

PROF ROSS BROWN

Job title

Emeritus Professor of Sound

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PROFILE

I am best known for my books on the dramaturgy of sound and theatre aurality. I was a professional sound designer, theatre musician and composer in the 1980s/90s and founded the sound design course at Central, one of the first of its kind in the world. I was one of the first to reframe professional artistic practice as research and submit to the Research Assessment Exercise (1996), thus helping to lay the foundation for the establishment of Central's research department. I was also part of Central's senior academic leadership team from 2002 in a number of roles, including Dean and, most recently, Interim Principal (2020). I retired at the end of 2020 and was honoured to be made Emeritus Professor in March 2021. I am married to a primary school headteacher and live in South London with a dog called Badger and a record collection that is getting out of control.

I was a home-counties, state grammar schoolboy in the 1970s. I played in bands, read the New Musical Express avidly, spent my school dinner money on gigs and vinyl and was good at art. I was supposed to aspire to Oxbridge but my heroes went to art college, so after a foundation at Farnham I went to Newcastle Poly, because it was as far away from Guildford as you could get. Moving to Brixton in 1985, I worked in art galleries and record shops and by chance became involved with two fringe theatre companies: The Shadow Syndicate, and Red Shift. We ran venues on the Edinburgh Fringe, made award-winning work and toured it in the Arts Council Small Scale funding bracket. Taking advantage of the increased demand for sound and music in all kinds and scales of theatre, in 1989 I used Thatcher's Enterprise Allowance Scheme to become legitimately self-employed. I balanced work as a multi-instrumental performer and composer mainly in the subsidised sector, with larger scale commercial sound work. I collaborated regularly with Adrian Johnson and Mike Roberts (a.k.a. Mike Flowers), composing and performing scores both for live theatre and for silent film screenings at international film festivals.

I was recruited by Central in 1994 to launch a BA in Theatre Sound Design and taught across several BA and MA production, art and design courses. For the first time in drama training, sound was positioned within the collaborative creative process (rather than as a technical service). As the only full-time UK academic specialist in theatre sound, I developed a discursive framework for the subject and a dramaturgy of sound, through articles, books, AHRC-funded projects and interdisciplinary and industry knowledge exchange, (see my impact Case Study The Professional Development of Theatre Sound, submitted to the Research Excellence Framework in 2014).

My later years were dominated by senior management duties, but I continued to undertake peer review work across the sector. Recent advisory work includes, the All-Party Parliamentary University Group (2020), the International Advisory Group of the University of the Arts, Helsinki, Finland (2019-20) and the Department for Education (2014). My latest book Sound Effect: The Theatre We Hear was published on 20th February 2020.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Theatre sound design
- The dramaturgy of sound
- The aurality of theatre
- The history of theatre sound and aurality

PHD SUPERVISION

I am not offering PhD supervision at this moment.

KEY PUBLICATIONS

Monographs

2020. Sound Effect: The Theatre We Hear (London and New York: Methuen Drama).

2010. Sound (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Chapters and journal Articles

2021. 'In Memoriam: Sound Effects with Ronald Harwood (1934 – 2020)' Contemporary Theatre Review, 30.4, 598 -600, DOI 10.1080/10486801.2020.1824670

2016. 'Bruit pittoresque / Cadres musicaux. La composition pittoresque et mélodramatique du son au théâtre' in Le Son du Théâtre edited by J.M. Larrue and M.M. Mervant-Roux (Paris: CNRS Éditions), ISBN 978-2-271-09356-1, pp.135 – 162.

2016. 'Fix Your eyes of the Horizon and Swing Your Ears About: Corwin's Theatre of Sound' in Anatomy of Sound: Norman Corwin and Media Authorship, edited by Jacob Smith and Neil Verma (Oakland: University of California Press) pp. 171 – 194.

2016. 'Changing Technologies of Stage Performance: Sound Design' in The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare, edited by Bruce R. Smith, (New York City: Cambridge University Press) pp. 1460 – 1467.

2015. 'On Vibrate: The New Scenographic Picturesque' in 'Sounding out 'the scenographic turn': eight position statements, edited by Adrian Curtin & David Roesner for Theatre and Performance Design, 1:1-2, pp. 107-25.

