Do it Yourself: Women and LGBTQ+ Musicians and Promoters in the DIY Midwest Music Scene

Morgan W. Matzen

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DO IT YOURSELF:

Women and LGBTQ+ Musicians and Promoters in the DIY Midwest Music Scene

by

Morgan Matzen

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the
University Honors Program

Department of Media & Journalism
The University of South Dakota
December 2019
The members of the Honors Thesis Committee appointed to examine the thesis of Morgan Matzen find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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ABSTRACT

Do It Yourself: Women and LGBTQ+ Musicians and Promoters in the DIY Midwest Music Scene

Morgan Matzen

Director: Janet Davison

In certain parts of the Midwest “DIY,” or the underground/alternative music scene, there is not enough representation of women, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals in music, whether onstage as a band or musician, or in venue ownership and leadership. This study looks at where these diverse people are, and the setbacks they’ve faced along the way of becoming a musician, promoter or venue owner. Three emerging themes through this journalistic research include all-ages venues and music scenes as integral to getting people involved in music; a “DIY” attitude or ethos as a push for these musicians and promoters to get their start; and discrimination as a setback which makes women, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals feel unwelcome, unheard or unimportant in music.

This documentary, produced over the course of a year, looks at venue owners, show promoters, booking agents, individual musicians and bands that feature diversity, and works through the setbacks they’ve faced in the music scenes of Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Vermillion, South Dakota; Fargo, North Dakota and Sioux City, Iowa.

KEYWORDS: Documentary, Diversity, Representation, Music, DIY, Musicians, Bands, Promoters, Venue Owners, Shows, Concerts, Gender, Sexuality, Media, Women, LGBTQ+, People of Color, Inclusion, Fargo, Sioux City, Sioux Falls, Vermillion, Midwest
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements...........................................................................................................vi

Dedication............................................................................................................................vii

Artist’s Statement...............................................................................................................1

Bibliography......................................................................................................................18
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee for sticking with me every step of the way. I want to thank the people who helped me with 1BlueString and DiME Fest, because you showed me that I can really do anything. Thanks to the departments of Media & Journalism, Honors, Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies and the CURCS Grant office for giving me the tools and strength to do this. Thank you to Jackie Hendry for paving the way for me to do this, and being a great inspiration and role model. Thank you to Annie Boyum for being my best friend and great technical support. Thanks to Bee, Annie and Laura for tagging along for Fargo. Thank you to my family, who let me go to shows for years and let me become the person I am with music.

Most of all, thank you to everyone in this story. Without you, none of this is possible.
DEDICATION

This documentary is dedicated to Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and the foremothers of rock music.

You’ve paved the way for all of this.

I would also like to dedicate this to my mom, grandmothers and the women in my life who raised me and educated me to become a feminist reaching toward intersectionality.
ARTIST STATEMENT

One of the main things that kept me in the Honors program over the course of my three-and-a-half years at USD was the idea that I would get to do some big project, a thesis, as the capstone to my career at USD and my career in the Media & Journalism program. I remember having some difficulty selecting a topic, but can’t even recall what my other options for a topic are because I am so glad that I ultimately settled on this one and I feel so passionately about the topic I did choose.

The inspiration from this topic came from my Gender & Media class with my thesis advisor, Janet Davison. In this class, we learned about lagging representations of women who play electric guitar, and learned about influential rock musicians like Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Joan Baez, Bonnie Raitt and more. I found myself wondering why I hadn’t heard of many of these women before, but I’d learned about lots of male guitarists and musicians in my earlier education and in my general knowledge of popular culture. Why hadn’t I heard about any of these women? Even in my previous classes at USD, like Rock & Roll Appreciation, I feel like I rarely learned about any female or trans or queer artists. I even remember emailing the professor of that class as a freshman that there was not enough representation in the class. Later in my Gender & Media class, I wrote my final paper about missing representations of women in music and later presented it at the biennial Women & Gender Studies conference on campus, so I have some knowledge on the subject.

