

ROB Hello. I'm Rob Hochschild, associate professor of Liberal Arts for the Berklee Oral History Project. And we are
HOCHSCHILD: really fortunate today to be with one of Berklee's most accomplished and brilliant faculty members, Susan Rogers. She joined the faculty in 2008. She's a professor of music production and engineering.

Also teaches science courses in the liberal arts department and courses for the online school, she holds a doctorate in psychology from McGill University, where she studied music cognition and psychoacoustics. Prior to her science career, Susan Rogers worked for two decades as a record producer, engineer, mixer, and audio electronics technician.

Highlights include five years-- 1983 and 1988-- with Prince as staff engineer, and she's also worked with a wide range of artists-- Barenaked Ladies, David Byrne, Tricky, Paul Westerberg, Geggy Tah, and Tevin Campbell. She's director of the Berklee Music Perception and Cognition laboratory and co-founder of The Record Company, Boston's first non-profit recording studio, and a whole lot more.

We'll get into all of this much more deeply and other subjects during this conversation. Susan Rogers, thank you so much for the time today.

SUSAN Thanks for having me here. Not listed in the biography because it wouldn't be-- he wouldn't need it-- but not
ROGERS: listed is just how much I love being at Berklee, how proud I am to be here among all of you, among the students and the faculty and the administration here. I'm really happy and fortunate to be here.

ROB Yeah. Well, I feel the same way about Berklee, but we're very happy and fortunate to have you here. It's been 10
HOCHSCHILD: years, but your impact has been-- 10, 11 years, but your impact's been really incredible. So--

SUSAN That's nice to hear.
ROGERS:

ROB And we'll-- I mean, that's a subject that comes up in these interviews, so we want to learn about your experiences
HOCHSCHILD: at Berklee. So wherever your passion for what you do here comes up, that's a great subject to plunge into. So I'm looking forward to asking you about the beginning of your music career, but I want to go back even a little further at the beginning. Where did you grow up, and how did music first become a passion and interest for you?

SUSAN I grew up in Anaheim, California-- literally right next door to Disneyland. So there was Disneyland in Anaheim,
ROGERS: which was founded in the 1950s. I was born in 1956. But our tract of homes was next door. There's Disneyland and the Disneyland Hotel. And there was a helipad there so little kids could go and hide in the orange groves and we could watch the helicopters land. And there was this tract of homes.

And so I grew up on Lullaby Lane. And in those days, you could get into the park at Disneyland. A kid could get in for \$0.50. So if you had some birthday money or some allowance or something, you could get your little ticket and you get into the park. You couldn't get on any of the rides, because that cost extra then, but you could run around the park. And the neighborhood kids and I did that as frequently as we could.

I think it germinated my early love of mechanisms-- the mechanisms of fantasy, because you could kind of hide in the bushes behind the Dumbo ride or Mr. Toad's Wild Ride and things like that, and you can peek in and you could see the gears and the levers and the machines.

And you could see the behind the scenes of this fantastic fantasy place, which I found that really exciting, the fact that adults would build this place-- of course, being egotistical children, we assumed that it was for us. It didn't occur to us that this was for adults. That adults would build this fantasy for us, it felt very generous of spirit.

And I think somehow on some level, I wanted to be part of an entertainment industry contributing to that.

ROB Interesting. So that planted some of the seeds right then.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN I think it did.

ROGERS:

ROB Yeah. And so, you were in Anaheim throughout your childhood and through high school and all of that?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Right.

ROGERS:

ROB So did you listen to music-- or when did you start listening to music in those days?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Like all kids, Anaheim, we had-- in Los Angeles, we had great radio stations, so there was a lot to choose from.

ROGERS: And at the Disneyland Hotel, there was a radio station-- I forget the call letters now-- but there was a radio station that operated out of the hotel. And there was a covered walkway that abutted the radio station. So there was a glass window there and you could look through and watch the DJ work, and you'd see the racks of records behind the DJ.

And they had speakers mounted on the outside so that you could hear the DJ as you're watching the DJ at work. And it was so much fun. I loved being a little kid and pressing my face to the glass and watching that DJ and looking at those records.

ROB Yeah. It was maybe your first glimpse of some sort of studio I guess.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Oh, loved it. Loved it, loved it, loved it.

ROGERS:

ROB So in terms of styles of music, did you find yourself drawn to anything in particular? Were there artists or bands

HOCHSCHILD: you were listening to?

SUSAN Yes, and this is a question that has obsessed me recently as a scientist, not much or, really, any research is done on it, but I believe it is true that all of us have a certain resonant frequency or appetite, an innate appetite for food, for certain tastes-- salty or sweet or savory or whatever-- and for music.

And where that comes from, I don't know. But just like our palate, I believe it comes from gene expression. I believe it's innate. I remember being a little kid and all the neighborhood kids-- 7 or 8 years old-- neighborhood kids were just crazy about The Beatles. This is the early '60s. Beatles are coming. This is going to be great.

And I remember my first Beatles album and listening to it and thinking, I don't want to say anything to anybody, but I feel like maybe I've heard better elsewhere.

ROB Interesting.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN But you don't want to say anything because that would be embarrassing. All the kids are crazy about the Beatles.

ROGERS: But I do being aware of-- I remember being aware of when I heard-- when I heard the Rolling Stones, thinking that's a little bit closer to my idea of what great is.

And I remember hearing the R&B and soul stuff a little bit later when I would hear Sly and the Family Stone on AM radio. That just felt like, oh, hell yeah. Now that's what I'm talking about. Where that comes from, I don't know. But I have an innate fondness for, and my appetite is honed for mostly R&B and soul music, music that comes from that tradition. I like the more blues-based stuff than I like the pop, melodic-based stuff.

ROB That makes sense, considering Prince and other artists you've worked with later on that you had that early attraction to it. And it's interesting you talk about that innate quality, and that's something I've heard you talk about before, and I definitely want to plunge into that more as we talk about the science part of your career. Did you play any instruments?

SUSAN [SIGHS] With reluctance. The family bought a piano and they said, all right. Line up, kids. Somebody's going to play this because we just bought it. So I was the oldest, so I was thrown into the pool and had a couple of years of piano lessons. And I knew that I loved music, and I also was well aware this brings me zero joy. I have no interest in this. It just doesn't feel right.

In contrast, listening to records, buying records, listening to the radio, that just lit me up like a Christmas tree. That felt right.

ROB Yeah. So then how did-- when did you first begin to think of music as being a possible career for you?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Golly. It never-- it was out of the question pretty much. My family suffered a hardship in that my mother died of cancer when I was 14 years old. And she had she battled it for six years. So by the time that ordeal finally ended, there was no money. No money for college. The bar for success in my family, I have come to learn-- I've come to be very grateful for that-- the bar was set very, very low.

If you kids get yourself a good job-- success. That's a wonderful thing. And I am aware that, for our Berklee students, sometimes the bar for success is set very, very high for them. I don't envy them. I think I got pretty lucky. So essentially, in my family, you do anything, do anything, have a good job, and you're good with us.

So I made a mistake when I was 17 years old, just out of desperation, I got married. And it turned out the person I married was very bad. He used to beat me up. He was terrible. He's very abusive. So that ended up also being a good thing. Because if I had married a good man, I wouldn't have had a career. I would have stayed with him.

I got lucky I married a bad one. And when you marry a bad one, you to get out scot-free. No guilt, no explanation, no apologies. You have all the reason you need to get out.

ROB So how old were you when you arrived at that place?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN 21 when I finally escaped. And I escaped in January. It was Jimmy Page's birthday-- Jimmy Page from Led
ROGERS: Zeppelin. I believe it was January 8. The year was 1978. And that was just 41 years ago. And I escaped with a girlfriend. She was my friend, my roommate. I literally ran away and then filed for divorce and everything. But she and I were roommates in Hollywood.

And that's when I thought, I've got nothing to lose, nothing to lose. So I'm going to see if I can get into the music industry somehow.

ROB Mm-hmm. So I know that I either read or heard an interview where you talked about getting this manual you
HOCHSCHILD: wrote away to the armed services--

SUSAN Yes.

ROGERS:

ROB --I forget which branch, and asked for this electronics manual, is that right? So is that the next thing that
HOCHSCHILD: happened?

SUSAN I kept finding luck, or it kept finding me, because I met someone who would become my first teacher. And his
ROGERS: name was John Sacchetti from Quincy, Massachusetts. He had come to Hollywood to become an audio technician and engineer. And he's just genius, genius, brilliant, brilliant fellow. I don't throw around that word lightly.

