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Chavous’ tech startup is crafting sweet sounds of success[3]

Isaiah Chavous stands at the confluence of creativity and technology. Well, he doesn’t really stand. He runs at the breakneck pace typical to technology startup companies as his sprints to revolutionize sound production for video.

The CU alumnus and former student body president, 26, is founder and CEO of Noctal, a pioneering media technology company using AI to advance the process of sound production. It will elevate the quality and variety of sound for content creators across a wide spectrum, from those working on feature films to commercials to companies creating promotional video content (and anything in between that uses sound).

The Los Angeles-based company recently completed a seed funding round that attracted nearly $2 million, the bulk of which came from Boulder-based investor Dan Caruso of Caruso Ventures. It will be followed by additional investment rounds, as is typical with startups.

Noctal’s platform uses artificial intelligence to analyze video and create and place custom audio and special effects. Noctal’s chief operating officer and co-founder James Paul, who has worked for more than a decade on Hollywood films, said the current process of adding sound to films is extremely laborious, requiring a sound producer to spend hours watching footage and marking where sounds go on a timeline. Noctal aims to change that.

Clients can upload their video and Noctal’s engine will sync sounds with the appropriate video action, creating perfect audio timing. The company also has an expansive sound library that is adaptable to any scene. AI makes suggestions for aligning sounds with video. While the process for feature films would be more involved, Noctal’s target audiences include studios creating big-budget films, as well as the tens of thousands of video content creators across the country and around the world.

For an example of how the technology works, imagine a video where a skateboarder lands a trick in an empty parking garage. The wheels hit the concrete. An echo bounces. A distant car whooshes by. Off-screen, a loose can clinks and rolls to a stop. None of those sounds were captured on set, but they will fit seamlessly into the final cut.

To make it so, Noctal’s audio engine watched the raw footage. It didn’t just see a skateboard — with AI’s help, it understood the environment, the action, the material of the floor, and the likely acoustics of a concrete garage. Within seconds, it matched each moment in the video with the perfect sounds from a massively curated library.

What used to take a sound designer hours of manual work – scrubbing through timelines, scouring folders of special effects, fine-tuning layers – happens automatically using Noctal’s tool. Creators get a rich, sound-designed draft they can refine or publish right away.

“At Noctal, our mission is to let artists and innovators focus on what they do best – bring their visions to life,” Chavous said. “By simplifying the complexities of production, we empower a new wave of storytellers to push boundaries and craft work that resonates well beyond the final edit. Noctal isn’t just a tool – it’s a catalyst for unlocking potential and inspiring creativity.”

The company is unique not only in its use of AI to optimize sound production, but also in its focus that puts creativity at

the forefront. Most tech companies start with the engineering platform, then adapt it to fit creative needs.

“Noctal started from the creative standpoint,” Chavous said. “We certainly have talented engineers designing the platform, but we wanted the creative to be at the head of the table.”

Caruso said one of his reasons behind his investment is the spirit of Colorado innovation driving the California-based company.

“Colorado has always been a hub for innovation, and I’m thrilled to back Isaiah and the Noctal team as they redefine what’s possible in production technology,” he said. “Noctal’s approach to redefining media production is poised to disrupt the industry, creating a ripple effect that will resonate with creators and studios worldwide.”

The seeds of Chavous’ entrepreneurship were planted while a student at Boulder, when he oversaw a $26 million student government budget and co-founded the campus’s Center for African and African American Studies.

“Those experiences gave me the ability to work with high-level stakeholders on high-priority projects,” Chavous said. Yet nothing could have fully prepared him for the fast-paced, high-stakes uncertainty of leading a tech startup, particularly one based at the epicenter of the world’s film and video industries.

He’s also looking to buck the odds of being a Black CEO of a startup company. According to the Founders Network, in 2023, Black founders of startup companies secured 0.48% (some $705 million) of venture funding. But Noctal’s investors share a belief that he can do it. They include the musician Grimes, a Major League Baseball player and the head of original content at social media platform X.

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