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Gerhardus Engelbrecht

Sound Technician

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY TO MAKE WAVES IN THE CUTTHROAT SOUND AND STAGING INDUSTRY

The different sounds at events such as concerts need to be clear and crisp. Consequently, the technical skill of sound technicians are absolutely essential for providing the audience with a satisfying multi-sensory experience. Meet 35-year old Gerhardus Engelbrecht, a sound technician, employed by one of Namibia's leading sound and staging service providers, db Audio. Born with a cleft palate, which affects his speech, Gerhardus has overcome this adversity and is today considered one of the best sound engineers in the country.

CHALLENGING CHILDHOOD

A cleft palate is when the roof of the mouth contains an opening into the nose. Often, this condition results in feeding, speech and hearing problems and frequent ear infections. Born with this condition at Arandis in Erongo, life did not start out well for Gerhardus, or Gerrie, as he is affectionately known.

He had difficulty breathing and feeding was a challenge. But, his loving mother embraced her first born's condition and Gerrie grew up a normal, but naughty and hyperactive little toddler, in a loving family environment. Following surgical procedures at age four to repair the cleft; by age nine, he still struggled to speak. "I knew I sounded different than other kids my age, but it never really bothered me. My family's love and support certainly helped me to make peace with my condition; and cope with the occasional teasing and insensitive observations", he shares.

Gerrie's mother refused recommendations for him to attend a special needs school in South Africa, and instead, approached a local speech therapist to help Gerrie, while enrolled at M.H. Greeff Primary, in Khomasdal. The therapy had the desired results and his speech improved dramatically, boosting Gerrie's self-confidence to levels where at age ten, he boldly announced that he wanted to join the church band and that he wanted to play the keyboards.

EARLY CAREER CHOICE

Gerrie finished school at Ella du Plessis High School, in Khomasdal. After a self-imposed sabbatical year, he told his mother that he was going to enroll at the College of the Arts to study sound engineering - a decision motivated by his experience as keyboardist in the church band, where according to him, "little attention was paid to how instruments were set up, acoustics and overall sound quality". "Our band's sound was all over - loud and distorted. I remember saying to to myself that there must be a better way of doing this. I've always been very curious as a child taking my toy cars apart just to see how they worked. I guess it was pretty much the same with sound set-ups and systems.

I knew I just had to find a way to study and learn more about the science of sound, and how everything works”, he narrates.

Any doubts he might have had about his career decision evaporated at a chance encounter Gerrie had at a World Music Day celebration, with renowned and pioneering local sound technician and dBAudio owner, David Benade. “I couldn’t keep my eyes of him behind the console, working his crew and testing the sound quality and acoustics. I moved to stand closer to his station, when he handed me a microphone to hold for a while. That’s how I met David. And that’s how I got hooked on sound”, Gerrie shares.

TRAINING JOURNEY

The encounter with David Benade had a strong impact on Gerrie, and motivated him to put his full effort into completing his training. And as fate would have it, upon graduating, he came across a vacancy advertisement by DB Audio for a junior sound technician, to which he responded. His experience in the church band, as well as his enthusiasm and positive demeanour, counted in his favour at the job interview. “I remember being somewhat bothered about how they were going to respond to my condition. But, I went to the interview with a mindset of giving it my best shot, praying that they would see beyond my speech impairment, and instead recognise my talent and passion”, he recalls.

Work experience is everything in the sound and staging industry and Gerrie grabbed the opportunity to serve as an apprentice under the tutelage of seasoned sound engineers and industry professionals such as Benade and Manuel Jacobs, with both hands, gradually working his way up into more senior positions.

TOUGH APPRENTICESHIP

Working at dB Audio has provided Gerrie with the space to learn the finer tricks of the trade, checking

and preparing sound equipment, minimising unwanted sounds on set, evaluating location acoustics and positioning equipment in the right places. “My training course only laid the foundations for my career progression. The real training happened here at dB Audio. To become the best, you have to learn from the best. I’ve indeed been fortunate to learn my trade from such tough taskmasters, especially with regards to live events”, Gerrie confirms. Although considered by his employers as one of the most proficient live event sound technicians in the country today, Gerrie keeps humble as he moves from one project to the next. “You never get bored in this line of work, because every project is different. What is important to me is when after you connect everything – microphones, cables, amplifiers and speakers – switch on your console, play your favourite song and it works; that is what I love most. When everything works from a smaller system to a big outdoor setup, when you connect everything and it works 100%, that is the fun factor about my job”, he shares.

METICULOUS PLANNER

Planning for and executing live events can be physically strenuous, requiring high levels of concentration and heaps of mental toughness. Physical fitness and dexterity are equally important and despite his relatively tiny stature, Gerrie leads by example. “Packing, offloading and setting up on site is heavy work and the process repeats itself when the event is wrapped up. It’s taxing – both physically and mentally – but I’m always up for it. Don’t be fooled by my stature – dynamite comes in small packages”, he jokes.

Gerrie’s work ethic and energy continue to earn him the respect of colleagues and industry peers, who hold him in high esteem as a diligent and driven team leader. “It’s simple, really ! Why bother to do something, if you cannot do it well. I live by this credo, and I expect my team members to do so, as well. And it all starts with your planning. If you plan well, your chances of a successful event are just so much better”, he observes. “There are no shortcuts to quality. At the end of the day, it is quality service that will determine whether a client would want to continue doing business with us, or not”, he adds.

LIFELONG LEARNER

Gerrie’s faith, passion for what he does and commitment to excellence, stand him in good stead as he continues to make waves in the sound and staging industry. His employers have rewarded his loyal and dedicated service and contribution with shareholding in the company. His mindset of continuous learning makes him to grow in his chosen career path. “The owners have embraced a culture of continuous learning at dB Audio. We appreciate that to remain a leader in our industry, we need to invest in the training of our people and ensure their exposure to the latest developments. The training has a holistic focus and we assign an important premium