In November of 2018, I remember I went home to see a band called Diet Cig at Total Drag Records in Sioux Falls, and the lead guitarist and songwriter Alex Luciano mentioned that rock and roll was founded by a queer woman of color, Sister Rosetta Tharpe. From the moment I heard her say this onstage at the concert, I knew I had to do a thesis on this topic, and also figure
out where the representation was in my scene. I met Alex offstage selling merchandise after the concert, and asked her to give the little speech again. I recorded it on my iPhone. From that moment, I knew I had a start to my thesis. I wanted to look at where the women, queer and trans people were in my music scene, and why I hadn’t seen a lot of representation in my scene over the years since I’ve been going to concerts for so long.

I figured I wanted to do a documentary from the start because I had a lot of experience with doing print media in my journalism career so far and wanted to challenge myself to try something new. I’d dabbled in video work in my previous Media & Journalism classes, but it wasn’t enough for me to leave with a full video portfolio that I can really show off to employers. I could do a multiplatform story, but I felt passionate about having one consistent platform. It made the most sense to do this as a video documentary. Print has its purpose in reporting but I felt that in print, we wouldn’t get to hear these people’s music or the emotion in their voice when they speak about issues that they face every day in music. Even a radio story would allow us to hear these diverse voices and these emotions as well as the music, but we still wouldn’t be able to see these people play. Video felt like the most natural platform to go with, as we could see these diverse people and see them speak about these issues, as well as see their performances, hear their music and see their musical styles. I also wanted to go with video because personally, I do spend a lot of time watching band interviews with some of my favorite bands on YouTube. I also wanted to come to college to become a music journalist and saw this as a great opportunity to cover music in a new way and push myself in a new platform, so I could leave USD with something to show for my passions.

In the beginning of my Thesis Prep class, I remember giving a PowerPoint about the topic I’d chosen. Naturally, the plan slightly shifted and changed over time, and over the course
of a year. Originally, I’d entitled it “VOICES: Gender and Sexual Minorities in the DIY Midwest Music Scene,” and figured I’d work out the questions on the basis of a SWOT analysis with each of my sources. A SWOT analysis looks at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. For the strengths, I figured I would ask about role models and guitar skills and any strengths they have as an individual, whether they were a musician or promoter. For weaknesses, I wanted to ask about how they may have felt discouraged from joining the music scene. For opportunities, I asked about any safe spaces they’ve been a part of or any places they felt especially welcomed, and any new paths they have created for themselves as minorities. When it comes to threats, I wanted to ask about the “dark side” of the music industry and whether these people had faced any harassment or violence, or any forms of discrimination, anything from being misgendered to not being able to play at a certain venue.

Based on prior research I’d done about representation and discrimination, I wanted the documentary to feature primarily women and LGBTQ+ identifying people, essentially, gender and sexual minorities, as well as any people of color that fit into those categories. I figured I would be looking at people in Sioux Falls, Vermillion, Sioux City and maybe even Fargo or Minneapolis as ways to localize the story. These are also regions I felt more familiar with. Although I had never traveled to Fargo before, I knew a handful of bands and at least band names there, and was aware of the thriving music scene. I also found it important to focus not just on musicians and the people making and playing music, but also the people who book bands and run venues and why they make the choices they make in who they let play, as well as any setbacks they may face based on their gender.

I also chose to apply for a Council for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship (CURCS) grant because I knew I would have to travel quite a bit for this story, and also get some
much-needed camera equipment like an external hard drive and a new SD (Secure Digital) card. I also wanted to have a documentary screening when I was finished with the project, which cost $200 at the Coyote Twin for December 16, 2019. I ended up getting a $750 grant to help cover my costs.

For my committee, I felt it was wise to choose Janet Davison as a committee chair because she taught the Gender & Media class that inspired my work, and has been a great role model for me. Janet knows a lot about representation and has a smart grasp on gender and LGBTQ+ related issues. She and Michelle Van Maanen also teach in the Media & Journalism program, so they’d know a lot about the production of the documentary and could help me with questions and advice on that frontier. I chose Michelle Van Maanen for the committee too because she has a great technical understanding of journalism and would give me useful critiques on my video and audio. I chose Sara Lampert because she would have a great sense of the representations we need to see in media, and good ideas about how to frame stories because she watches lots of documentaries and has a great knowledge of history. I also subconsciously chose all women for my committee, which had its benefits as we talked a lot about gender representation and the nuances of that, and this ultimately turned out to be a bit of a feminist undertaking and feminist praxis.