2013. 'The Human Auditorium' in On Listening, edited by C. Lane and A. Carlyle (Axminster: Uniform Books), pp. 94–99.

2013. 'The Eleventh of the Eleventh of the Eleventh: The Theatre of Memorial Silence', in Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage, edited by K. Bijsterveld (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag), pp. 209-221.

2011. 'Towards Theatre Noise' Theatre Noise: The Sound of Performance, edited by L. Kendrick and D. Roesner (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars), pp. 1-14.

2010. 'Sound Design: the Scenography of Engagement and Distraction' in Theatre and Performance Design: a Reader in Scenography, edited by J. Collins and A. Nisbett (London: Routledge), pp 340-348.

2009. 'Noise, Memory, Gesture: the Theatre in a Minute's Silence' in Performance, Embodiment & Cultural Memory, edited by R. Mock and C. Counsell, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars), pp 203-222.

2006. 'The Theatre Soundscape and the End of Noise', Performance Research, 10:4 'On Techne', pp. 105-119.

2004. 'Bartleby (extracts)' in World Stage Design Exhibition Catalogue—Digital DVD Edition (Toronto: Canada, USITT Press).

EXTERNAL PRACTICE

2004. *The Third Man*: original score (composed, performed, recorded) for Red Shift, London, Greenwich Theatre and National Tour. Widely reviewed nationally. 'Ross Brown's original music finds a sound that is as distinctive as Anton Karas' zither score in the movie' (*The Guardian*, 20 October 2004)

2004. *Bartleby*: original score for Red Shift – reworking of 1996 production (also produced and performed), Greenwich Theatre, Feb 2004 and National Tour. Widely reviewed in national press. 'Ross Brown's plangent score' (*Time Out*). Bronze Medal Winner (World Stage Design, Toronto 2005)

2001. *Here's What I Did with My Body One Day*: sound score for multimedia production, Aldwych tube station (also co-producer, with Andy Lavender assisted by £20,000 development money by the Regional Arts Lottery Programme)

2000. *The Blue and Green Ark* (with the poet Brian Patten): soundscape and score for live poetry reading – Brian Patten national tour

1998. *I Am Yours*: score for Shared Experience / Royal Court production, London, Ambassadors Theatre. Widely reviewed nationally, archived by the National Sound Archive, British Library. 'There are not enough sounds on the stage nowadays. The production that Shared Experience Theatre has given Judith Thompson's new play enforces this realisation. One of the distinctive features of *I Am Yours*, directed at the Royal Court Upstairs by Nancy Meckler is the creation of a scenery of noise, a sequence of background murmurs, which are related to, but independent of, the main action. There are low hummings and dull clangs. There are sighs and shudders and echoes, the trickle of water, the thud of an object dropping. A continuous, wordless commentary swells and fades throughout the play. These effects composed and orchestrated by Ross Brown serve to punctuate the drama, marking the intervals between episodes. They emphasise the unease and tension which runs through the dialogue. And, in belonging both to an inner and to an outer landscape, they project an important element of Judith Thompson's text.' (*The Observer*, 15 March 1998)

1998. *The Affair at Grover Station*: 90 minute score for BBC Radio Drama – a Christmas ghost story, broadcast 27 December

1996. *An Evening in the Weimar Republic*: Sound Design for cabaret by Marianne Faithful. The Almeida Theatre, London

1996. *Bartleby, A Story of Wall Street*: score for public production by Red Shift, London, Pleasance, Edinburgh, Pleasance and national tour. Fringe First winner, *Guardian* and *Time Out* pick-of-the-week. (Reworked and toured again in 2004)

1995. *George Dandin*: Red Shift Theatre Company, London: Cochrane Theatre and national tour. Interviewed by BBC Radio Four for Kaleidoscope on sound design and composition for theatre, with performed extracts from George Dandin score.

