

Bay Area Sound

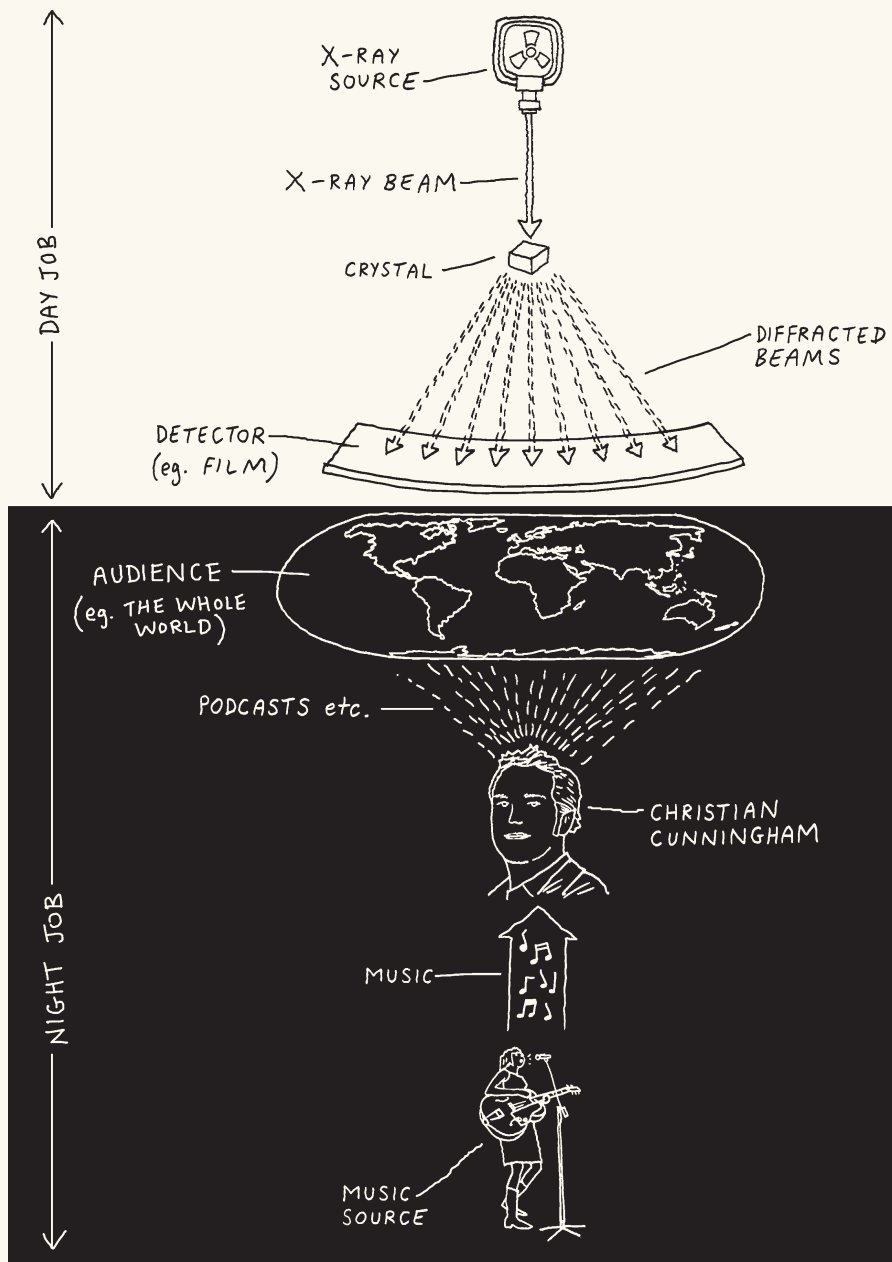
One of San Francisco's hardest working local music promoters spends his days doing x-ray crystallography. Christian Cunningham, a graduate student at the University of California, San Francisco, spends his nights managing The Bay Bridged, a website and podcasting empire focused on the San Francisco Bay Area independent music scene.

"We're trying to spread the word about what Bay Area musicians are doing," says Cunningham, a graduate student in HHMI investigator David Agard's lab. "Great music comes from many places, but it can also come from your home. Our aesthetic has always been to try and promote music from within." He and business partner Ben Van Houten, an attorney, met as undergraduates at the University of California, Berkeley, where they both worked at the school's radio station.

From a rented studio space in San Francisco's Mission District, The Bay Bridged produces three podcasts: a weekly interview with a local band that showcases four of the band's songs, a monthly DJ-style mix featuring eight bands, and "Live this Month," which promotes local and out-of-town bands that are performing in the Bay Area. Public radio station KQED began syndicating their podcasts online last year.

The duo also produces live music shows and festivals, including one at the annual South by Southwest music and media conference in Austin, Texas. At last year's conference, The Bay Bridged booked 15 Bay Area bands on two stages, lined up company sponsors, and advertised to potential partygoers. The show, which they called The Bay Area Takeover, was "a massive success," Cunningham says. "It sold out, it was a ton of fun, and it was written up in all sorts of publications."

The Bay Bridged has grown so much since it launched three years ago that



Cunningham and Van Houten now have a 19-person staff, all volunteers who are as passionate about music as they are.

With so much on his plate, one wonders how Cunningham has time to do any science. "It used to be a hobby and now it's a jobby," Cunningham jokes. He says good time management skills help him juggle lab work and his music promoting, which he considers his creative outlet.

Video podcasting is the latest endeavor. They take bands to weird places in San Francisco and record and videotape them in live, acoustic performances. The first event was both "amazing and a debacle," Cunningham says. They invited two bands to perform on Cunningham's roof. "I live in the Mission, in a four-story apartment

building, with a 360-degree view of San Francisco," he says. "The idea was to showcase the beauty and grandeur of San Francisco while focusing on the local music." To their surprise, 100 people showed up; after the first band started playing, the police arrived downstairs with bullhorns, ordering them off the roof. "The second band performed indoors," Cunningham deadpans.

What Cunningham finds most satisfying is seeing musicians featured on The Bay Bridged become nationally known. "Ben and I get the biggest kick out of showcasing brand new music from very young bands that wouldn't get press any other way," he says. "The success stories are what make this worth it." —Corinna Wu