



Redraw the Balance: Diversity in Sound

04/25/2017 12:12 pm ET



By Beckie Thornton & Tess Ludlow, GCRS

As young women working in an industry that is still overshadowed by a staggering lack of equality, it is not often we have the opportunity to work on a project directed, produced, animated and edited by a team of (predominantly) women.

So, when we were approached to collaborate with a group of female industry talents and asked to create the sound design for [Let's Get Animated](#), the second Redraw the Balance spot from Inspiring Girls International, it was something of a dream brief.

[VIDEO: Let's Get Animated](#)



Redraw the Balance shines a light on representations of women in animated productions and the ongoing lack of gender parity within these roles, with a call to studio heads to address this imbalance through the characterisations they produce for TV and beyond. It was an exciting project in which to get involved and we leapt at the chance to work with a great team dedicated to further raising the aspirations of young girls around the world by connecting them with female role models.

In the animation, women were portrayed in a variety of typically male roles – a carpenter, an astronaut, a coder – putting paid to the typecast in animation that we are all damsels in distress or lovesick princesses looking to be swooped off our feet by Prince Charming. Working closely with the team at MullenLowe London, we were able to really flex our creative instincts recording the VO, writing songs for the characters and designing the sound. The final work not only calls out antiquated stereotypes but makes it clear that children need to see variety and balance in their role models.

This call to action really chimed with our own personal experiences as young women breaking into the industry. It is challenging for women to break through the creative sector's glass ceiling but since The 3% Conference identified the imbalance within the advertising community we have seen some real change. We work with superb female directors, producers and creatives but if we look at audio and sound design, the picture is less positive. The sound industry is changing, but as young women aspiring to progress in sound design, we are still very much in a minority.

We first noticed we were entering a male-dominated industry at university, whilst studying music technology and audio respectively. Looking out at our graduating classes, women made up less than 5% of the intake – and that was before any of us had even stepped into the professional world.

Working together on this project, it made us reflect on our experiences and try to understand why progression has not happened as fast as we would hope. One consideration was the technical side of sound design; there is so much to learn regarding the hardware and software that, initially, it is daunting particularly when STEM subject stereotypes are foisted on girls and boys from a young age. Or perhaps it is the absence of inspiration coming from the industry potentially influencing young women – we can count on one hand the female sound design role models we have had in our careers. Many girls may simply not be aware of the career paths in the field and so young women may feel that the sound industry is less attainable.

It is clear there is work to be done on demystifying a career in sound design; raising awareness of the craft and the career routes in the field is vital if we are to help open channels. Educating people from a young age about the fact that it is an accessible and exciting industry for men and women alike is key. We must also move the focus from the lack of women in the industry, and start concentrating on the people who are currently in leading roles to learn from them and their achievements. A career path in sound might seem more appealing to younger women if they can see role models clearly, rather than having to search high and low in order to find someone to whom to aspire. Increasing the visibility of prominent female ambassadors for sound will make young women more aware of our industry as a career option.

Women in sound want to be recognised for their work, not their gender – so addressing the issue is a bit of a double edged sword. But the bias is something which needs to be addressed in order to attract new talent. We stuck to our guns and went after a career, regardless of any diversity hurdles we encountered on the way. However, opening up the field should not be a matter of stubborn determination: it should be more accessible.

Misconceptions and barriers can only be eradicated by showing our industry and the people we want to enter it, that men and women alike can have equally prosperous careers in whatever field they choose. How do we do that? We need to engage with schools and colleges and let them know about our industry and the multi-disciplines therein. It really comes down to encouraging girls to get there in the first place, to redraw the balance.