



BUILDING A ROADMAP

Diversity Equity & Inclusion
In The Live Event & Live Touring Industry



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INTRODUCTION

Austin Freshwater
MANAGING DIRECTOR | DiGiCo

Welcome to DiGiCo's inaugural report on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) in the live events and touring industries. This isn't an internal box ticking exercise, or a report to showcase how "good" we are as a company. This is an honest, unbiased look at our corner of these industries, and how, collectively, we can improve the experience of the individuals who keep them running. We are striving to help create opportunities, and make them more accessible for the new wave of talent set to embark on their careers in live sound.

People, and especially companies, too often cite a reluctance to broach the subject of DE&I, perhaps through fear of 'getting it wrong', or maybe they just don't know where to start. A good place to begin, we've discovered, is by talking openly and honestly about these – often uncomfortable - subjects and creating a safe space for those conversations to happen. Hopefully, that's what we've facilitated in this e-Book, and we will continue to do so. We have included some of our own initiatives throughout this report to provide context, and potentially even some inspiration for implementing some of your own.

It's in all of our best interests to ensure our industry is diverse, inclusive, and equitable. That it is as reflective behind the scenes as it is on stage. These are essential values to uphold, and we truly believe these are the key drivers of success for a company like DiGiCo - and the sector as a whole. We are acutely aware that we have a long way to go, but if we commit to learning and growing together, for the better, positive change isn't just possible, it's inevitable.

Maria Fiorellino
HEAD OF MARKETING | DiGiCo

We have a saying at DiGiCo: "It's our people that make us great." And it's true; all different kinds of people make our products what they are, the recognised worldwide standard for live audio mixing. We attribute a lot of this success to promoting diversity and inclusion. Diverse environments foster creativity and encourage a wonderful mix of different ideas.

This, in turn, leads to innovative solutions, improved problem-solving abilities, and a broader perspective on industry challenges.

Having had the privilege of interacting with numerous visiting engineers and crew members on the road, we've heard stories that deeply disappointed us, and it's this broader perspective that's compelled us to address the unacceptable experiences some individuals face. We also need to shine a light on the positives too, where people and organisations are making a difference, and hold these up as the ideals we should all strive to attain.

It's evident that there is room for improvement, and we firmly believe in championing impactful and lasting change. Let's strive to create a culture where diversity thrives, and empowers individuals to bring their unique perspectives and talents to the forefront of this industry that we all love.

We want our partners, customers, and the entire industry to join us in this endeavour. So please, let's unite and ignite a remarkable transformation that benefits us all, starting in a positive way (or maybe the 'DiGiCo way') with this eBook!



Q&A: Kevin Brown

Kevin Brown is a front of house engineer who has worked with several exciting artists including Chris Brown, Nicki Minaj, Post Malone, Childish Gambino and many others.

In his view, full visibility of the careers available in the touring industry needs to be taught in schools, especially where multiple demographics are present. .



Beyond the Mix: Kevin Brown

Kevin Brown is a front of house engineer who has worked with several exciting artists including Chris Brown, Nicki Minaj, Post Malone, Childish Gambino and many others.



MY INTEREST in audio began when I was around twelve years old, but I've been playing drums since I was six or seven," says Kevin, who has been "infatuated" with technology from a young age. "My grandfather went to a tech school where he learned how to fix televisions and radios, so he always had a workstation in the house. This is where I was introduced to circuits – I would sneak in to play with his oscilloscope and circuit boards."

Since then, Kevin has blended the technical side of music with the musical elements whenever he could.

As a pre-teen, he was introduced to the soundboard at his local church where his first mentorship in audio began.

"I was helping with anything I could, usually wrapping cables. My mentor, Denard Spriggs also known as Das, took me to gigs around the city and introduced me to a world I was unaware of. He helped me get into touring, but church was my segue. I learned about sound at Bethel A.M.E Church in Baltimore which, when I was growing up, had a pretty antiquated sound system. We had an old Soundcraft 24-channel console with Renkus-Heinz trap boxes. There came a time when we needed to renovate the entire production ministry, and Das spearheaded that. I instantly went from the Soundcraft to a 48-channel Allen & Heath ML4000 with eight channels of ACP88 compressors and gates. We also had a broadcast room upstairs, which was fitted with a 24 channel Soundcraft Ghost, multitrack recording capabilities, and near fields. It was a great platform to learn on."

Q&A: Kevin Brown

While in college, on a full scholarship, Das called to say: “your parents are going to hate me, but there’s an opportunity for us to go on tour with an artist called Musiq Soulchild, are you interested?”