He was almost a Savant for certain electronics styles of thinking. Anyway, he told me the way he learned electronics was an electronics manual from the US Army. And John was, like myself, from a lower middle class family. No college. Simply not an option. So he said, with this thick Boston accent, he says, you know, Sue. You know what you should do? You should call the army. Call the army, and let them know you're going to-- just lie to them.

Tell them you're in high school and you're going to graduate and you want to study electronics, and let them send you the manuals. So I said, "Okay--"

ROB That's a good Boston accent.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yeah. It was pretty good. So I called the army and I said, I'm 16 years old, and I want to join the army. Will you
ROGERS: send me your electronics manuals? And the guy said, yeah, sure. You send \$1.75 in postage to this address, tell us where you want them sent to, and we'll send them. And they did. I received a box that was pretty big, and it had paper-bound books from basic DC principles all the way up to microwave technology courtesy of the US government, with big pictures.

Like volume one had big pictures of batteries and-- and I began studying them.

ROB So had you already discovered a proclivity for science and technology where you could take in something like
HOCHSCHILD: that and absorb it?

SUSAN I had no idea. No. No one in my family had that background. I had no idea I could do that. And unfortunately for
ROGERS: me, because my mother was so ill during a lot of my childhood-- I was a good student, but I had-- as the only girl in the family and the oldest, I was cooking and cleaning and shopping and making beds and doing ironing from the time I was 11 years old.

I could not apply myself to school unfortunately.

ROB Then I'm wondering, it must have seemed like a daunting task to look at this stack of manuals and learning a
HOCHSCHILD: new language or something like that. How did you dive into it?

SUSAN Now, that brings us back to that resonant frequency idea. I think there is a difference between-- well, I think our
ROGERS: fantasies fall into two kinds of types. I think there are the fantasies that we recognize internally as being pure fantasy, those Walter Mitty daydreams.

Then there's another kind of fantasy that is, on some level, by some little tether, joined to reality or perhaps joined to our abilities. So those things occupy the two different spheres-- the spheres of what we want-- our motives and our desires and our drives, and the spheres of what we are-- our strengths, what we can do.

So like any child, like any human being, I've had fantasies about doing things that are just completely beyond my abilities like being an athlete. I have zero ability to be an athlete. Or maybe being a great jazz piano player. What I wouldn't give being a great singer like Ella Fitzgerald. Being a-- I'm a painter. I'm a sculptor. I'm a fashion designer. I'm a model.

I mean, I, like most healthy people, understand the distance between fantasy and reality. Not me. Just fun to think about and pretend. But then there are the fantasies where you go, yeah. In another life, that could have been me. In my particular case with my physiology and makeup, things involving the hard sciences feel like, yeah, in another life, I could have done that.

A Jane Goodall, Frans de Waal-- the cognitive ethologist. I am very interested in medicine, especially am interested in neurosciences, so I think I could have done all right in medical school. I think I would have been okay in medical school. So to answer your question now, when I started studying, it felt like this is doable.

I've never seen it before, but internally, I feel like this makes sense to me. This is the street I live on. I would like very, very much to be able to do research in that area to understand what the neural underpinnings are or the genetic underpinnings or the biological underpinnings of these innate appetites or strengths are in us.

ROB So when you look back at that moment then, you absorbed all of the information in these manuals, or as much of
HOCHSCHILD: it as you could, and then began to apply it to music? I mean, how did--

SUSAN Well, a lot of things were happening simultaneously. I'm studying these electronics manuals and I'm studying
ROGERS: modern recording techniques. And there was a book on acoustics, studio acoustics, that I read and studied. There used to be the most wonderful bookstore in Hollywood. It was called Opamp Technical Books on Sycamore Street just off Santa Monica.

And it was a bookstore that served the technical industry in Hollywood, the entertainment capital of the world. So you'd go into this crowded, cramped little bookstore, and there'd be the audio aisle and there'd be the film aisle and the lighting and the television and anything you'd want to know about [inaudible] or telecine or anything.

Anything technical that supported the entertainment industry, you could find it there in that bookstore. So with my little bit of money, I could go to that bookstore and I could buy the books that I would have had as textbooks in college.

ROB And is that how you studied recording techniques as well--

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yes.

ROGERS:

ROB --from reading those books?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN From reading modern recording techniques. Now, right around the same time, I was combing the back of the ~~LA~~
ROGERS: *Times* the newspaper to look for a job, and I saw my dream job. It said audio trainee wanted. The company was called Audio Industries Corporation right on La Brea just South of Sunset Boulevard across from A&M Studios.

And Audio Industries Corporation, they sold and serviced MCI consoles and tape machines, whole studio packages. So I joined them as an audio trainee in 1978.

ROB Okay. And so that was very much the audio technician kind of work and, what, repairing equipment or--

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yes. When they brought me in, I was a beginner, beginner, beginner. But they liked my enthusiasm. They liked
ROGERS: that I was studying on my own. I was highly self-motivated. So they liked it, and they hired me. And then the technicians there, Keith Skiving and John Claven, they taught me how to repair consoles and tape machines.

In the meanwhile, I was living now with my boyfriend, the great John Sacchetti. He and I had a little apartment together, and he was further advanced than I in electronics. His father was a TV repairman. So John had been studying electronics since he was a little kid. So I had these great guys who believed in me and were training me on the job and then were training me nights and weekends as we studied and I read schematics and I traced signal flow.

I learned the value system of the tech crew and what we do and how we work and how we talk and how we think and what we need to know. I was with them for I think it was about three years.

ROB Wow. Okay.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Two and a half, three years.

ROGERS:

ROB Well, it's great that you had such supportive mentors, because I don't imagine-- as you note in your own CV that
HOCHSCHILD: there weren't a whole lot of women working in that field at the time. I mean, were there any other women working in that organization when you joined it?

SUSAN Oh, no. Not as technicians. No, no, no. It was rare to have women even as audio sales women. That was pretty
ROGERS: rare. The percentage of women who were recording engineers or record producers was very small. The percentage of women who were techs, smaller.

ROB Yeah. I can imagine. Yeah.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yeah. And thank goodness that I had these wonderful men who believed in me and-- yeah.

ROGERS:

ROB So you were immersed in the technology and in signal flow and the concepts. I imagine you were also listening to
HOCHSCHILD: music because you always seemed to be listening to music. So was it all starting to connect up with you at that point, what you were hearing on record, some of the work you were doing in the technology, and were you starting to envision this other future for yourself?

SUSAN I did not envision the other future. I did not have big dreams because I was really happy to just be working. I had
ROGERS: desire down deep inside, desire to be where records were being made. I wanted to somehow make a contribution. But I was listening to the radio. And primarily, the two radio stations in Los Angeles at that time, the R&B soul stations, were KACE and KJLH.

KJLH stood for "kindness, joy, love, and happiness," and it was owned by Stevie Wonder.

ROB Oh, really?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Oh yeah. KJLH. And KACE. And they were both based out of South Central, Los Angeles. And you could drive
ROGERS: around town and listen to those radio stations. My favorite thing to do. Man, I loved that so much.

ROB Just driving around listening to the radio.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Oh, listening to the radio. Because it was not pre-programmed playlist-- live disk jockeys on the air. And KACE,
ROGERS: they would sometimes play album cuts. So they'd play a song by-- well, let's say it's Stevie Wonder. They'd play a Stevie Wonder song. And then sometimes, the DJ would come on and he'd go, aces back to back, and he'd play another Stevie Wonder song.

And then maybe once or twice a day, he'd come on, he'd go, aces wild, and he'd play a third Stevie Wonder song. And you're just in ecstasy thinking, oh, this is so awesome. You've got someone on a microphone on the other side of a pane of glass somewhere with records and he's just dropping these records for you.

It was listening to one of those stations-- I don't remember which one-- when I first heard Prince.

ROB Oh wow. Okay. So about what year was that?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN That would have been around '79.

ROGERS:

SUSAN And his first single was "Soft and Wet." And I remember hearing that and thinking-- I actually heard it while riding
ROGERS: in the back of a bus, taking the bus to work. It was a kid sitting in the back of the bus with a boom box, and he had the boom box tuned to my station. So I'm sitting next to this kid or near him-- and I think the kid was actually maybe high or something because his pupils were really dilated.

It looked like he was just tripping his brains out. And he had this radio on his lap, this boombox, and that song came on. And I remember thinking, whoever this is, whoever this artist is, I need to stay on the bus so I hear who this artist is. Because that's something new. My ears perked up immediately.

ROB Mm-hmm. And then you dug more into Prince's work at that point or--
HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yes. Bought his albums, followed his career. When he came into town-- and I think it was 1980, maybe '81-- to
ROGERS: play the *Dirty Mind* tour, that record blew my mind. That rocked my world and rocketed him to the top of my favorite artist list because it was so bold and so strategic.