Choosing sources was no easy task. I knew there were a handful of people who would have a compelling story to tell, and there are lots of genres and venues I could look at, and lots of bands and musicians who would have something to say about all this. I knew I wanted to talk to Dan and Liz Nissen, the co-owners of the venue Total Drag in Sioux Falls, as they were running on almost five years in business. I knew Bee Lohr through the music scene and had been to a house show at their house, and wondered what stories they would have to tell as a trans person
running a house venue. Later, they pointed me to Shelby Scheerhoorn, another gender-diverse person who sort of took over house venue operations for Bee as they moved houses.

For Sioux City, I had made a lot of connections with the people I ended up interviewing from when I worked at the Sioux City Journal in the summer of 2018. I knew Kendall through The Ox, as I had previously written a story on the house venue before I even interned in Sioux City. I met Grace through The Ox when she played a show there, and naturally I met Simone through Grace. Simone actually reached out to me early to ask for some recommendations of bands she could book for Sioux City Pretty, so we were connected then, too. It is crazy how this underground world of DIY kind of works out, and everyone becomes connected and works to help each other out.

For Vermillion, I had interviewed Dylan Daniels before for a story about booking bands at R-Pizza so we both knew of each other before this. And lastly, for Fargo, I have seen Free Truman (Tayler and Tia Krabbenhoft) play several times in Sioux Falls, and even in Vermillion. I think I saw them play at Total Drag once when I was in high school, and I think they are one of the hardest-working bands in DIY right now, so I was dying to hear their story, and their perspective as a band of sisters who are queer Mexican-American women in a genre dominated by white men. I also knew there was a story forming between Tayler and the long-standing New Direction Fest in Fargo, and when I reached out to TND by email, Jack Stenerson was willing to be interviewed for the story. I also knew that Cydney Berlinger would be a great source because I’d seen them play a house show and I learned that they’d been in lots of bands and had expertise and experience in booking shows in the Midwest. Cydney also helped with Book Your Own Fest.
A huge part of my inspiration for this documentary was my own intrinsic sense of journalistic duty to tell these stories. I felt that by telling these people’s stories, I would also be telling my own story. I’d be telling my story as someone who rarely felt represented in the shows they attend; my own story as an occasional show promoter for shows at USD like DiME Fest and 1BlueString; and as a journalist who simply loves to tell people’s stories.

My journalistic duty also shone through when I realized that no one was covering this story. Not only did that mean a great opportunity for me to expose an issue, but it also meant that there was a problem with other people not seeing this as an issue. Why didn’t the dilemma with Book Your Own Fest and The New Direction Fest get a lot of coverage in Fargo? Why didn’t Simone get a ton of coverage for Sioux City Pretty? Why didn’t Kendall get much support from her community or from local media for the hard work she does with The Ox, and with booking shows around town? The fact that this underground scene of music didn’t get much attention or coverage fueled my fire even more to get these stories covered in the right way.

Along the way, I did wonder if I should include more people as sources, but I had to put my foot down and think to myself about how much editing that would take, and whether any additional people I would interview would have anything new or thought-provoking to say that hadn’t already been said by someone else I’d interviewed already.

In the spring semester of 2019, I got to work shooting. My first day of shooting started with the last Ox show, which was on Valentine’s Day. I got a great shot of Kendall giving a speech about why she was switching from a house venue to more permanent venues in Sioux City, and the gratitude she had for the show’s attendees. I got some shots of the crowd, too, but not much else because people decided to turn the lights off during the actual recordings of music
during the show. So, sadly, I didn’t get a wealth of b-roll of playing music during that, but I did get some background footage to establish what The Ox was.

