

Chikadibia Ebirim

CURATING SOUNDS THAT MOVE STORIES AND SPACES

CONFIDENCE

I've outgrown my own expectations, and I wasn't thinking small. Art was already part of my family long before I understood how I might make a living at it. My grandfather, Thomas Palmerton, was a painter and sculptor based in Brownville, Nebraska, whose work includes the gorilla sculptures at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo. My mother had a studio at Hot Shops, where I met Gerard Pefung, who helped introduce me to the local creative community. I had plenty of people close to me taking their imaginations seriously. I wanted to see what I could do with mine.

Getting to that point involved some difficult years. After my parents divorced, we moved through rural Nebraska, including time in trailer parks while my mother worked toward finding us a home. We moved to Omaha when I was about six or seven. There were school expulsions and I spent some time in a boys' home before I began finding my footing in my junior and senior years of high school. I was working jobs, making art, and developing my own style. A massive three-day house party I organized even brought out students from several colleges and showed me that I had a real instinct for gathering people. I kept hosting functions after I graduated, and the arts community started paying attention. People started reaching out with real opportunities, and funding followed.

As a multidisciplinary artist, I began focusing my energy on music, producing my own records and creating videos and live events around them. My film direction earned awards, and in 2018 I received a fellowship at the Union for Contemporary Art. Having a studio and support gave me room to develop what I was already doing across different mediums. My time at the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation was important to me in a more personal way, because it helped me understand what I represented as a Black artist and feel more assured about expressing it. I was finding mentors, building relationships, and becoming more deliberate about the work I wanted people to encounter.

Through all of this, I kept my day jobs. Sales and service were how I supported myself, and Dario's in Dundee gave me a demanding education in fine dining. I had to learn the food in detail and meet high expectations while staying attentive to the people in front of me. That was where my interest in food really began. Later, I worked at Modern Love, Isa Chandra Moskowitz's vegan restaurant, while continuing my residency, and became vegan myself. When I started considering moving east, I visited first. The restaurant had a Brooklyn location, so I could transfer and keep earning while pursuing the life I wanted. My working life helped make that move possible.

The years that followed included COVID and time living in Dallas, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. By the time I paid my own way to Nigeria to meet my family, roughly three years had passed since that initial move to New York. A great deal of living happened in between. Meeting my relatives in person cemented a connection I had wanted to understand more fully. I could experience my heritage through people who were part of my own history, and that changed how I carried it. My faith in God and trust in my intuition are personal parts of that experience. They've helped me make consequential decisions while accepting that I won't know every outcome in advance.

My career gained real momentum in Off-Broadway theatre. At Minetta Lane, I worked as an audio technician on **Drinking in America** and Audible's **Breakthrough**. My experience expanded into sound supervision at BRIC and Abrons, lead audio for EPIC Players' **RENT**, and sound design for **Ruby & Charlie** at HERE. I was applying what I'd learned through making my own music to productions with different creative demands and people depending on my work. Commercial audio and production take that experience much further. Alongside those commitments, I've continued reconsidering my own direction. I've re-branded more than once and taken earlier releases offline because I wanted what I presented to reflect who I was becoming. The recordings don't have to remain public for the years spent making them to count.

I've lost brothers, best friends, and community leaders and I often wish they all could see this part of my life. Living through those losses, along with racism and periods of instability, gives being here a weight that is difficult to convey through a list of credits. I'm grateful to the people who helped me get beyond circumstances I couldn't handle entirely on my own. I know how much it can mean for someone to recognize your potential while you're still figuring out what to do with it. As I gain more skills and resources, I want to offer that support to others without losing sight of my own ambitions.

I'm confident in what I bring to a project now. I can understand the artistic intention and work through the technical decisions needed to carry it out. I'm comfortable taking responsibility, learning unfamiliar systems, and collaborating with people whose expertise differs from mine. I want opportunities and compensation that reflect that range, while continuing to build my own company and creative work. Sound remains the subject I keep returning to, with more to investigate every time I make something. I trust myself with greater responsibility because I know how much I've already learned, and I'm still willing to put in the work.



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