“Long story short? I ended up on tour,” he laughs.

“Starting a career on the road at a young age was exciting, but I quickly realised that a lot of the time I was the only black person in the room,” he recalls. “Sometimes there would be two of us. When you’re on a tour with 150 people and only two of you are black, you both know each other; it’s comedically awkward.”

This lack of representation is something Kevin often encountered. “At some point I realised I had only seen two other black engineers pictures in magazines; Phil Strong mixing Kanye West, and Horace Ward mixing Usher. This really highlighted the importance of representation for me. Being able to see someone who looks like you makes things feel a little bit more attainable.

“There are actually a lot of diverse individuals in the industry, we just don’t tend to be as visible.

10 or so years ago I received a call from a sound company. They were looking for an engineer to mix a comedy tour. I love comedy tours – a comedian, two microphones and some PA? Sign me up! But I was not available. They said the production company had specifically asked for an African American engineer, which the rental company thought was weird. They had never had that request, but it wasn’t weird to me. If the client hadn’t specified that, it’s more than likely that the company would have called a white, male engineer. I thought it was very honourable that the artist specifically had that request because it shows that someone thought about it, and they were intentional about representation in their crew.”

This need for representation goes beyond just race. He continues: “I once recommended a colleague for a gig I was unavailable for. When I sent their name, the response I received was ‘Oh, it’s a woman? Let me check to make sure that’s okay’. My immediate thought was why wouldn’t it be okay? If I vouch for her as an engineer and you respect my opinion, then you’ll know she’s capable of the job both technically and personally. I do understand there can be exceptions to the rule, but ultimately she shouldn’t be disqualified purely because of her gender.”



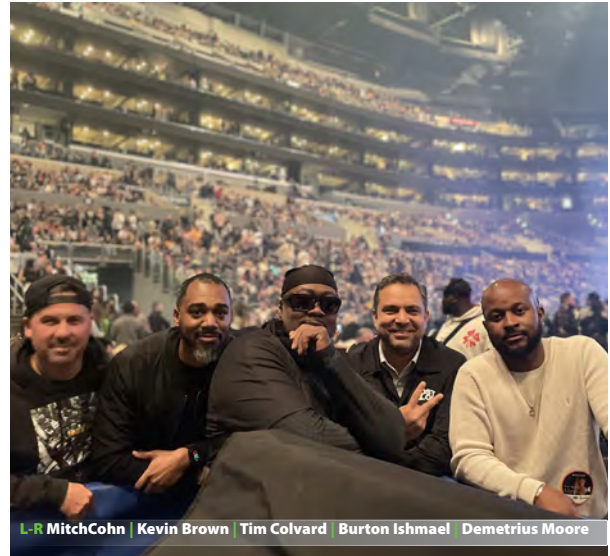
LR- Kevin Brown | Krysten Dean | Paul Walker | Marlon John



Q&A: Kevin Brown



L-R Dani Munoz | Kenneth Williams | Kevin Brown | Courtney Taylor | Phil Strong



L-R MitchCohn | Kevin Brown | Tim Colvard | Burton Ishmael | Demetrius Moore

Kevin says that despite a strong dislike of posting on social media, it's important to do so because that's where young people find others who do look like them representing similar interests.

"Whether that be a black or Asian male, a black, white, or Asian woman, knowing that someone does this for a job could inspire them to think 'I could do that too!' and that's important.

"The downside of showing our jobs on social media is that people get caught up in the glamour of what we do, but there's more to the job than the "fun" moments. To really excel in this career, you have to put in the time to learn the job. Patience is probably the biggest skill I would tell someone to practice. We work 12-hour days, sometimes more, and the other hours are spent on the bus, being around people, so you need to be patient and friendly. Be somebody that people want to be around."

"As a whole, we need to hire people who look different and have different opinions. This is how we all learn. Diversity needs to be everywhere.

"A colleague once asked: "do engineers in your position ever talk to plug-in manufacturers about creating pre-sets for different genres of music?" and the answer was "generally no".

"I used to find that when I would select a kick pre-set and listen to it, I didn't like how it sounded because it wasn't tailored to what I was mixing. At one point, most of the presets came from rock & roll engineers. It's little things like that, and it's spread out everywhere. A lot of these little seeds get planted and grow into 'standard' outlooks that we glaze over. Down the road, you'll realise that these seeds have subconsciously shaped your perception of the entire industry.