I made another trip back to Sioux City for Ox Fest on March 2nd, and was happy that there was some lighting in the venue and a lot of fun bands playing. I caught an entire song from Mess that became the unifying footage between the Sioux City portion of the story. On March 4th, I finally caught up with Kendall and met her at The Ox to do our interview. She really knew her stuff and was passionate about her community. At that point, it was evident just how much she cared about The Ox, and how passionate she was about getting to uplift an entire music scene in Sioux City. But sadly, as we see revealed in the documentary and towards the end of my filming process, Kendall became burnt out with booking shows and seeing less of a turnout than she desired, which led to her taking a break from booking shows with the Ox.

Throughout the month of March and in the weeks preceding it, I was working hard on setting up details for DiME Fest. DiME is a student group working to promote Diversity in Media and Entertainment, hence the name DiME. The idea for this festival had been in place since I helped set up 1BlueString, which was on September 21, 2018. 1BlueString was an event where the ICARE team at USD trusted me to book a bunch of acts to play a festival that creates awareness for the 1 in 6 men and boys who face sexual assault in their lifetimes. At that event, some friends encouraged me to keep booking shows, especially ones that have a focus on advocacy. From there, I joined DiME and proposed to them to host a music festival featuring diverse acts, and as a group we decided event details and who would play. It had not occurred to me that it would be beneficial for me to use b-roll from that event in my documentary, so it was almost like a “two birds, one stone” situation. My committee allowed this in an early meeting, and the festival itself did not become the focus of the documentary, but rather a circular way of
storytelling where some of the shots of b-roll started the story off and ended with it, too. DiME Fest was so much fun, and I’d plan another event like it again in a heartbeat. I learned a lot from doing it, and from planning 1BlueString, which gave me some more knowledge on how to frame questions to the bands and promoters that I interviewed. I’ll never forget the buzz and excitement, and even the empowerment, that I felt on March 22, 2019 from DiME Fest. It is by far one of my best college memories.

A week after DiME Fest, I set out for Fargo. I ended up carpooling with some people: my roommate Laura Krom, because I wanted to offer her a ride home to Fargo for the weekend; my best friend Annie Boyum from Sioux Falls, because her car would fare much better than mine in the winter snow; and our acquaintance Bee Lohr, who asked last-minute if we were going, and we wanted to be helpful to them. Bee, Annie and I split the cost of an AirBnB and gas mileage along the way, and we all paid for our own food. It helped to not have to travel alone, and to have a few extra hands helping me carry film equipment. In fact, I even got Annie a press pass when we went to shoot some video of TND Fest, because I knew I would need help getting comfortable in an unfamiliar venue. Bee and Annie also helped me carry equipment for much of the weekend and were a great support system for me in an unfamiliar city. Fargo was quite an adventure, and among Annie, Bee and myself, we almost looked back at it as culture shock. For us, it was rare to see two competing music festivals being held on the same weekend, and also extremely rare to see so much diversity represented in one festival in particular: Book Your Own Fest. We were surrounded by a diverse community of people, as well as diverse sounds among each of the bands we got to hear perform. This diversity was hugely important to represent in the film, and I’m glad I took the creative liberty of adding a little montage of the bands Gully Boys, Histrionic and With Iowa In Between.
In Fargo, I was able to acquire the set times for both festivals, and all three days of them, so I would know what band would play at what time. I was lucky to catch the bands Histrionic, Gully Boys and With Iowa In Between, as well as Vanity Plate, Free Truman and Plumslugger. They all made great b-roll to represent Book Your Own Fest. At TND Fest, I knew I needed to catch Jack Stenerson’s band, Baltic to Boardwalk, so I’d be able to use some b-roll of him playing in between the shots where he talks in the storyline. In Fargo, I was able to interview Jack Stenerson and Cydney Berlinger; I knew I would not be able to talk to them anywhere else. They both had fruitful interviews and great stories to tell about booking shows in Fargo, and different takes on the dilemma between the two rival festivals.

Although I had intended to interview Tayler and Tia at the Red Raven Espresso Parlor in Fargo while I was there, or even at their home in Fargo, we had to keep rescheduling because of complications they had with their festival, as well as some car troubles they had in getting to the interviews and venue on time to talk. I ended up interviewing them both in the hotel room they stayed at for Sioux City Pretty on April 6, simply because I knew I would not be able to make it to Fargo again in the time frame of editing, and also because I did not think I’d be able to catch them on the same weekend that Dylan was having his benefit. I also did not know, and they did not know, either, if they would be in Sioux Falls or Vermillion another time again. It worked out just fine to do it this way, and they had great stories to tell which became a central force of the documentary.