I teach students about it here, the clever move that he made with that record. Anyway--

ROB So when you say strategic and a clever move, what specifically are you talking about?
HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN All artists start out by imitating others. You learn your craft before you can express yourself artistically if you're
ROGERS: going to be any good and go the distance. So you learn how to write and play by imitating others who have a style that you like. Prince was no different. When he got signed to a seven-album deal-- which is what you would normally be signed to-- his first two albums were somewhat imitative of the R&B soul styles of the day.

First record showed some of his musical playing abilities. It showed that he was an imitator of others. He was a good imitator of others. His second record, which was just called *Prince*, showed that he could write, because that had the singles on it, "When You Were Mine" and "I Wanna Be Your Lover--" those two songs have since been covered by other artists.

This kid can write. He's clever, he's funny, and he's got-- he knows how to write a hook. So now it was time for Prince to jump the queue and stop imitating others. There are different audiences for our work, and these different audiences can be recognized by their value system and what they are assessing artists for.

The three audiences are the general public, other musicians-- an audience of your peers-- and the critics and scholars. All three of them want different things. The public is very fickle, as we know, but they're going to assess music differently than other musicians will. We all know this. Other musicians, if you say about an artist, you say, yeah, he's a real musician's musician. Oh, it's sad. It means he doesn't sell any records, but other musicians think he's great or she's great.

Other musicians are assessing whether or not they could do that. And if they couldn't, it's like respect. And then that third audience, the critics and scholars, are, of course, assessing whether or not this needs to be done. Is this a trend we'd like to see more of or please don't ever do that again?

The three audiences will give you something different if they love you. The public gives you love, of course. Other musicians give you respect. But it's the critics and scholars who give you fame because they write about you. It is folly to think that you're going to wear the triple crown and be a hit with all three. In the history of recorded music, this has rarely been done.

When my friends Greg Kurstin and Tommy Jordan and I were trying to think of examples of who's worn the triple crown, Greg came up with a good one-- Duke Ellington. Duke Ellington was the most popular bandleader in America. The other musicians thought he was a god. The critics thought he could do no wrong.

That's so rare. I'm old enough to remember that the public loved Led Zeppelin. Critics hated Led Zeppelin. And the public loved the Beatles, but there were a lot of other musicians who were saying, hey, guys. There's other bands who are just as good. So it's hard to please everyone. Anyway, for Prince's third record, for *Dirty Mind*, he turned his back on the public and even on other musicians by doing the album *Dirty Mind*, to appeal just to the music writers in New York and LA.

There were songs about incest and oral sex-- and this was a punk. It was an R&B soul kid with a punk sensibility who could write a melodic hook, unlike Bad Brains, and the critics fell all over themselves-- in London and New York and Paris and Los Angeles. Hey, everybody. This is it. This is the second coming.

Critics wrote about him. For his fourth album, he called it *Controversy*. And the opening song-- the opening lines of the opening song are, "I just can't believe all the things people say. Am I Black or white? Am I straight or gay?" They're talking about him now, and he's an enigma. Good. Other musicians began to say, this guy's a little freak, but he can really play. He's playing all the instruments on this record pretty much.

For the next record, he courted the public's love. So his fifth album was *1999*, which was a double album, and he had his first crossover Billboard top 40 hit single with "Little Red Corvette." Now he had independently, with three different records, hit all three of them. His sixth record was his masterpiece-- *Purple Rain*. Bull's eye.

ROB And that's where Susan Rogers comes in to that story too.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN And I just so happen to be so lucky that I was involved in that record. So when I say that *Dirty Mind* blew my
ROGERS: mind, I tend to what the critics like. I share their perspective quite a bit. I don't tend to like pop music. I'm a little bit more in the critics' camp. So that record just killed me.

ROB Mm. I love that breakdown, both of the audiences and the way you look at Prince's evolution. So you were
HOCHSCHILD: listening, obviously, very closely to his music. And then at some point, you got connected to him. How did that happen? How did you wind up going from what you were doing to being involved with *Purple Rain*?

SUSAN Well, I was at Audio Industries for, I think it was going on three years, maybe a full three years. And I had been
ROGERS: repairing consoles and tape machines in the Greater Los Angeles area. MCI, the brand that I worked on, was the most popular brand at that time. So I saw a lot of studios, big and small and met a lot of people. But there was one studio just up the street that was owned by Graham Nash and David Crosby called Rudy Records.

And their stuff was breaking down a lot. And they kept asking me, please, please, please, quit your job. And come work for us. So I did. Eventually, I said yes.

And this got me closer to where records were being made. Now I'm working for a studio. And at that studio, I got to do-- every now and then, I'd do a little bit of assistant engineering. But mostly, I was their studio maintenance tech. Grateful for that job, liked those guys, happy to be there.

But the music I was listening to was mostly Prince and still the R&B soul stuff that I liked. And in summer of 1983, the famous John Sacchetti-- famous in my world because he features so prominently, but John Sacchetti, who was a technician at Westlake Audio. John called me up and he says, Sue, your dream job is waiting for you. Prince is looking for a technician.

So Prince was just coming off the 1999 tour. And he had received the green light from Warner Brothers to make a movie, as well as his next album. The kid was like 25 years old. Warner Brothers in their genius saw that, yeah, we think he can pull this off. So he told his management, find me a technician.

I need someone from New York or LA who really knows what they're doing because I'm getting ready to make this movie, and I need somebody really good. So Prince's management contacted Westlake Audio. Westlake Audio went back-- Glenn Phoenix from Westlake goes back to his tech shop and says, hey, boys, this guy Prince is looking for a technician. The winning candidate would have to move to Minnesota and work for this guy. Anybody know anybody who wants to-- a good tech, wants to move to Minnesota?

And right away, John says, yeah, my girlfriend Sue, wants that job. She wants that job. Let me call Sue. She'll do it. So he called me. And I said, you're damn right.

That's my job because I was this huge Prince fan. And that was my dream come true. So Prince's management interviewed me. We worked out terms of employment. They hired me. And I moved to Minnesota, sight unseen.

ROB Wow. So did they interview you in Los Angeles or did you--

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN In Los Angeles.

ROGERS:

ROB Oh, Okay. And then you just up and moved from the warm sunny climes of Los Angeles to the otherwise climate
HOCHSCHILD: of Minneapolis, not that that was a factor in your decision or anything like that. So you immediately went up there. And was *Purple Rain* already sort of underway at that point?

SUSAN It was underway.

ROGERS:

ROB Okay.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yeah, he had done some recording. "Darling Nikki" was recorded. And I think that was the second tape that I put
ROGERS: up in his studio and the first one where he asked me to put it up. And he left the room. And so I was able to put up the multitrack and push up those faders and just-- [GASPING]--

ROB Mm.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN --and just realize, oh, my gosh, when fans hear this. I was so excited and happy to be there. I'm a Prince fan
ROGERS: working for Prince. It was pretty damn good. But working for him right in the beating heart of what he does where he makes his music, I couldn't have been happier.

ROB I mean, I can't even imagine what that must have felt like-- I mean, both musically, spiritually in a way, just
HOCHSCHILD: everything kind of coming together for you. What did it feel like? I mean, you started to get into that. But I mean, to be around the studio during the making of this record, and you were hired initially, as you said, to work on equipment.

SUSAN As a tech, yeah.
ROGERS:

ROB Right, but then did your role evolve over time?
HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Well, it turned out that Prince really didn't know the difference or didn't care the difference between technician
ROGERS: and engineer. So after he would have me put up a tape, the very first song he had me put up was "Mia Bocca" by Jill Jones. And he asked me to set up a microphone. And I thought, uh-oh, any minute now, the engineer, whoever the engineer is, is going to walk in and be mad at me, the tech, for setting up a mic. But Prince is my boss, so I have to do it.

And I set up the mic. And I routed it and everything. But I thought, oh, geez, I'm already rehearsing my story in my head. I have to explain to this engineer when he or she shows up, I'm sorry, he told me to do it, so I had to do it.

But nobody's showing up. And finally, Prince came back in the room. And he gave me some command or something. And I asked him, well, who's going to engineer it? And he just said, you.

And I went, oh, right-o, Chief-- [CHUCKLING]-- and jumped into that chair. I realized no engineer is coming. He wants me to do this. And that was huge. It was like preparing a giant gift basket for somebody and then finally asking, well, who's this gift basket for? And the person says, it's for you. Oh.

ROB Were you nervous?
HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yeah, but I wouldn't allow myself to be because I really wanted to do a good job. It was daunting. I had that
ROGERS: winning combination that people who last a long time in this business have. On the one hand, you have to be batshit crazy. And on the other hand, you have to be cold sober.