1995. *Crime and Punishment*: score (performed intradiegetically by the composer) Red Shift Theatre Company, London, Lyric Hammersmith and national tour. Musical extracts performed on Radio Four (Kaleidoscope and Woman's Hour)

1995. *Untitled*: score for contemporary dance, Milca Leon Company, The Place, London

1993. *Macbeth*: score for production by Red Shift Theatre Company, London, BAC and international tour (score operated and performed live by the cast) 'The possibility of the supernatural is still there in Ross Brown's score. Thunderous drum rolls, ghostly chimes and the menacing metallic rustle of cymbal brushes accompany moments of impending evil. The audio tape, visibly spinning upstage, has the air of an impersonal external power but the music could equally well symbolise the Macbeths' inner experiences as they let morality slip.' *The Times*, 27 March 1993. Restaged and reworked in 1994 for British Council tour of Chile

1993. *The Winter's Tale*: score for site-specific promenade production, Lancaster Duke's Theatre in Williamson Park

1992. *Reflected Glory*: sound score for play by Ronald Harwood starring Albert Finney, dir. Elijah Moshinsky, London, Vaudeville Theatre and national tour. Annotations of score incorporated as stage directions in published play text, *Reflected Glory*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1993)

1993. *Hamlet*: (collaboration with the Georgian composer Giya Kancheli) sound design for Robert Sturua / Georgia Drama Theatre production starring Alan Rickman, for Thelma Holt, London, Riverside Studios and national tour

1993. *Submarine* (with Adrian Johnston & Mike Roberts): original live score for screening of restored Capra silent film, Villa Borghese, Rome

1993. *Orchestra*, (with Adrian Johnston & RAI Symphony) conductor: Gillian Anderson) Wings: creation of sound effects integrated into an original live musical score for screening of restored 1927 film, (historically significant for its revolutionary use of synchronised recorded sound effects at its 1927 premiere), Villa Borghese, Rome

1992. *Orlando*: live score for touring public production by Red Shift Theatre Company (performed live by the composer). Score nominated for Best Sound Design - Charrington Fringe awards 1993. Featured on Kaleidoscope, BBC Radio 4. Widely reviewed in national press. 'Red Shift theatre company's stylistic trademarks are well in evidence, the cast of four scrambling in and out of costumes on stage and taking turns to accompany the action on glockenspiel and melodica.' (The Independent). 'The trademark exuberant theatricality of Red Shift is well in evidence: players rush to the borders of the acting area to pick up props and costumes, and take over from one another playing Ross Brown's arresting glockenspiel-and-melodica score. This is far from an earnest disquisition upon the Bloomsbury set: it's made (as all Red Shift productions are) to be thoroughly entertaining without sacrificing its brain.' (*City Limits*)

1992. *Treasure Island*: (with Adrian Johnston) original musical score for site-specific production of Treasure Island, Lancaster, Duke's Theatre in Williamson Park

1991. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (with Adrian Johnston & Mike Roberts): original score for Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow production – also onstage performer / actor-musician

1991. *Metropolis* (with Adrian Johnston & Mike Roberts): original live score for screening of restored silent film: Lancaster, Duke's Theatre

1990. Multiple silent films: *Dans La Nuit, Invitation Au Voyage, Voyage Imaginaire, Cinq Minutes de Cinema Pur, Aux Bonheurs Des Dames*: original scores for season of French silent films (Le Premier Vague) performed commissioned by the Cinémathèque Française and performed live at the Avignon Festival and Tushinsky Theatre, Amsterdam. Documentary feature on the processes of devising and rehearsing the scores for the Avignon festival made and broadcast by French national television (with Adrian Johnston & Mike Roberts).

1990. *Hands Up!* original live score for screening of restored silent film: Pordenone Silent Film Festival, Italy; Ljubljana Film Festival, Yugoslavia (with Adrian Johnston & Mike Roberts)

1989. *Die Nibelungen*: original live score for screening of restored silent film: devised and performed at Köln Philharmonie, Germany. Widely reviewed in German national press (with Adrian Johnston & Mike Roberts)

1989. *Nosferatu*: original live score for screening of restored silent film, subsequently performed at Edinburgh International Film Festival; Midnight Sun Film Festival, Finland; Murnau Society, Bielefeld; Ljubljana Film Festival; Phoenix Cinema, London. Featured on British and Finnish television (endorsed by Vivian Stanshall and Ken Campbell) (with Adrian Johnston & Mike Roberts)

1988. *Nightmare Abbey*: score for Theatre Caddis, Edinburgh Festival, Cannongate Lodge (Fringe First winner)