With Sioux City Pretty, I was able to interview both Simone and Grace at the venue in Sioux City. With the interviews taking so long (I had four interviews in one day, plus travel to and from the venue and hotel and back to the venue, and to and from Sioux City), and with the homework I had due the next day, as well as the volume of clips I had already captured at Book
Your Own Fest and DiME Fest, I decided not to stay and get b-roll at Sioux City Pretty. This plan worked out okay because I still had lots of b-roll of Her Grace and Free Truman to go along with their storylines.

The day after Sioux City Pretty, I interviewed Dylan Daniels in Vermillion at his house while I still had the camera checked out. Dylan’s story became a huge part of the documentary because of his perspective as a trans man, the vocal changes that would affect his music and the stories he had to tell of growing up in a DIY music scene in a small college town like Vermillion. Later, on April 28, I was able to catch his fundraiser fest in Sioux Falls at Vishnu Bunny. I got b-roll of him playing a song, as well as Free Truman. Due to some technical difficulties I had with my personal DSLR camera that I brought to shoot the performance, I only captured half a song from Dylan’s set. At the time, I figured I would get to see him perform again, so I did not worry about it. Later, in the editing process, I knew I did not have enough footage of him or of Free Truman at his fundraiser, but Dylan graciously offered to let me use his music video of the song “Green” that he released a few months earlier. So, thank you, Dylan!

Over the summer, I had hoped to start editing or at least transcribing some of the interviews. However, I was so busy with my summer internship at the Sanford Health Foundation that I was rarely able to make it back to Vermillion to edit. The only times I could make it back to Vermillion were to mow my yard in the hot summer months. It also would have been difficult for me to check out video equipment in the summer, when no one is on campus.

Returning in the fall semester, I had my work cut out for me. All I had left to do, really, was some Sioux Falls interviews to round out the story and round out my knowledge of the Midwest music scene. I reached out to Dan and Liz Nissen to see if I could interview them. I did have an interview with them on October 14 that went very well. It went well, until I went back to
school at my editing desk, and realized that a pop machine had been running extremely loudly in the background the entire time we conducted the interview. I will forever be kicking myself for that one. Thankfully, Dan and Liz were very gracious about the whole thing. In fact, Dan mentioned that he had a similar thing happen before when he tried to help a local band record vocals for an album in the store and the A/C unit was running really loud in the background.

Lesson learned. I am glad to have forgiving, friendly sources! The second interview on December 1st went without a hitch, and I knew exactly what I wanted to ask them this time. The audio and composition were much better than the first botched interview. To represent Total Drag, I was able to grab some b-roll of the venue at a show for Lisa Prank on November 14, as well as shots of Lisa’s band playing.

On that previous October 14th weekend, I also interviewed Bee Lohr and Shelby Scheerhoorn in the same place at the same time. The audio quality was not great, but I knew since they were both new to the DIY game and the house venue game, their stories wouldn’t be as central to the integrity of the film as some of the other sources that were in the story. However, they did have some extremely useful insight as they are both queer and trans, and they are in the DIY music scene and certainly see a problem with the lack of trans representation in music. They also talked a lot about the importance of all ages shows and house venues as safe, accessible places to get into music, and their experiences running house venues. I was also lucky that I took some phone videos at Bee’s house shows to convey the energy of those shows and set the scene a bit better through that b-roll.