If you're too crazy, you'll spin out of a turn. And people who are just too nutty don't last in this business. And if you're too sober, you won't be able to take the risks that you need to take. You have to walk out on that tightrope.

Use another analogy-- you have to walk out on that thin ice. It might crack. You might fall under the surface. But that's where the prize is, so it's just how you have to do it. I happen to have, like many of my peers, I had those qualities.

ROB Mm-hm. So were there moments during those first sessions that were particularly challenging? Did you feel like
HOCHSCHILD: there were hurdles you had to overcome? Just wondering what it felt like to go through that experience.

You would be in the studio. And it'd be interesting to hear what hours you worked. And then you'd go home and probably continue to sort of live with this experience of making this music, right?

SUSAN My experience was jumping on a train that was moving really, really fast. I mean, this is a machine that's
ROGERS: changing extraordinarily rapidly. New people are coming into the fold. A tremendous amount of work is being done at a very fast clip, so my job is to keep up. He hired me as his technician, which means I need to keep current flowing in these wires.

This equipment needs to be working properly. And I need to be working properly so that at any time if he asks me to, well, if we're staying up later, we're staying up later. With Prince, it was not uncommon-- I mean, really not uncommon-- once a month, maybe that you would work all night, 20, 24 hours or so, and be packing up to go home and get a few hours of sleep. And he'd say, fresh tape.

He'd have another song in his head. And you're going again. You're going around again. So 48-hour sessions were not at all uncommon, not at all.

My longest one was 96. But that's another story. I survived it. The 12 hours, that would've been like a day off. [CHUCKLING] We worked all the time.

ROB Wow.
HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN I was fueled by the ether of youth, which is, you know, this is totally doable. An older person would recognize, no,
ROGERS: it isn't. But when you're young, you think it is, and lots and lots of willpower and excitement of just being in this fast-moving environment. So I was trying really hard not to make mistakes.

Fortunately for me, he was doing this movie. And so he had a crew of people, the film crew, who were there assisting him during his primary activity of making this movie. So I was not as busy as I would ultimately be when we were on tour or when we were making records. I can tell you if you want to hear it, the "Pie Story."

ROB I don't think I know the "Pie Story."
HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN I can tell you the "Pie."
ROGERS:

ROB Sure, let's do the "Pie Story."
HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN I joined him in August of 1983. And we were making the movie by November. And I had a night at home, a night
ROGERS: off. And I just was very antsy because I knew he was working. He's my new boss. He's on the movie set.

And my work had been to be with him in the studio preparing music that we would be using for playback on the set and incidental music and things like that. But this particular night involved a scene that was shot in South Minneapolis, a home scene. And there wasn't going to be music involved in the playback. So I didn't have anything to do, so I'm at home. And somehow, I got it through my head that what he was going to need was a pie.

I don't know what I was thinking. I didn't know anything about being on a movie set. But I just knew that my boss was there and he's working really hard. I know. I'll bake him a pie.

So I go to the grocery store. I get the ingredients for apple pie. And I can bake. I've been baking since I was a kid.

I rolled out the dough. I chop up the apples. I add the spices. I put in the filling. I put on the top crust.

I bake it in the oven for 45 minutes. I get it out of the oven. I wrap it up. I get in the car. I drive to the movie set.

I get out with this pie. And I ask a security guy, where is Prince? I'm his employee. And he said, he's in his trailer right over there. And it's just as I'm walking to the trailer with this pie that I realize, huh-- [CHUCKLING]-- I wonder if this is weird.

ROB [CHUCKLING]

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN And then I thought, no, you got to own it. You got to own it. You commit to that pie. This is a good idea. And
ROGERS: you're going to deliver this pie with the attitude of, this is a great idea, dammit. You need this pie.

So I go, and I'm holding the pie. And I knock on his door. And he opens it. And he says, yes? And I said, Prince, I made you a pie.

And he just looked at me, and like, he's starting to laugh. And he says, thank you. And he takes the pie from me. And he says, hold on a second. And he looks around, and the kid hardly ever ate.

But he looked around. And he had on the little table there in the trailer, he had some Tic Tacs, so he picks up the Tic Tacs. He's holding them out to me. And I put out my hand very ceremoniously. And he taps a few Tic Tacs into my hand. And I say, thank you.

ROB [CHUCKLING] It's like an exchange.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN It was an exchange of the gifts. But the subtext of that message was, I care. I have energy. If I've got a night off,
ROGERS: I'd spend it working for you rather than for myself. Put me to work.

ROB Wow.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Put me to work. I care. And it's a nurturing gesture. Feeding someone a homemade apple pie is saying, it's a
ROGERS: little bit of love, a little bit of care and nurturing. Put me to work.

ROB Wow.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN And he did. Everything changed after that. Everything changed. He kept me busy. It was also right around this time that I started the vault because he would start asking for songs or bits of music. And his tapes were everywhere, so I started a database of cataloging and compiling and storing all of these tapes, which became the Paisley Park Vault.

ROB Mm. And that must have been huge for him to help stay organized like that as he was moving forward, making music.

SUSAN Sure, it was helpful and useful. He was so busy and had so many employees at this time, he doesn't know and he doesn't need to know who's done it. You just get it done because our task, of course, at that level is to keep the world out of his way. He was one of the biggest rock stars in the world. In the '80s, it was Prince, Michael Jackson, Madonna, and Bruce Springsteen who were ruling the top of the charts in the mid-'80s, so I'm working for one of the biggest stars in the world.

Unlike Michael Jackson or Madonna, he doesn't have a team of people at the highest level. Prince liked outliers. His band, The Revolution, Wendy and Lisa, Wendy was 18 years old when she joined Prince on stage for the first time-- 18 years old. I was young myself. We were all in our 20s.

Michael Jackson had Bruce Swedien, one of the world's great recording engineers. Prince had a tech who'd never basically recorded anything. So you had asked earlier about the learning curve, I had to learn how to be an engineer. Fortunately, Jesse Johnson from The Time, the guitar player of The Time, sat down with me while Prince was out in Los Angeles.

And Jesse showed me on the console. He said, here's how Prince likes his high hat to sound. Here's how he likes the guitar to sound. Here's the reverb that he likes. Jesse really helped me to get Prince's sound dialed in.

ROB Oh, that's great. So then after *Purple Rain* wrapped, either the record or the film, what happened next for you?
HOCHSCHILD: You were just basically on board now with him.

Or at what point did you-- when you first started working for Prince, you were an employee. And you were there. So when the record ended, when the record wrapped, what happened after that? Was there a tour immediately that you were also involved with?

SUSAN The tour happened pretty quickly. But yeah, as his full-time employee, I was with him every day because he recorded pretty much-- well, he played music every day. And if he's playing music, he's going to be recording. We never just finished a record and then focused on the tour. And it didn't work like that with him.

He was recording and writing constantly. We had the next record *Around the World in a Day*, nearly finished when *Purple Rain* came out. There was still some additions to it. But that record was nearly ready to go. He was working at a really fast clip.

In addition to that, he's doing Sheila E. records and The Time and Vanity Six, which became Apollonia 6. Prince was very rare in the music industry. He did something no one else had done. He created his own competition. He was smart enough to recognize one guy coming out of Minneapolis, not especially interesting.

A whole bunch of bands with a similar aesthetic coming out of Minneapolis, that's not a guy. That's a scene. He created a scene. He wrote all the material, played all the instruments, recorded the guide vocal for *The Time* record and Sheila E. and Vanity 6-- Jill Jones. We were recording constantly because we had not Paisley Park Studios, but Prince had a home studio.

And he also had a rehearsal space. And the band was rehearsing for the tour. They were rehearsing for scenes in the movie. And in between when the band would go home late at night, he and I would stay up and record. When we were on the *Purple Rain* tour, I had road cases, big Anvil cases filled with tapes, the 2-inch multitrack tapes.

And I had my notebook, my catalog of these tapes because I would book recording studios in advance so that Prince could come off stage after having played an arena show-- come off stage, get in a van, go to the hotel, shower, change clothes, and meet me in the studio afterwards. So during the *Purple Rain* tour, I'm stationed stage left because I was the technician for Bobby Z.'s drum rig. If that drum rig went down, I had to fix it. So I'm stationed stage left. After having done soundcheck and having done the show, we would go to a recording studio, record all night, and either catch a plane or the bus to the next city the next day.

ROB Oh, man.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN How many artists can you think of who would play an arena show and then go to work afterward? That's Prince.

ROGERS:

ROB That's a lot of energy and a lot of creative energy too.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN And he was so happy. I mean, if you could have seen him, he'd show up at 1:00 in the morning, beautifully dressed, of course, happy-- happy, happy, happy, happy, happy to sit down with his instruments and play and create. He would so much rather do that than go to an after party. He was shy. His whole life he was naturally shy.

