

Sisterhood of technicians



Melony Eksteen

Melony Eksteen is someone who has walked the walk. She started her career at the South African Roadies Association (SARA) and worked her way up to become the technical manager of the Roodepoort Theatre where her passion to deliver uncompromised technical solutions is only surpassed by the quiet strength and respect that she gives each person who comes her way. During a coffee break at a recent DWR training day, Melony told us about the Sisterhood of Technicians (TechSis), a support group she started for women working in the live events industry. Thank you Melony for submitting this write-up.

Why do I STILL get so excited when I see female technicians on an event technical production team?

At times, I often have to rip myself away from this euphoric state, because after all, having female technicians on an event is normal right?.... Well, is it really?

In the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic in August 2020, I started a WhatsApp group called TechSis (A Sisterhood of Technicians), primarily to create a bubble where female technicians could chat about industry-related stuff, share ideas, job opportunities, ask tech-related questions, check-in on each other and just celebrate one another.



The industry, at the time, morphed in interesting ways with hybrid events becoming common, and with this came challenges that forced new ways of thinking and rapid learning.

Thabang Khaile landed an internship at Urban Brew through the sharing of information in the TechSis cyber community. This is a testimony of how networking and selfless sharing can catapult us to grow and succeed as a collective. "I am so grateful for the opportunity to have learned new skills in a sector of the industry I previously knew very little about, as I had just completed a 2-year intern program with the Gearhouse Training Academy that mainly focused on Live Event production," Thabang said. "I am now in a position to freelance for both television and live events. There are interesting opportunities for female technicians like Audio Assistants on request from female artists who prefer working with female technicians from a comfort point of view. These could include (but not be limited to) mic'ing up an artist, wiring in-ears and body packs, assisting with quick costume changes etc."



Thabang Khaile on the job (centre)



Thabang Khaile micing up an artist

Pearl Massie, another graduate of the Gearhouse internship program who freelances as an AV technician, is also no stranger to both the astonishment of clients who see female technicians work on their events and to the challenges caused by the snail pace at which transformation is taking place as it relates to gender representation. Her comment to me was, "It would be great if we could see a greater consistency of female technicians being employed, acknowledged, granted access to learning and sharing ideas outside of the August month focus."



Pearl Massie

The last voice I'd like to add is Kimberly Field, a graduate from the Academy of Sound Engineering, now a musician and Audio Engineer, who also echoes that there has been a beautiful uptake of work post COVID-19. Says Kimberly, "My experience in working within a particular corporate space, on a project basis, suggests a model of productivity and



(Above): Pearl Massie

I am by no means the authority on matters concerning females in the Technical Production Industry, but my position as a Technical Manager in the Arts and particularly the Theatre space has given me an audience to see both sides of the coin.

In South Africa, August marks the Celebration of a group of radical and fearless women who marched for the freedom, benefits and victories so many of us enjoy today. My hope is that I will live to see the day when I no

longer get excited to see female technicians on a production team because it has become REALLY normal in EVERY sense of the word.

So why do I STILL get so excited when I see female technicians on an event production team?

Maybe this is some sort of celebration, not of freedoms, benefits or victories, but definitely of gains made, albeit in small measures.