

From: Carla Wilson cw3595@outlook.com
Subject: Follow-up to Workshop Topics
Date: February 17, 2022 at 5:33 PM
To: Allyson Bolton admin@vtrailway.com
Cc: Leah St. Marie leah@a-typical.com, Dave Peterson dpeterson@visitcarsoncity.com



Allyson,

Thank you for sending me the audio of the workshop on 2-9-22. I am so sorry I was not able to be there due to a different commitment. Based on listening to the recording I wish I could have been there to explain some of the issues discussed from the perspective of myself, my crew, and my cast members to these items. I do not feel these were presented from a neutral viewpoint.

In the audio recording of the workshop, I clearly heard the displeasure of my reaching out to Dave Peterson with emails. As he was new to the Commission, I did this to keep him informed or when I felt I was not getting resolution from you to the challenges I was experiencing to ensure I met my contract. Such as adequate rehearsal space, the need for a cast Sani-Hut, or repairs needed to the road to the North Pole to make it accessible to the crew and performers. It is now truly clear you are the direct point of contact for all matters. I am only copying Dave in on this email as I feel it's important, he hears from me firsthand about the corrections which need to be made in the record of the workshop topics.

First matter, it is important to correct a statement you made about the production being pre-recorded. Not all the show is pre-recorded. To be more specific.

Pre-recorded portions: (Approximately 12 minutes of the 61-minute production)

1. Safety speech at the beginning of the ride.
2. Music for Polar Express song, Hot Chocolate song, and a couple of the short Conductor lines. (Note: Most of the railroads doing Polar Express use the recordings with the lyrics in their production. The exceptions would be Atlanta, Chicago, and New York as they use professional actors who are required to be able to sing to accompaniment music in the show.)

Delivered live by performers: (approximately 49 minutes of the 61-minute production)

1. Hobo Monologues x2
2. Live action scenes – Competition scene, Performer introduction scene, Conductor's checklist scene.
3. Sing-along and audience interactive scenes such as Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, Frosty the Snowman, and Jingle Bells.
4. Santa and elves handing out the bells (20 minutes).

I have attended three Polar Express Camps in Durango. I built our production

based on what they had their script and performers do with a large budget along with discussions with other groups with budgets like ours. In Durango, they have a box car which is positioned in the middle of the passenger cars. This is their production car. From this car they manage all sound, lighting, costuming, hot chocolate, etc. The sound for their show is all done from this train car as they have full control of it. Part of their production is pre-recorded just like ours. They also have smaller cars, and each car has a stage area in which many of the scenes take place instead of in the aisle of the train. As Rail Events is located there in Durango, they have the REI staff at their disposal for on-site technical assistance.

The Polar Express productions in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and New Orleans are directed by a director from New York and done with professional actors. They are required to audition and must be able to sing, dance, and act exceptionally. These performers and Santa get paid very well for their professional talents. They are also required to perform every night and every show (up to three hundred performances). They are not all adults.

I would like to address the sound issue. First, I would like to correct a statement made during the discussion about the sound. Someone made the statement, "You let Carla basically do it all on her own and then probably never even talked to Tom and was frustrated when she got there, and it didn't hook up and she probably never talked to him." This statement is far from the truth. At the beginning of every season, I have discussed with Tom how to improve the meshing of our vocal sound system with his system which plays the soundtrack. I am going to give you a little background on what I knew about the sound system on the train when adding microphones for the performers in 2017.

I began performing on Polar Express in 2011. That same year Tom asked me to be the entertainment on his Candy Cane Express. At that time, his sound system did not play music throughout the train cars. Narration had to be done in each car separately. Over the next 2-3 years, Tom did invest in a sound system that would play music through all the train cars using a cell phone, tablet, or laptop. However, any live vocals had to be done through all the train cars from a fixed microphone in the middle passenger/pullman car of the train.

The Polar Express surveys received prior to the 2017 season always had several complaints from passengers not being able to hear the performers because they did not have microphones. Cast would have to scream or sing at full voice to be heard which then created an issue of the performers losing their voices quickly and not being able to perform other nights. After discussion with then Manager, Elaine Spencer, she asked me to investigate a system for the train in which the performers could use microphones. I did go to Tom first about this and explained what we were trying to do. After this discussion, we learned Tom's system did not have mixer boards nor the capability to run multiple microphones. Next, I spoke with Eric Klug at the community center for guidance. He directed me to Star Sound Audio in Reno for assistance. I spoke with John at Star Sound Audio on the phone. I then asked Tom if I could have John look at his system on the train and advise me from there and he was happy to let us do this. John, Wavne, and I spent a Sunday looking at

...the more happy, ... what could be done to add wireless body mics, to Tom's system so the soundtrack and the vocals could all run through the same system. Tom was protective of his system and was not receptive to changes needed so we could run the vocals through his sound system. This is when John helped us put together a system for the vocals which included the necessary mixers and speakers specifically designed for vocals. This sound equipment would give us the ability to work in conjunction with Tom's. Hence, the soundtrack for the show would be played over Tom's system using a cell phone, tablet, or laptop, while the vocals from the body mics went through a mixer board and out to speakers wired separately in each car. Trying to mesh the show this way has been challenging each year. It is not the ideal set-up, but we have made it work each year to include 2021.

The costs associated with sound in 2021 were for cabling, connectors, and securing of speakers and other hardware for sound in the depot. For the show, the costs were for replacing of microphones, batteries for the power packs, cabling and electrical hookups on the train cars. Based on what we had to work with at this time these costs were not excessive, but necessary.

You stated you did not feel the service received by my Sound Engineer (Wayne) did not warrant what he was paid. I do not feel you fully understand what the costs for the Sound Engineer covered. This cost included the following: (1) Modifications to the soundtrack for the show to keep it fresh. (2) Attending every rehearsal to run the soundtrack for the cast to rehearse to. (3) Going up to VC to install the sound system on the train cars. (4) Setting up the sound in the depot for the pre-show scene and background music. (5) Starting up the sound system on the train cars each night. (6) Doing microphone checks with the cast in the coach and deluxe cars each night. (7) Being readily available each performance date to troubleshoot any sound issues. On performance dates Wayne was at the depot for 8 hours. ($23 \times 8 = 184$ hours). Editing the soundtrack to make it seamless and capture all elements needed in the production (50-75 hours). Rehearsals (164 hours). Tear down, organizing, and inventory of all sound equipment (24 hours). Total hours = 447. $\$3,480.00$ divided by 447 = $\$7.79$ per hour. According to Zip Recruiter the wage for a Sound Engineer in our area is approximately $\$4,600$ per month ($\$38.00$ per hour). I hope this helps you better understand the services provided for the money charged. It is also important to note the power in each of the cars is done with generators. We were not able to test or do sound checks until Darnell started the generators each night.

I am aware Tom invested in a new sound system for the train cars. I worked Tom's Candy Cane Express train a couple of days last season and he was having issues with sound and vocals going throughout the train cars then. In the workshop recording someone stated that Tom "spent a pretty penny" on his new Bose system. I will agree that his new system is wonderful, but no one knew, including Tom, how to connect our system into Tom's to make them work as one. Tom has designed his system to work effectively for his needs. He is also still protective of his system and only wanted Darnell to adjust it. This generated another problem with regards to having the ability to adjust the sound during the performance as Darnell was

outside of the cars doing his main job. So, he was not readily available to make needed adjustments to Tom's system to mesh equally with our sound system for vocals.

My sound operator/technician retired from Harrah's Tahoe as a Sound Engineer. As an expert with sound, I asked him to look at Tom's current system. He told me it does have mixers and amplifiers. However, the mixer in his system does not have enough ports to accommodate the number of body and/or handheld microphones needed for the cast in the coach or deluxe cars. It was not necessary to use microphones in the VIP car or the private section of the deluxe car. Our system has mixers with five ports for microphones and you currently need to have one in each car to balance the vocals with the soundtrack. In addition to this, the speakers Tom currently has mounted in his cars will probably not accommodate the combination of the music and vocals at the volumes needed for both. My sound operator/technician can clearly explain what Tom's system needs to make it work as one with vocals for Polar Express. However, I do know Tom has a sound person he works with.

The sound situation has always been frustrating. The sound problems the first and second nights of the event last year were not all due to our system. It was a combination of Tom's and ours compounded by adding the Jersey Lil.' Wayne and I went up to VC three weeks prior to opening to install our speakers on all the cars. We asked about power being available at both ends of the car for our system. Tom told us he was going to try to get power at both ends. Unfortunately, he was not able to make this happen which created a problem for our system to work in the car on opening night. This issue was corrected the next day. We did all we could to resolve all sound problems as quickly as possible every night. I appreciate the Commission acknowledging my performers doing a fantastic job and doing the show acapella on opening night. I was immensely proud of them. It is unfortunate you had to refund money for this technical issue.

I also need to correct you with regards to us having a dress rehearsal on the train in VC prior to the media night dress rehearsal. As I do every year, I made it mandatory for cast to come up to VC to rehearse on the train cars a couple of weeks prior to media night. This occurred on November 6th and 7th. These rehearsals are not a "dress rehearsal" like you would have for a stage show. It would be exceedingly difficult and not realistic for the performers to hold a dress rehearsal at Tom's railyard. This is partially because of the sound, but also because we do not have all the elements of the show available to us up there like, hot chocolate, costumes, props, sound, etc. On these two days the cast goes through group songs and practices dancing and moving in the train car aisles. To do a complete dress rehearsal without an audience the train would have needed to be at the Depot the weekend before the actual event opened. We have never had this luxury in the 10 years I have worked this event.

I don't recall if I shared Jamie's comment to me to me about the production after riding the train the night he visited. He rode the first train of the night. In VIP on the

way to the North Pole and in coach back to the depot. Before the second run I asked him if he would be riding again. He responded to me with, "No, I don't need to. You have this dialed in and running smoothly." This meant a lot to myself, the cast, and my crew knowing how hard we had all worked on making the production enjoyable and fluid and one the Commission could be proud of.

We are both in agreement there was conflict between us. Your staff felt it and noted it. My cast and crew also felt it and noted it. We could both put blame on the other one as to why this was such an issue. In reflecting on our working relationship, I feel communication between the two of us was a major part of the problem. Had we communicated better you would have better understood all the issues I am covering in this email as they were occurring, and I could have better understood the reasons for your responses to me. It is fair to say we both experienced several growing pains and could have communicated better for the 2021 Polar Express. Ultimately, it was enjoyed by thousands which is a credit to both of us and our staff.

In closing I am again sorry I was not able to attend the workshop. Had I been able to attend I could have personally spoke to the members of the Commission to address the issues brought up with regards to my contract, my performance, the sound, or anything else about the production instead of this email to you. My input and availability for questions could have given ideas on how to address these issues and possible solutions to them going forward. I hope you will share the information I have provided with the Board. If you feel it would be advantageous for them to hear them directly from me, I will be happy to attend the February or April Commission meeting.

Thank you for your time.

Carla Wilson

Carla Wilson

*Northern Nevada's Premier Mrs. Claus
Polar Express Production Director
Lollipop Productions, Director/Producer
Phone/Text: 775-781-0664
Email: cw3595@outlook.com*