And that's why when we weren't in a recording studio and we had after parties, he only would do these after parties if there was a stage there and he could play at them because he doesn't want to talk to people. He's just not comfortable. He likes people. But he doesn't want to talk.

He wants to be on stage playing, so we would either go to a recording studio. Or we'd go do an after party. Many times, I would mix the front of house for these after parties, not always, but sometimes because I could do those smaller club shows pretty easily.

ROB So, you know, it's amazing. We could talk about your work during these five years with Prince for this hour and a half that we have. But--

SUSAN Yeah, he was something else. And in his own words, those kinds of cars don't pass you every day. He was something else. And I want to add before we move off of Prince, he was easy to love. He was no saint.

ROGERS:

He could be mean. But when he was mean, it was the kind of mean that a 12 or 13-year-old boy is. And I grew up with brothers, so this was not a raging fiend who would throw things or fire people on a whim-- not Prince, not Prince. This was a 20-something-year-old young man who was a multimillionaire, who had employees. He had grown up very, very poor.

He's got everything going for him. The pressure must have been unbelievable. I can't even conceive of it. All of his friends, his friends are his musicians and his staff and the people who work for him, everyone who's close to him gets a paycheck from him. Even girlfriends would often be backup singers in the band.

Everyone he's closest to gets a paycheck from him. So who does he turn to? And what happens when he's having a really bad day and he's really upset and he needs to get anger out? He could be mocking in his humor, kind of snarky. From what I saw, that was as bad as it got.

ROB Hm.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN And I was very tolerant of that. That wasn't often. But it happened sometimes. And I was tolerant of it because I'll
ROGERS: be damned if I could've done any better. And the studio was his refuge.

When he went there and he was creating, that's the easiest way to get him from a bad mood to a good mood. So we'd start a session sometimes with him in a bad mood. But the more he worked, as the song is coming together, he's back to his usual self. His home base, his temperament, was happy. He was happy. And he was funny.

He was lovely to be around. And as I said, it made him really easy to love. I talk about him to this day because I want the next generation to know about him. And I want him to get the reputation and the legacy that he deserves. He deserves a good one.

ROB Mm-hm. Absolutely.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN We have heard stories recently about other rock stars and their behaviors. And some of their reputations are
ROGERS: pretty tarnished. Prince's isn't going to be. He's a good man.

ROB Yeah, well, I'm glad to hear you say that. It must have been difficult when he died recently. And did you stay in
HOCHSCHILD: touch with him after those five years of working with him?

SUSAN I saw him a few times when I would work as a client at Paisley Park. And the last time I ran into him was actually
ROGERS: in the late '90s. I was on a van tour with a small band. And we dropped in on Glam Slam, on the club there in Minneapolis.

And he was there. He invited me to come to New York with him that night. And I couldn't. I was on tour with a band. Our encounters afterward, with one exception-- [CHUCKLING]-- with one exception were very warm and very loving-- very loving.

ROB So before we leave Prince, I wonder if you could just sort of give us an encapsulation of sort of how things went.
HOCHSCHILD: You talked quite a lot about the early part and maybe a little bit about the other parts. But so, for five years you worked with him, how did your role evolve?

How did what you were experiencing evolve? I mean, when you began, you hadn't even really worked as an engineer? And *Purple Rain* was your first session. So at the end, I'm just wondering what your own evolution was throughout that period?

SUSAN

It was fortunate for me. Yeah, I would've liked to have been able to have evolved faster. But I did the best I could. I was not with him for a full five years. I was with him over four years, going on five.

ROGERS:

But no, I didn't make it to five years. In the four years, we did not only *Purple Rain*, *Around the World in a Day*, the *Parade* album, and movie, *Sign o' the Times*. I did all of the tracks on the Black album, except for one. So I did those five records, as well as *The Time* and Apollonia 6, and Sheila E., and Jill Jones and these other records that I contributed to that we worked on during this time, as well as two films-- well, three films-- *Purple Rain*, *Under the Cherry Moon*, the *Sign o' the Times* concert film, as well as world tours.

ROB

Mm-hm.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN

So much work in over four years. And we built Paisley Park Studios. I was evolving to be more comfortable in the engineering role. I was constrained in that Prince had a very specific sound that he liked. But the way we ended up working together ultimately is that he'd have me put up a tape if we were going to work on a song in progress, get a rough mix.

ROGERS:

He would sit down. And he'd be playing these instruments. And I would be shaping the song-- shaping the mix as the record is coming together. When we started from scratch, he'd leave a note on the console, a handwritten note, telling me what instruments he wanted set up. And I'd set up those instruments, get sounds on them as much as I was able to before he came in.

And he would move from one instrument to the next. When we recorded with the whole band, it would often be at rehearsal during my time. So at rehearsal, we had the microphones on stage feeding a splitter snake that fed two consoles, a monitor console and my recording console, so I'm recording the band and shaping everyone's sound and the mix while they're recording at rehearsal. After rehearsal, the band goes home. And Prince and I would stay up for him to do the lead, often the backing vocals.

Wendy and Lisa were a big part of backing vocals as well, depending on the song. Eric Leeds would maybe come and do the sax part. And we would mix the song as we were recording it. Sometimes, we'd pull down the faders and start from scratch on the mix but not always. When I worked with him at Sunset Sound-- he loved working at Sunset in Los Angeles.

That was his favorite recording studio, mine as well to this day. When we worked at Sunset, we were accompanied by Peggy McCreary, who was a staff engineer at Sunset Sound. So Peggy had been working with Prince before me and knew him well. So it'd be me and Peggy and Prince. And I liked that a lot.

Peggy and I had not completely overlapping skill sets and personalities and temperaments, so we could kind of have each other's back and learn from each other as well. And that was nice. And it was collegial.

ROB

That's good. It must have been nice to have somebody and have, like, a little team there working with him.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Oh, yes.

ROGERS:

ROB Because often, you were by yourself in a lot of those sessions, it sounds like.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN At home in Minnesota, it was just the two of us.

ROGERS:

ROB Yeah, yeah. So then what happened after your last project with Prince?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Well, after I left Prince-- I seem so naive to say it now, but I didn't know that anyone would hire me as an engineer because I assumed that I only know his sound. Who's going to want that? And I actually thought that maybe I'd have to work as an assistant engineer back in Hollywood because Prince was such an island. That experience was so unique.

ROGERS:

He was 2,000 miles away. He's in Minnesota. Who's going to hire me? I really didn't know. And I loved Minnesota so much, I thought about doing audio work at a radio station or TV.

But then something great happened. Someone through someone I knew out in Los Angeles, they contacted me. And they said, would you be interested in working for the Jacksons? And I said, Okay. And they brought me out to Los Angeles.

And the Jackson family was doing *2300 Jackson Street*. And they had me stay at the family home on Hayvenhurst and Encino. There was a spare bedroom. The deer pen was right outside my window, the little deers because Michael, he had just bought and was just now building Neverland.

So Michael was on tour. I think it might have been the *Bad* tour. It was in the '80s, and all of his animals, like the llama and all that stuff, at home, the family home on Hayvenhurst. So I worked for the Jacksons for the next few months and decided, yeah, I'm going to move back to LA.

ROB So you began your engineering career with Prince and Michael Jackson, which is a pretty incredible way--

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN It wasn't Michael. It was the other brothers. *2300 Jackson Street* was Jermaine and Jackie and Tito and Marlon.

ROGERS:

ROB So, pretty extraordinary beginning to your career-- you wound up working with an awful lot of artists. And I just want to sort of ask about what it was like to work with so many different kinds of artists. I mean, Prince was completely unique, obviously-- a lot of different genres, a lot of different kinds of people. What sort of skills do you think you had to have in order to be able to work in all of those different situations? How did you make all these kinds of situations work well?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN I got fortunate in that I had a manager who got me work in the alternative indie scene. It wasn't originally what I wanted. What I wanted was to do the R&B records that I loved. But those calls weren't coming my way.

ROGERS:

The R&B producers, on the other hand-- rather, the alternative indie producers, on the other hand, were interested in working with someone like me because where they would have their ear on lyrics and melody, I've always had that affinity for rhythm. I could have an ear on the bass and drums. I have an affinity for the foundation. That's my thing.

So I learned that when you combine talents in a number of areas, you fan something out. And that's kind of what was happening with my career. I was being brought in to have that soul perspective. So that helped me with engineering projects. And eventually, I would get hired to do mixing and then eventually get hired to produce.

ROB HOCHSCHILD: So were there one or two projects from that period in your 22 years post Prince altogether that stood out as--

SUSAN ROGERS: Oh, yes.