While each interview varied, I made sure to bring plenty of camera batteries and a charger, the full camera and tripod deal, headphones, an on-camera light and lavalier mics to each interview. For Bee and Shelby’s interviews, I ended up using a handheld microphone with
them because that day, the lavalier mics weren’t working as I wanted them to. With Kendall’s interview, I did use a spotlight on her face and it turned out very pretty on her, but I decided to stop using it on subsequent interviews because it was a lot of extra hassle to carry around the light, an extension cord for it, a light stand and a sandbag to hold it down. If I wasn’t a one-person crew for most of this project, the lighting and audio situations might have turned out differently. While I did have my own personal technical difficulties, a viewer won’t be able to see those issues in the story. For my standup at Total Drag, my friend Annie watched the camera and listened to the audio for me while I spoke, but I was responsible for setting up the shot and all that. I am grateful Annie helped me with this project where she could!

In the midst of my editing and interview processes, there were some moments of “breaking news” or big changes in the music scenes. In June, Free Truman announced they’d be breaking up, and since then have started a new band, Sketchy McClain. In July, Kendall posted on Facebook that she was going to stop booking shows with The Ox, citing her disappointment with turnouts for shows like Ox Fest. Bee stopped hosting shows in May and that’s when Shelby took over with that process. I knew I would still have a compelling story to tell regardless of all of these changes and that I would be able to add an epilogue to the documentary explaining where all of these people are now. Yet, it was sad to see that so many changes happened in this story all while I was still getting the rest of my interviews done and working on editing. It was also sad because these are hardworking people, and their hopes were dashed, or some of the things they loved changed on them. It was also sad for me because it was like our music scene was evolving. I will miss going to Ox shows, and seeing Free Truman play and hearing their songs, and going to Bee’s house shows. These are all topics that my documentary addresses. Free Truman deserved the break. Kendall deserves a break too and not to feel burnt out, and I am sure
someone in Sioux City will pick things back up soon right where she left them, as she talks about in the documentary, hoping that young people like her will start doing house venues and DIY in Sioux City. Bee is still in the music scene, and Shelby is doing basically the same thing Bee did.

An early meeting with my thesis committee made me realize the story shape I needed to work toward. At this meeting, I had gotten about halfway through editing, and the story was sitting at 22 minutes long, and little did I know that it would end up being around 45 minutes! However, Michelle explained to me that what I had so far was a Christmas tree formation that is sometimes used in broadcast. The top tier of the Christmas tree that emerged was my story of growing up in Sioux Falls and getting involved in music early, which led into the story of Total Drag and The Ox and Sioux City venues nicely. The next tier was Free Truman’s story, which goes into Fargo in general, and the issues between Book Your Own Fest and The New Direction Fest. The next tier is Dylan’s story, which trickles down nicely into Bee’s and Shelby’s stories. The tree trunk from there is the issues of discrimination that women and LGBTQ+ folks often face in music, and then the story devolves into the meaning of DIY and where people are now with their music.

As far as research findings, I noticed many emerging themes across the interviews. One was the importance of all-ages and getting people into music at a young age; another was the DIY factor; last were the moments of discrimination and setbacks a lot of these people faced. The last section was a big reason I wanted to work on this documentary: to uncover discrimination, and to see where representation is missing in the Midwest DIY music scene. Another, smaller, but just as important, theme is the idea that a lot of these folks saw representations of people that looked like them that made them want to play music.
The first theme I noticed is that access to an all-ages venue or music scene, away from a bar and away from drugs and alcohol, was integral to every single person’s involvement in their music scenes. That’s how Dan and Liz met, and started the idea for Total Drag together. That’s how Kendall got involved in music and was able to start something like The Ox in Sioux City. Simone wanted to keep that all ages tradition alive, too. Grace would not be in music if she had not started very young, playing music at church. Tayler and Tia both started going to shows as teenagers. Jack started in Fargo as a teenager. Cydney was already in a band with some friends in high school. Dylan grew up in the music scene in Vermillion. Bee was 18 at the time of our interview. Shelby started going to shows in high school, too. Without access to venues that allow people of all ages to go, there would not be a music scene in the Midwest because the next generation of musicians would not be allowed to participate, and then would not gain the needed inspiration to start a band of their own.