"I believe we need to visit schools in different areas to show different demographics of children that this is a valid profession, whether it be audio specifically or just touring, because there's a vast ecosystem inside of the touring world. They may not look like you or share the same background but, having a diverse crew will add value to the team and your production. Different people come up with different results, which tends to lead to a more positive outcome."

END



Q&A: AMANDA DAVIS

Amanda Davis is a front of house engineer from Memphis, Tennessee. She has been mixing live artists for 10 years and describes her route into the audio industry as not being 'typical.'

She says learning to be a professional in live music is part of personal development.



Behind the Faders: Amanda Davis

Amanda Davis is a front of house engineer from Memphis, Tennessee. She has been mixing live artists for 10 years and describes her route into the audio industry as not being 'typical.'



AMANDA'S LOVE for making music began with piano lessons. "I've always loved music," she begins. "I put everything into it, resulting in me later studying to be an opera singer, receiving a degree in vocal performance from Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts."

While we're used to hearing stories about audio engineers taking up the mantle after failing to make the big time as a rock star, Amanda had her own realisation about her chosen craft. "Being an opera singer wasn't actually what I wanted to do. I began thinking about music and performance, and I took a leap of faith and went to audio school. At the time, I thought that I would become a recording and mixing engineer. I didn't know a thing about the live audio world at the time"

To progress this newfound interest, after attending SAE Institute Atlanta, she took internships throughout the city of Atlanta. "I interned at multiple studios and although those experiences built me and taught me a lot about being an audio engineer, I concluded that I didn't want to work in a studio either! I've always been conscious of my quality of life. I'll get out there and hustle and do what I need to achieve my goals, but my quality of life is still important. If I'm not happy, I can't give it what it needs. And that's kind of how I felt about being stuck in the studio for long hours.

"Of course I needed to earn money, so I started working shows at local clubs in addition to my church gig.

Q&A: Amanda Davis

This church had cool musicians playing there; the drummer had toured with Sheryl Crow and the worship leader was a full time singer / songwriter, so I was very excited to work with those guys so early on in my mixing career.

“Regardless of your faith or your belief system, a church gig is a great gig to have because it’s consistent. You get to experiment and see what works and what doesn’t work. I’m not saying there will be opportunity for extreme experimentation, but you can really dig into what a compressor does or train your ear as to how certain microphones sound. If you can’t find a church gig, find a club or performance venue that runs open mic nights... basically anything that offers consistency and allows you to have different opportunities to explore different mixing tools and hone your skills.”

Amanda says her journey to live mixing “wasn’t typical”, largely due to the fact that she didn’t come up through a production house like many of her peers.

“After the church gig I went to work on a cruise ship as an audio tech which in a way served as my “shop” time. I’d say that I literally learned how to tour by going on the road. After the cruise ship, I started working with [singer/songwriter] Janelle Monae and went straight into learning on the job.”

Though determined, Amanda explains that touring presented “a bunch of challenges”.

“You must be disciplined to tour. Nobody’s going to wake you up for load-in, you’ve got to be an adult and get up and go to work. I certainly didn’t know how to tour and in the early days I made some mistakes that were probably annoying to people. I had to grow and learn to not take certain reactions personally. That’s the thing about touring, it’s never personal, we’re just trying to get the gig done. That was a big lesson for me to learn actually, because being a minority, a double minority in fact: a black woman, for some reason, I would come up against people who didn’t know how to deal with me on tour.



Q&A: Amanda Davis



“Trying to communicate what you need or what you don’t know can be challenging,” she admits, given the touring environment is often very white and very male. “You have to figure out how to navigate conversations as a woman but still get the job done and get it done well. It’s your professional reputation after all.

“While I was in school studying to be a performing artist, it was hard to take criticism when my instrument is my voice, but being critiqued as a front house engineer has allowed me to take a step back and ask myself, ‘am I being a professional?’ or ‘do I know HOW to be a professional in this situation?’ I think that’s the caveat of true professionalism, letting go of ego and learning to take constructive criticism without taking it personal.”

Amanda cites a key differentiation between knowing how to do the job of a front of house engineer and being a professional one is how you conduct yourself.

“Knowing that it’s not about you is important,” she continues. “If someone hires you the expectation is that you’ll do the job. When you’re mixing for an artist, it’s their name on the marquee, not yours. Nobody’s coming to see you group your drums or use certain plugins, so look at the bigger picture of why you’re there and what you’re there to do. Yes, you play a huge role in the client’s performance, but you must have a good balance of understanding your role.”

Her early days on tour may have been a sharp learning curve, but as a champion of minorities getting into live audio, her honesty is celebrated.

“I’m a firm believer that your journey is YOUR journey. Because I was in Atlanta, R&B, hip-hop, and recorded music was the big pro audio gig to aim for. It’s different now, but at that time that’s what was presented to me to go after. If I could change anything about my route into live sound, I would have moved out to LA sooner or got into a rental shop to learn how this sector of the industry works. I do wish that I knew about the live sound sector earlier, however I have no regrets and am very grateful for the journey I have had and looking forward to continuing on.

“A friend of mine that I used to tour with put it into perspective, he said ‘we throw parties every night, a live show or a live event is just a huge party, and you get to travel the world doing it, but you have to be disciplined and get the balance right.’ That resonates with me because audio is fun! It doesn’t feel like work to me, but I do work hard to be good at it. Tim Colvard and Kevin Brown have been huge inspirations/mentors to me, as have Jeremy Peters, Kyle Hamilton, and Karrie Keyes from Sound Girls – Soundgirls.org was the first to interview me and feature my work.”



Q&A: Amanda Davis

When it comes to preparing the next generation of young women, and hopefully young women of colour who are contemplating a career in this industry, she says: "Interviews like this one need to continue. I think we are seeing progress in the industry, but I'm 10 years into touring now, and the topic of inclusion still needs to be highlighted. We need to hold ourselves and each other accountable. That's really lacking when it comes to inclusion because people don't like to face hot topics like this and will often rather avoid tough conversations than face hard truths.

"The fact is women do get treated differently and black people get treated differently. Why can't I hold someone accountable for that without it being a thing? I've lived with myself my whole life LOL, I know who I am. So I choose to not walk into a gig wearing my identity on my sleeve because I feel it's just unnecessary and counterproductive. I have to make sure that I hold myself accountable as a professional.

I'm here to mix a show, my race and my gender isn't going to change at load-in, the start of the show or at load-out, so it can't matter. And if someone starts exhibiting behaviour and using language that shows it matters to them, then I have a right to protect myself by holding them accountable."

Accountability is a big deal.

She concludes: "A lot of the time people simply want to be understood and want to be heard but what they're trying to say doesn't come across well because of how they're saying it. We must be more aware of how we communicate so that someone can hear us. Especially in the music industry, and especially when putting on shows. It's highly stressful, with lots of pressure, so I completely get it, but I don't have time to think about your emotions or my emotions. At the right time, we can step to the side, respectfully talk about what's going on, take a beat to gather ourselves and move on. Ultimately, we are all here to make the show happen professionally."



Q&A: PHIL WRIGHT

Phil Wright is a sound designer and front of house engineer from the UK, specialising in large-scale classical and orchestral productions.

It was on his school's theatre productions in his early teens that he found the sense of belonging his neurodivergence had robbed him of in the day-to-day hubbub of school life..



Where Sound Found Me: Phil Wright

Phil Wright is a sound designer and front of house engineer from the UK, specialising in large-scale classical and orchestral productions.



IN HIS TEENS it was through his school's theatre productions that he discovered the sense of belonging his neurodivergence has often denied him in the day-to-day hubbub of school life - setting him on the path to becoming a sought-after audio engineer.

Phil came from a musical household - he learned to play several brass instruments and sang in the church choir. From that early musical training, he gained an understanding of the complexities of a full orchestral score, a skill that has been invaluable in giving him the ability to mix anything from very early to contemporary music. "I understand what I'm dealing with, which is half the battle," he says.

Phil was diagnosed with ADHD in childhood, but the language used to describe neurodivergence was very different in the 1980s and 90s and he never felt like he fitted in.

"My inability to cope in some of the situations at secondary school, particularly when there were lots of people around, was, I think, put down to being socially awkward, a bit weird, a bit gay," he recalls. Then he found the support of the theatre club and a community that understood him, making him feel welcomed and appreciated. However, it wouldn't be until his own son was diagnosed with autism, that he would fully understand why he'd always had to work so hard at communicating effectively.

Q&A: Phil Wright

“It wasn’t until I was doing my GCSEs and A-Levels that my physics teacher realised my brain worked quicker than I could write, then I was allowed to use a computer. Until that point, I was labelled as ‘able but lacks application’. Looking back, I can see that these symptoms were all part of my ADHD and autism, but the autism diagnosis didn’t come until 2010.”

Phil counts himself lucky to have been supported by exceptional teachers during his school career, adults who could see that he wasn’t thriving with traditional teaching methods and offered him more practical alternatives.