ROB HOCHSCHILD: --the most memorable?

SUSAN ROGERS: I had so much fun making records and I worked with a great variety of people. But my whole life changed when I met Tommy Jordan and Greg Kurstin. Greg Kurstin was the Geggy. And Tommy was the Tah of Geggy Tah. They were signed to David Byrne's Luaka Bop label.

And when I met those two guys, everything changed. In fact, everything changed before I met them because it changed the first time I heard them. And I was in Kevin Lafferty's office. He was an A&R person at Warner Brothers Records. And he was playing me stuff.

And he said, I'm going to play you something. He said, you wouldn't be interested in it because they don't have any money to pay you. They're on a tiny little label. But check this out. And he played me two songs, two demos by this band.

And I recognized immediately, these guys know something about music that I don't know. And I need desperately to know it. Like, what they knew about music was so advanced from my perspective that I thought, I need to meet these guys. I want to know what they know.

And so Kevin hooked us up. And Tommy and Greg and I met. And everything changed. I ultimately did work with them. I nearly went bankrupt because he wasn't kidding.

They did not have money to pay me. And the label was very small. It was all worth it. I lived off savings so that I could help those guys make their first record, which was called *Grand Opening*. They were two of the most creative and talented people I'd ever worked with in the music business.

Now, Prince was a very special kind of talent. Tommy and Greg were another kind of talent. Greg is a multi-instrumentalist whose career has been on fire lately as a producer and songwriter. Greg took home the Grammy for Producer of the Year, not this year but the last two years in a row, for his work with Adele, Beck, Foo Fighters, and Lily Allen, and so many other people he works with. Tommy, on the other hand, has done film scoring work with David Lynch and does a little bit of television scoring as well.

But the two of them together approach music from, what was to me, a brand new perspective. And that's the perspective of understanding what music is. Their goal, Geggy Tah's goal, was not to be rock stars or to be famous or to be rich. It was to understand what music is. And what they wanted to know was, how far apart can we pull it and have it still be music? What can we do to this and have it still be allowable?

Now, these two guys had had all the formal training in the world. Greg had studied under Jaki Byard at the New School in New York for years and at CalArts Northridge. Tommy had studied at Oberlin. I believe he was a composition major at Oberlin, so they had all this formal training. But they made the weirdest records-- not weird for the sake of weird but pushing a notion of how music works and what good is.

They taught me to ask the question that every three-year-old would ask and too few producers do or engineers do, and the question is, why? Why? Often, we do things just because that's how it's done. But Tommy would always ask why, why, why, why. He would never just accept a pat or routine answer. He always wanted to know that every gesture in the studio was coming from a place of intentionality.

And he was all about that. Tommy and I are best friends to this day. We started a conversation in 1992. And we're still talking, so that was, like, one of the big highlights. Because of what I learned under their tutelage and the records we did together, my career took off after that.

ROB Well, and it's a great segue to what I want to move to next because this question, what is music and how can
HOCHSCHILD: you manipulate music, feels connected to what you studied later on and what you're teaching here. So I wonder if you could talk about how that transition occurred. You left your work in the music industry in the late '90s, I believe it was?

SUSAN I left in 2000.

ROGERS:

ROB 2000, and then went to college.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yes.

ROGERS:

ROB So I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit. Where did you go? Did you know right away what you wanted
HOCHSCHILD: to do as a college student? So give us that story real quick.

SUSAN Yeah, when I was young, I felt the calling to be in the recording studio. And it was a calling. It felt like, that's
ROGERS: home. And I need to go back to home. You feel a little bit like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. I know I belong here.

And in my mid-30s, I began feeling a new calling. And that was the calling to be in a laboratory. I wanted to be looking under a microscope or be working in the sciences. I thought I would really enjoy that kind of life. And that calling didn't go away. It just kept getting louder and louder, so I knew I would need to have a second life.

And the opportunity presented itself when I had a hit record as producer with Barenaked Ladies. Their *Stunt* album sold, to this date, I think it sold 5 million. But we had this big hit record. And back in the days when we got royalties for records, we got these big checks. So a royalty participant would get a big check.

And with that big check, some people will build a home studio. Or they'll buy a yacht or something like that. Or they pay off their mortgage. I quit my job. And I left the music business in the year 2000 and entered the University of Minnesota as a freshman at age 44.

ROB As a freshman, yeah.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Freshman, age 44.

ROGERS:

ROB How was that?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Great. Many people say college is the happiest years of their life. I thought it's just because you're young. No, no, college was so wonderful. What a treat to be there every day and have people teaching you things. It's amazing.

ROGERS:

I loved it. I loved it, loved it, loved it, loved it. And after I finished my four years-- I had a dual degree in neuroscience and psychology-- I was accepted into Daniel Levitin's lab at McGill. After I joined Daniel Levitin's lab, he decided to write a book. And the book he wrote was *This Is Your Brain on Music*.

Who knew it was going to become a bestseller? But it did. And that was fortunate for me and for everyone else involved in the field of music cognition because Dan showed the general public about these questions. And he showed how scientists address these questions.

ROB Were you the person who brought him to Berklee several years ago? Were you here when he spoke at Berklee?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yes, but I'm not the person who brought him.

ROGERS:

SUSAN Dan is a big deal. He's a big celebrity, so many others could have brought him here.

ROGERS:

ROB So you studied with him and then eventually got your PhD.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yes.

ROGERS:

ROB And did you contemplate staying in that segment of academia, like teaching science as opposed to coming to

HOCHSCHILD: Berklee and teaching?

SUSAN No, my dream was to go be a scientist in a research university. That's what I wanted. And that would have been very possible if I had earned my PhD at the age of 25 or 26. But our former Dean, Stephen Croes-- old friend-- I've known Stephen since the '90s-- Stephen started asking me in my last year of grad school if I'd be interested in coming to Berklee.

ROGERS:

And at first, I'm like, no, that's not what I want to do. I want to do research. But Stephen's wife is also a PhD. And Stephen is smart enough to know, you know, lady, you're not going to walk into a grown-up salary with a new PhD. You'd have to do a postdoc for two years maybe-- three years, if you're lucky, at some place. And then you'll have to look for another postdoc and then another.

And maybe they'd eventually hire you. And you're going to go back to earning very little money. And you're in your 50s now. And what about retirement? So he started persuading me.

He said, you know, at Berklee, you could teach your actual PhD. You can teach in the sciences. But you can teach your virtual PhD in record production and engineering. Now, at this point, I didn't want to have those conversations anymore. Like, I'm done with that. I've got this whole new thing that I love.

But he was right. I came here. And what changed my mind was a kid with a big afro. I had been in the psychology department at McGill and had been around scientists. And they're a different breed.

And prior to my academic career, I'd only known musicians. And I missed musicians badly. I missed those conversations. I missed that attitude. I missed those people. I missed how musicians are.

And Stephen brought me here to Berklee in May 2008 to visit. And we walked in the doors at 150. And the first kid he introduces me to is this tall, skinny kid with a giant afro, which I hadn't been around a kid like that in eight years. And I just felt like, oh, yeah, oh, yeah, these are my people.

For better or worse, there's no denying these are my people. I belong with musicians. They're what I know. I should be here. And I accepted his offer to come here.

ROB Mm-hm.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yeah.

ROGERS:

ROB Are we good with this?

HOCHSCHILD:

CREW: That's okay.

ROB Okay.

HOCHSCHILD:

[CHUCKLING] That's good. We can take a quick break.

CREW: We don't have to do it now if you need to take a break.

ROB No, I mean, I'm okay.

HOCHSCHILD:

ROB But Susan--

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN I'm okay. I'm just trying to breathe.

ROGERS:

ROB Yes, well, and we'll try to wrap in about 20 minutes. So you came and joined the faculty fall of 2008.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yes.

ROGERS:

ROB And hadn't taught music production in a classroom setting before.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN No.

ROGERS:

ROB So how did you sort of put it together at the beginning? What was your approach at the outset?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN I still remember my first day, my very first class. It really makes me smile. So it was 461, the Advanced
ROGERS: Production class. And I walked in. And there's eight kids sitting there.

I introduce myself. And I'm telling them a little bit about my doctoral thesis. I tell them I have not been in the studio recently. I was in the studio a lot in the past but not recently. Here's what I've been doing.

And I talked about my doctoral thesis, which involves the origin of consonance and dissonance. There's a little skinny kid sitting in the front row. And he's got really long blond hair. And he's looking up at me the whole time. And once I finally finished talking, he said, I disagree with everything you just said.

ROB What? [CHUCKLING]

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN And it was so funny. And I thought, oh, this is great. This is great, because as a teacher, you want that. You want
ROGERS: a conversation. You don't want to be a talking head, just, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah in front of people.