The second theme I noticed is that many aspects of these peoples’ stories involved some elements of doing things themselves, or “Do It Yourself” -- DIY. This would become the name for my documentary. However, the idea of DIY can sometimes be misleading, as some of my interview sources pointed out. DIY as a name for the genre, for the scene and for the documentary makes sense to outsiders because everyone seems so independent when they have ideas to do these big things. However, for the most part, no one is truly doing everything alone or by themselves. Many of the people I interviewed thought it was more “DIT,” or “Do It Together,” than “DIY,” or “Do It Yourself.” Dan and Liz started Total Drag together; Kendall had the help of many friends and her partner Jake with running shows and the venue; Simone had support from friends and family with Sioux City Pretty; Grace started playing music with her brother; Tayler and Tia had each other, and had the help of Cydney with Book Your Own Fest;
Dylan has had the support of family, friends and his band along the way; Bee and Shelby have had each other for support the whole way through. In the documentary towards the end, I talk about this sentiment of what DIY really means to these people. I also talk about how DIY is kind of a unifying genre or term for the scene, because a lot of what it is about is doing everything without an existing structure or guideline to really help these people. I mention how in my experience with running DiME Fest and 1BlueString, it did sometimes feel like I was on my own and doing things completely by myself, but this was never really the case because I had such supportive teams of people on my side for both events, and also great support from USD and Vermillion at-large. Even when turnouts were not as I expected at certain times, which is a sentiment I am sure many of the people in this story will relate to, they were still successful events and made a difference to the people who did come to see the magic happen.

The third and largest theme I noticed is discrimination, which is fully covered in the documentary. Everything from being misgendered, to feeling unwelcome at a venue, to Tayler receiving threats on social media for her critique over a lack of diversity, is discussed in the film. A fourth theme, which is almost a sub-theme to the third theme of discrimination, is the idea that representation in any scene is integral to who will be inspired to keep playing music. Cydney said it best when they said that if you see people that look like you playing music, it makes you want to play music, too.

Bearing these emerging themes or topics in mind, I tried to highlight these topics throughout the documentary. I did not want to go in too heavy on creating a “plight of the female guitarist” trope on the characters in my story or make them seem entirely victimized; I wanted to humanize each person and make their stories more than just about the issues they’ve faced. I wanted to represent everyone fairly and accurately.
When it came to the editing process, I started the way that any journalist, and especially print journalists, know really well: logging interviews. I listened to and rewatched each interview one by one and wrote down every single word they said, and marked the times on each clip that they said each thing. As I began to actually edit the documentary together, I was so glad I had done that, so I knew exactly when on each of those long interviews that people said the thing I needed to use in the story.

When I started editing, I was not entirely sure what my introduction was going to be, so I just started out by editing Dan and Liz’s interview and blending it into the Sioux City story. I actually mapped out how I thought the story should go on a small sheet of paper in my personal notebook, and worked from that framework. I continued to work through that framework, producing the story we see now. It didn’t change shape too much. Ultimately, I rewatched some other documentaries to help inspire me for my introduction, and seeing Jackie Hendry’s documentary starting with some b-roll of the places she visited for her story helped me come up with some b-roll of Sioux Falls and a standup, as Jackie also inserted herself into her story because it was ultimately just as personal for her as mine was for me. If I had to estimate, I would say that for every 30 seconds of the documentary that we see now, at least one hour of editing went into that process to recolor and lighten shots; fix audio; add supers; make video and audio transitions and all the funny other little editing tricks journalists have in their toolkits. I did all of my editing in Neuharth, a majority of it at my desk in the Volante newsroom, and maybe 10 percent of it at an editing bay in the Neuharth building where I recorded my voice overs and touched up last-minute details.

Looking back on this process, one question I wish I had asked more people is “why don’t you start a band?” Liz, Bee, Kendall, Simone and Shelby would have been great people to
answer this question. However, I can also ask myself this question. Now that I have seen people that look like myself onstage and have realized just how important representation is, why would I not start a band of my own? I have tried, and just been too busy with college, too poor to buy a guitar, too busy to learn the instrument… the list goes on. It is difficult to start a band, regardless of the setbacks and discrimination some of us might face along the way.

What I hope this story does for people is make them realize that they should be more critical of the representation they see in their scenes, and that it would be the representation that so many people need to see to get the inspiration to start playing music. That is the best I can hope for.
Documentary Bibliography