“My physics teacher would make sure I could realise theory practically, so if we were looking at thermodynamics, he would get together a bunch of broken radio gear, like oscilloscopes, and work out experiments for me to do. My chemistry teacher looked after the AV club and the lighting for school productions. Helping him with the lighting and audio led to working at Watford Palace Theatre, where I met chief electrician Jules Millard, who really took me under his wing.”

With the benefit of hindsight, Phil can see the part Jules played in nurturing his talent. His un-diagnosed autism coupled with his ADHD meant that Phil often had trouble communicating. Traits that would land him in deep trouble at school were recognised by the folk in the theatre and put to good use, but the language to describe how he was feeling still didn’t exist. Masking was not understood, so Phil had no way of figuring out what he was feeling or explaining it to his peers. Luckily Jules recognised he was struggling and was able to support him, even writing a letter of recommendation for the next part of his educational journey, a degree at Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

“The letter Jules wrote helped me secure an unconditional offer and I don’t think it’s too over the top to say that offer saved my life. Once I had it, I kind of escaped school and buried myself in my theatre work. Once I started at Guildhall, I realised the place was filled with people just like me and I began to see that a professional career in this industry was entirely possible.”



Q&A: Phil Wright



ADHD encompasses a massive range of behaviours and Phil finds that his brain tends to speed through situations and work super-fast through conversations. Sometimes he'll answer questions before they're finished or finish other people's sentences. He knows it isn't always appreciated and may have affected his professional relationships.

"One thing I've realised is that autism and ADHD are not a linear scale: it's more a circle of intersecting mental health symptoms, like a Venn diagram. I was really lucky that I started my career in a small hire company, so the people there were able to get to know me and see beyond these traits. I had real difficulties, but being given a bit of a break by those guys gave me the chance to flourish."

The language around autism and ADHD has developed since Phil was diagnosed. We now have a shared language that helps neurodivergent people communicate their needs much more effectively. On a recent tour, Phil experienced the power of this open communication.

"At the start of the tour, during our first night on the tour bus, a colleague told us that he was diagnosed with ADHD and taking medication. He explained his symptoms and asked for assistance in advance. I was so grateful for that moment. It meant that if he did something that was possibly not the expected response from a neuro-typical viewpoint, the crew responded in a much more positive way, saying, 'that'll be the ADHD, why don't we try it like this?' It's part of young people's vocabulary now and that's great."

Routine and consistency have been very important to Phil, but when the small hire company he was so happy in was bought out by a much larger one, he suddenly found everything was moving on at a pace that didn't feel comfortable. Kit he'd always used was absorbed into other shows and new people were in the warehouse prepping shows in completely different ways. Another ADHD symptom, RSD (Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria), took over and he began to take these changes extremely personally, causing him real pain. Luckily for Phil a good friend was ready to help.



Q&A: Phil Wright

"Suddenly my work sanctuary, my safe space, was in flux. It was a very difficult time for me. I know now that I was feeling RSD, which has led me on a journey to deal with my mental health, but at that moment I was devastated. It would have been very easy to just walk away from the entire industry and give up. A friend saw what I was going through, and really understood how hard the transition was for me. So he went round and put a little sticker on every piece of equipment I used regularly. In a tiny font, exactly in my eye-line, he typed "Don't Take It Personally". That small affirmation saved me. Whenever I was on a gig, not using the equipment I would have usually chosen, feeling like I couldn't cope, I would see those stickers and it helped me to build strategies to get through those difficult times. It helped me so much that, for a long time, I did it for myself!"

Throughout his career, the people that understand how Phil's neuro-divergent brain works are the people that remain firm friends. Part of his growth journey is understanding himself, too, and fostering an environment where everyone feels accommodated and safe. It's a journey that still continues, but one that has left Phil feeling even more positive about the industry he chose all those years ago and his place in it. It has also helped him mentor some of the students he now teaches at Guildhall.

"This is an industry that, for many reasons, attracts those that are neurodivergent. We are challenging all sorts of long held perceptions to make it a much more inclusive and welcoming space, where anyone, regardless of their background, race, gender, or neurodiversity can flourish. I feel that it's part of my job, as an industry grown-up, to spot when others are struggling. I don't always get it right and there is always room to do better. It's my hope that, by talking about my neurodivergence and creating space for others to communicate, I can set an example, much like my colleague on the tour bus did, so that others feel safe to speak up. Together we can keep developing the language and attitudes that will support the next generation of professionals with ADHD and autism."



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