You want back and forth. Please, if you have other opinions, it would delight me to hear them. So he did. He had another opinion about dissonance. And turned out, he wasn't quite understanding-- I probably didn't explain myself well-- about the origins of dissonance as I explained it.

And he loves dissonance in his music. And so we were able to straighten all that out. And he became my first friend here at Berklee. Some of my students are kids I'm still friends with today from those first two semesters. I love those kids so much.

They recognized that I was new, that I was a beginner, that I had something to offer. And they just kind of embraced me and brought me into the fold and taught me about themselves and about the typical MP&E student and how this works here. I worked my tail off. I was writing my doctoral thesis at the same time as I was writing new classes.

I wrote curriculum for the Analog Tape class. And I wrote a music cognition course and a psychoacoustics course. I wrote a Studio Maintenance Tech class that is being taught by someone else now. But I wrote a lot of classes, as well as my doctoral thesis.

ROB Yeah, so it was a busy time, it sounds like.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Ridiculously busy, yeah.

ROGERS:

ROB Almost as busy as working with Prince?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Not quite as bad as working with Prince. But when I look back on it now, I ask myself, how did I ever get that

ROGERS: done?

ROB Mm-hm. So all those years of working-- how did you start to take all of those years of experience in the recording

HOCHSCHILD: studio and your academic work-- your scientific studies-- and apply that in the classroom in a practical way? How did that sort of all come out?

SUSAN Yeah, I could not pretend that my science training didn't exist. But I saw an opportunity. In the conversations
ROGERS: around record production or recording, I saw an opportunity to integrate the two and to be able to teach Berklee students something that-- I'm going to be a little immodest here when I say this, but it is to the best of my knowledge accurate-- teach them something that no one else in the world could teach them.

Dan Levitin has a little bit of experience in the studio but nowhere near the amount of experience that I have at the highest levels-- not the same number of years and not reaching the same number of record sales. My career in the music industry was diverse. I was a technician as well as a mixer as well as an engineer as well as a producer and had number one hits in all three of those roles-- engineer, mixer, and producer. So I've got the deep gravitas in the studio world. But I've also got this paper from McGill.

And I studied under Daniel Levitin and Stephen McAdams, so I recognized here at Berklee I can teach music production not only from a practical aspect but also from the aspect of the consumer-- what people are looking for when they are looking for a music product, how people bond to music, how personality traits influence what music we like-- well, as I spoke about earlier, the three audiences and what those audiences are looking for and what their value systems are and how to predict who's likely to be your audience and when and where and why and how, how music functions in certain contexts. I can bring a new perspective to record production, to the discussion of it.

Having been successful in the past, I can bring a perspective of helping students know, I think, a little bit along the lines of what to do to position yourself in the working world. I've done it twice. I've had two careers. So I have those conversations with them. And I really enjoy it.

ROB Yeah, I read in your sort of a CV or your promotion dossier that in your Advanced Production Techniques class,

HOCHSCHILD: you talk about interviews and how to prepare for interviews--

SUSAN Yes.

ROGERS:

ROB --and how to develop guidelines for accepting or rejecting gigs. And so is that something-- you actually do

HOCHSCHILD: interviews in class? Or how do you talk about that?

SUSAN In the producer audition exercise, we do a mock interview. I play myself from back in the '90s. And the student

ROGERS: offers to just play the role of the leader of a four-piece band. And so I model for them, here's how to take an interview.

So when a band or an artist is going to hire a producer, typically, they interview a minimum of three different producers. But it's often six or more. Geggy Tah interviewed 25 producers before they chose me just because they like talking with people or Tommy does, anyway. But yeah, you need to-- when you're going to make a record with people, it's like going into business with them. You're going to start a business.

And you need to know something about their philosophy and how they view the world and how they view this product and what they'd like to sell, how they think about themselves and how they like to work. And you have to share all that about yourself with them. And that's not something we were teaching. So I like teaching that.

ROB What do you think are the qualities that an aspiring producer or engineer need to have in order to get work that

HOCHSCHILD: they're going to find satisfying, have a career?

SUSAN Yeah, if you're an engineer or a mixer or a producer, you are a professional listener. It's what you do for a living.

ROGERS: You have to have an expert ability to read performance gestures, to read musicians, just like a chef can taste ingredients at the farmer's market and tell you what's fresh and what isn't and reject certain ingredients. I'm not going to make a sauce with this because it's going to come out terrible. I don't have that ability. But an expert chef must have that ability.

I do have the ability to read musicians and read their performance gestures. I am a greedy listener. I want to be played and sung to. That's what I do for a living or what I did. I listen to music, which sounds silly. But there's an art to it.

Then you have to have the art of knowing how to make the right product for the right market, knowing how to find your audience, and not giving in to the beginner's folly of thinking you're going to write a song that appeals to everyone. Of course, you won't. No chef is going to make a food or a beverage that appeals to everyone. And if he or she did, it would be really bland.

The only thing we all agree on all around planet Earth that we all like is water. Everything else we can have debates about because there are people who don't like crackers. There are people who don't like milk. Likewise, you're not going to make a song that everyone says, this is great. You have to figure out who likes you and why they like you, who is likely to like you. And target that audience.

You have to think about things like we talked about earlier, with who will your first audience be? Are you targeting the public? Are you targeting the critics? Are you targeting other musicians? Pick one.

ROB Mm.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN The kinds of conversations that producers need to have with their artists need to involve a lot of business
ROGERS: conversations of how we're going to get this product to the market. And the kinds of conversations engineers have to have with clients involve setting the conditions so that you get the best performance out of people. A recording engineer who doesn't do a vocal mic shootout on a singer that he or she has never worked with before is really naive. If you think you're just going to grab a microphone and put it in front of a singer, and it's going to work, and you've never heard this singer sing before, well, that's naive.

A throat is going to have a set of resonant frequencies based on its length and its diameter, its shape, and the condition it's in. Certain microphones will either embellish those qualities. Or they'll mask those qualities. Or they might just bring out the absolute worst in your voice. Engineers and artists need to work together, just like an art director and a cinematographer on a film is working with the actors to frame shots and to help the actors deliver their best performance.

ROB Mm-hm. You know, it's so interesting, considering the career that you had in the studio. And then you studied all
HOCHSCHILD: this science. And now it sounds like you're always sort of almost taking all of that experience and applying the science on it in a way. Or maybe I'm getting that backwards, you know?

SUSAN Yeah.
ROGERS:

ROB So I'm wondering what the conversations are like in class or if some of your students go deeper into science
HOCHSCHILD: through encountering you. Because I imagine--

SUSAN Sometimes they do--
ROGERS:

ROB Yeah.
HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN --our Berklee students do. So in the production classes here, I have lecture topics. The other production teachers
ROGERS: don't teach it that way. But I do because as you said, when I learned so much about brain science, so often in school, I kept thinking to myself, if only I'd known this while I was making records. If only I'd known this while I was making records.

So I want these students to know this now. They can go out into the world more armed, more informed than students of other production programs. I think it's good stuff. The other thing is I'm compensating for the fact that I don't make modern records. The tools and the methodology have changed greatly in the last 20 years.

I've never done-- well, with one exception-- a record on Pro Tools. I always worked in analog tape. Analog tape, with its constraints, constrained how we produced, how we arranged, how we performed-- we had to-- how we recorded. In this modern world, many of those constraints no longer exist.

But I don't care about that. The kids today, they got that all covered. They know how to deal with that. They don't need me to tell them. I think what they need me to tell them is some big picture stuff.

I can help them zoom the microscope out further. They can take care of the local details. But I can help them look at the big picture. I think that's a good role for me, given that I've been doing this for 40 some odd years. I've got that big perspective that they don't have, so that's what I try to give them a little bit of.

ROB And that perspective is always going to be applicable no matter what advances come down the path.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yes, because music changes. But human beings do not.

ROGERS:

ROB Yeah.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Now, there's an interesting thing that's going on in music. And I don't know quite how to wrap my head around it because it has implications for how we interact with music in the future. This came up in class the other day. A student played a track in progress. And it was drums, bass, electric guitar. It was a rock track, so it was just the basic track, kind of like in the style of Green Day.

And we're all listening to it. And it sounded great to me. The sounds were great. Performance was great-- really happy with it. One of the students in the class raised his hand and said to the student producer, he says, you know, you're going to have to fix some of those off-time snare hits. The student pointed out where they were.

And I said, hey, hang on a minute here. Why do you have to fix them? So sometimes when a drummer has just done a big fill or has been playing his ass off and is out of energy, he comes out of a big chorus with a big fill or maybe a blast beat, and his arm's tired. And that snare hit's going to arrive a few milliseconds late. It's going to be a little bit softer because his arm's tired.

