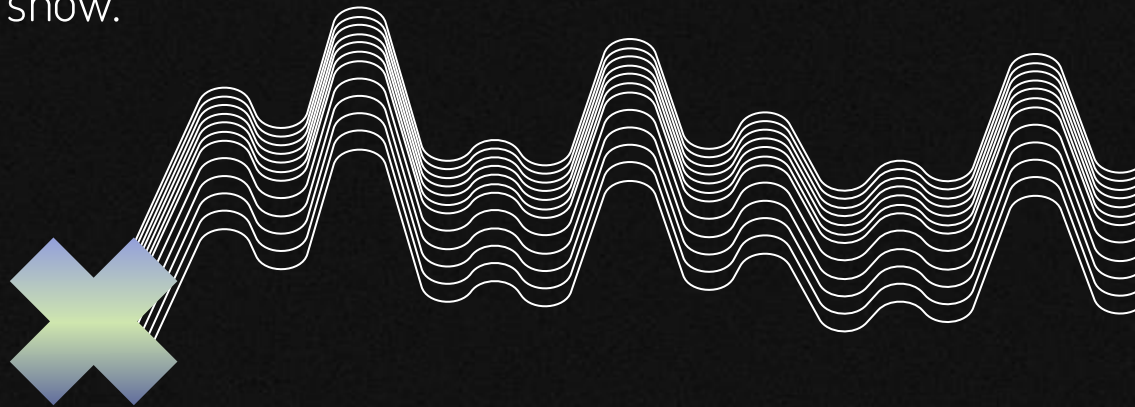
“What are my  
next steps  
after the  
concept  
statement?”



## Next Steps – Using the Concept Statement

You have three immediate next steps:

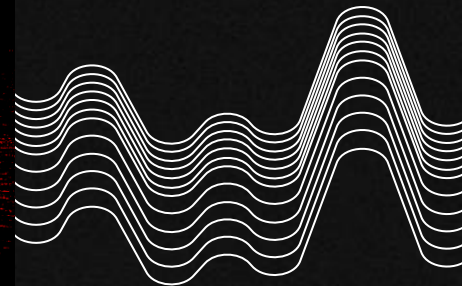
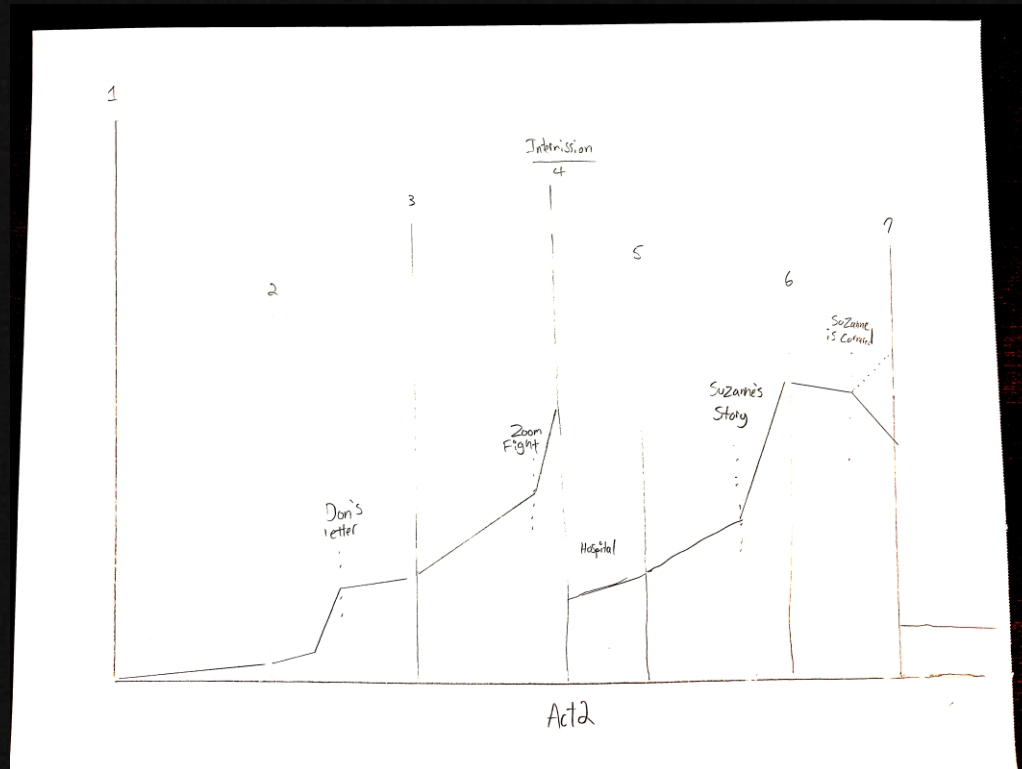
- Build a palate of sounds for your show. Look at your concept statement. This could be sound effects, ambiences, synth presets, purchasing an instrument, etc.
- Plot out the dramatic structure of your play. How does the tension build?
- Send the director a palate cue. Not representative of a specific moment, but representative of the tone of the show.







# Development Chart



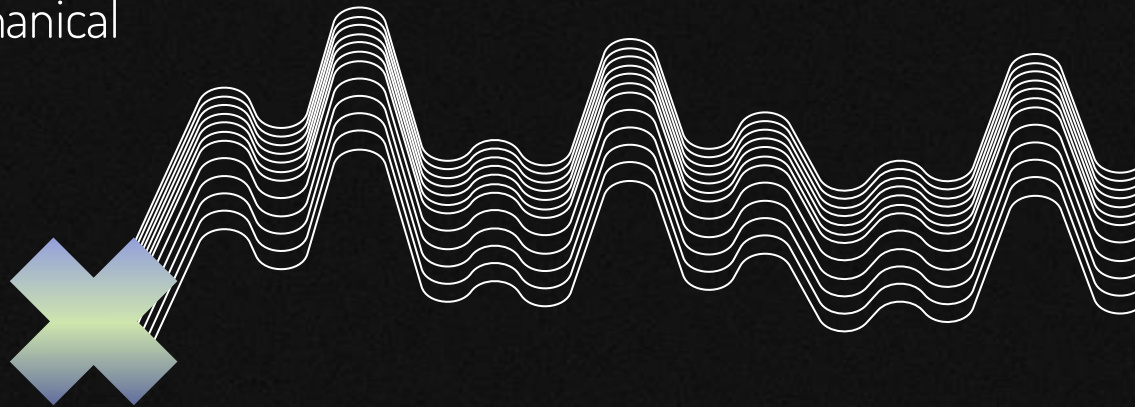


## A Note on System Design

Occasionally I get asked a question about how these ideas affect a system design.

This is a different workshop, but for now, let's apply a mental system design to the Hamlet concept statement.

“Bringing the ever-present mechanical eyes of the state to life.”





## Take Away:

You now have the tools to create a conceptual sound design. You will find that working this way is both simpler and more rewarding. This is the most important step while designing and the most often overlooked.





Questions?