That's a performance gesture. And the subtext of that gesture is it's telling me he worked his ass off on this song. I can hear how tired you are. That's a gesture that carries meaning to me and actually helps convey, to me, the listener, what a full can of whoop ass this band has. They're working really hard, so hard that they made some mistakes, so hard they're digging in.

So I explained that to the class. And I said, that said, do you still want to fix it? Because if you fix it, you're going to get rid of that subtext. And the class kind of looked around at each other. And they went, yeah, fix it.

And then one young man in the class said something that's a really sad sentence. They were talking about why. They said our generation is used to it being perfect. It has to be perfect on the grid. And then this one young man said, at some point, the drummer's no longer playing it. The machine is.

And I just went, oh, I don't want to listen to machines. I want to listen to people. What do you mean? You just took the drummer out of it. And now you've given me a machine.

The following day, a student comes to my office hour. And this student has been doing a lot of vocal production for a client down in Ecuador. And she played me the track. And the vocal, the female vocal, sounded perfect-- no pitch errors, no timing errors-- perfect.

So I asked her, you did a great job on that. What shape was it in when you got it? How much correction did you have to do? And this student laughed. And she said, this singer can't sing at all because I have to correct practically every note.

So this singer didn't really sing to me, did she? A machine sung to me. I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in human beings. In my day, when we made records, the performance people heard was the best performance the producer could get.

And you stopped where you realized that the mistakes were actually informative or were you realized the mistakes were inevitable. Sometimes you let it go because you couldn't not have them. Players can't play any better than this. Today's records are so massaged and corrected that you don't know what percentage of it is the human and what percent is the machine.

This may have downstream effects on the music listening experience. Listening to perfection is a lot like watching *Ralph Breaks the Internet* or *Cars*. That's an animated film. Is that animated?

ROB I don't know that film.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN "The Indestructibles-- is that one?"

ROGERS:

ROB What is it?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN "The Indestructibles"? I don't know. I don't know the names. I don't have children, so I don't know the names of these films. But take a great animated film, those things don't exist. We made it in a laboratory.

ROGERS:

But yet, we like it. It's exciting. Now look at a film like *Black Panther*. It was a little bit reality and a little bit fake. We can do the fake so well that at some point, it becomes almost inseparable.

And we've seen enough of reality to know that Wakanda doesn't actually exist. We suspend our belief. But when it comes to music, you don't have that information unless you go and see the artist live and you realize, oh, she really can't sing. He really does get tired after he does that incredible fill.

ROB So as this topic comes up in class or in the work here at Berklee, you try to address it and talk about it with

HOCHSCHILD: students? And the dialogue you just described, is that something is coming up more often, do you find?

SUSAN Yes, we can have that in class. And I'm not going to-- far be it for me to tell students what they should or shouldn't do because I'm not working in the world today. They are. They have to do what they have to do in order to be successful. And I frame it like that.

ROGERS:

And the students all agreed, like, yeah, you need to fix those errors. That's just what you have to do. But we do talk about it as a rhetorical question. I like them to consider their gestures carefully. Going back to Geggy Tah, Tommy Jordan would always ask why.

If someone says you have to correct all those timing hits, you got to correct that pitch, what I want these folks to do is ask why. What would happen if I didn't? And really explore the answers, both sides of the answer. What would happen if you didn't? Would it be better or worse?

What would you gain? What would you lose? If you can assess your own music that way, if you can analyze it and think critically about it, you'll be in good shape to go out into the world as a professional. You will have already started this line of thinking.

ROB How do you describe our students these days you've been working with these past 10, 11 years?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN I just love them. I've become a real stage mother, a stage mother, in that I really want them to do well. And when

ROGERS: I see or hear wrong thinking, I'm going to speak up. I try to help them to help themselves by helping them to teach themselves or to acquire certain habits. I am really strict about due dates.

And I don't accept late work. I learned this because I learned that there are young people attending these fancy pants schools-- young people, 8, 9, 10 years old-- attending these really fancy schools because they have very wealthy parents. And the way they're being taught is the teacher will say, you have a book report due in three weeks. It's due on March 15 and never mention it again. And the little eight-year-old's job is to take down that information and now own that information on his phone or his tablet or his notebook, wherever he owns it.

Teacher says, I gave you something valuable, the due date. It's no longer mine. It's yours. So the student has to be aware of and meet that deadline and not count on the teacher reminding him or her, hey, don't forget. It's due next week, due next week.

If eight-year-olds can do it, why not our college students? I think if we post those deadlines and we say, it's due at this date, you should be able to now own that information and not write back to me a week after that due date and say, oh, I forgot. Can you give me more time? No.

I gave you something valuable. And you lost it. I'm not giving it to you again. The hit to the grades is going to matter far less than if I said, Okay, yeah, sure. It's fine-- no problem.

I'm now doing you a disservice. I'm teaching you that the world will lay a carpet in front of your feet. And if you stumble and fall, they'll just pick you back up and let you go again. What if they don't? What if they don't?

ROB And they probably won't in a lot of cases.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Yeah, yeah. So our folks are great. And they work really hard. And they're not jaded. And they're not cynical.

ROGERS:

And they're delightful to be around. And they try really hard. And I love that they think for themselves. And I think our music industry, the future of our music industry, is in good hands.

ROB Yeah. Can you mention a few things some of your former students are doing now these days?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Oh, gosh, there's so many of them. I'm thinking of Alex Prieto. Alex Prieto was rejected for MP&E, I think three times. He finally had to bring his mother in. And they finally accepted him.

ROGERS: His grades weren't very high. But Alex Prieto has graduated 10 years ago now. And he's now doing all label mixing work out in Los Angeles. And he also does mixing for the TV show *Bob's Burgers*. He's doing really, really well.

Simone Torres-- unlike Alex Prieto-- Alex Prieto had that 10-year trajectory-- Simone Torres is doing incredible work as a mastering engineer down in, I believe she's in Miami. We've got Anthony Majors in Atlanta, who's doing incredible production work. We've got Tyler Scott. We've got, of course, Charlie Puth. We've got a long list of students who are doing incredible, incredible work in Nashville, in Los Angeles, in New York, and elsewhere.

Matt and James Morales, they graduated 10 years ago now. But Matt and James, two brothers, teamed up with their friend Dave Rodriguez and formed a production company called the Elev3n. They got signed to Sony ATV Publishing. And they've got a studio in New York City.

ROB That's great.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN And they're doing really well.

ROGERS:

ROB So as far as your future and your teaching here, what are you hoping to accomplish? Are there new things you want to try or explore as a teacher or with students?

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Well, I'm only a few years away from retirement. The thing I'd like to do before I leave Berklee is to make sure that this Hearing Health Initiative that I helped to launch is widespread and deeply entrenched. I'm deeply concerned about the hearing health of our young musicians. They need to be aware that they should be wearing earplugs.

ROGERS:

They need to be aware of their hearing. And they need to protect their hearing. So I have started with some other offices here an information campaign where we're trying really, really hard to get students to protect their hearing now so that they will have a long career with good hearing health. So many professional musicians suffer from tinnitus and hyperacusis.

It's going to kick in around your 40s, your mid-40s, just as your career is reaching its peak. We cannot afford to have that happen. If our young people today can be aware of that by the time I leave here that becomes widely known on our campus, then I will have felt like I did my job. Wearing hearing protection should be as automatic as wearing sunscreen or wearing a prophylactic if you're having sex. There are things in the environment that will cause you damage.

Protect yourself from that damage. Unlike a sunburn, which is going to get you right away, ear burn, you're not aware of. Because what actually happens is you start deteriorating the auditory nerve. And that takes a long time, a few years to fully die off, so you're not aware of how much damage you did. That's why you have to have that knowledge and just be proactive and protect your hearing when you're young.

ROB Well, great. I'm glad you're pushing that. I'll do my part to spread the word about it too.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Please, please.

ROGERS:

ROB We are kind of out of time for this one today. I almost think we're going to need to do this again at some point. Is

HOCHSCHILD: there anything we didn't cover today that you wanted to mention that feels like it's part of the conversation?

SUSAN No, I don't think so. I'm really, as always, just grateful for the conversation.

ROGERS:

ROB Me too.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Happy to be here, and if anyone wants to come to my office hour and talk about Prince or anything else, they're

ROGERS: welcome to.

ROB Great. Well, Susan Rogers, thank you so much for the time today.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Thank you.

ROGERS:

ROB And we'll talk some more soon.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Okay, thank you.

ROGERS:

ROB All right.

HOCHSCHILD:

SUSAN Appreciate it.

ROGERS: