

Journal of the CINEMA AUDIO SOCIETY



"Dedicated to the Advancement of Sound"

C.A.S. Award Winners

- The Stories Behind Their Success -

- *Fx Mixing on* *"Apollo 13"* -

by Steve Pederson

1995 C.A.S. Award for Outstanding Achievement in Sound Mixing for Motion Pictures, as well as the Academy Award for Sound.

Actor Gary Sinise portraying astronaut Ken Mattingly in "Apollo 13" delivered the lines regarding their upcoming space flight as "one hell of a mission, one for the books!" Astronaut Mattingly had no idea how prophetic those words would become and what a special mission Apollo 13 would ultimately turn out to be.

- *Related story - "Mixing the Dialogue on 'Apollo 13'" on pg. 7 -*

Similarly, we who had the good fortune to work on this film knew early on that it was to be a special "mission" for us, but it wouldn't be revealed for many months that our work on it would be "one for the books."

I've always been fascinated by the

Continued on page 10

- *ReRecording* *"The Piano Lesson"* -

by David E. Fluhr, C.A.S.

C.A.S. Award for Outstanding Achievement in Sound Mixing for a Television Special in 1995.

"The Piano Lesson" was one of three Hallmark Hall Of Fame Presentations in 1995. The Hallmark Hall Of Fame movies are a pleasure to work on, for many reasons. Not only are the stories generally a cut above, but the quality of the productions are also superior. From a sound standpoint, this is a pleasure. In these days of shrinking budgets and cut-backs, these movies separate themselves from the "average" movie of the week for television. In the next few paragraphs I will attempt to outline the postproduction sound process for "The Piano Lesson," and pass along our experiences along the way.

The show was written and produced by August Wilson. Executive producers were Richard Welsh, and Craig Anderson. It was

Continued on page 13

- *On The Dub Stage* *with "E.R."* -

by Allen L. Stone

The Cinema Audio Society Award for 1995 -- Outstanding Achievement in Sound Mixing for a Television Series.

"Good morning, Stage 4. Yes we are getting ready and I believe we have everything we need."

I hang up the phone with Wendy Spence, co-producer of "ER." She's calling from her cell phone in L.A. traffic making sure that all the elements we need for today's mix are on the stage. We take a look at act 1 -- one pass through without stopping. This gives Mike Jiron, the sound-effects mixer, a chance to access his many background tracks while we all get a

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NOTEWORTHY

HomePage Makes Online Debut

Thanks to the generous efforts of Paul Coogan, C.A.S., the Cinema Audio Society Home Page is now a reality. Paul has not only created a very fine-looking page, but also donated the site and has offered to maintain it for the C.A.S. Features of the site include information about the Cinema Audio Society, a calendar of upcoming events, the current issue of the C.A.S. Journal, transcripts of C.A.S. Forums, and links to related topics and societies.

Plans for future expansion include an archive of back issues of the C.A.S. Journal, technical information of interest to sound mixers, a listing of C.A.S. members, interactive features and enhanced graphics. Check out our new page at:

<http://webtop.com/cas>

C.A.S. e-mail List

The C.A.S. has compiled an e-mail list to send out periodic news of the C.A.S., as well as notifications of forums and special events. If you are not currently receiving e-mail from the C.A.S. and would like to be added to our e-mail list, please notify: CinAudSo@aol.com.

C.A.S. Holds Online Forum

On Thursday, July 11th, 1996, The Cinema Audio Society held its first Live Online Forum with guest ReRecording Mixer Randy Thom, C.A.S., winner of both the C.A.S. and Academy Award for Sound. The forum was open to all those subscribing to America Online, the service to which the majority of C.A.S. Online members have access. Those present were able to ask Randy questions, as well as participate in a freeflowing and lively exchange of information. A complete transcript of the forum is available at no charge and may be obtained by e-mailing us a request at CinAudSo@aol.com, or by contacting the C.A.S. business office.

In early September the C.A.S. will hold another forum, this time with Rerecording mixer Steve Pederson, veteran of such films as "Schindler's List," "Hook" and "Patriot Games." Notification will be given to all those on the C.A.S. e-mail list.

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Dialogue: A Question Of Style

by Randy Thom, C.A.S.

Among the frequently recited truisms of movie sound, the one heard most often may be some variation on "The dialogue has to be intelligible, or we're going to have people nudging their partners to ask what was just said."

I am skeptical about this idea that every word of dialogue must be intelligible. The notion seems to be questionable in a variety of ways.

The first, and maybe most practical question centers on whether such a thing is possible. As we know, the distribution of acoustic energy in an enclosed, complex space tends to be extremely difficult to control. Even under the best of conditions (which in 20 years I haven't encountered yet) translating the sound of the dubbing stage to hundreds or thousands of completely different rooms is tricky and unpredictable to say the least. So even if our movie is, say, "My Dinner With Andre," in which the dialogue has little or no competition from other sounds, there will be moments when some members of the audience will not catch a word or a phrase. This will depend on countless purely physical variables, including where they are sitting, how loud the movie is played, the ambient noise level (including audience response to the movie itself), fidelity of the sound system, etc.

Another question involves the politics and hierarchy among the participants in a typical dubbing situation. We all know that the

dialogue mixer is usually the most senior member of the mixing team. My own view is that dialogue mixing is the most technically challenging job in movie sound. Trying to make seamless a series of words which alternate between adr and production is often way past challenging and fascinatingly close to impossible. On the other hand, the power that accrues to the dialog mixer because of his (it's still nearly all men) seniority and technical proficiency can be misused. It may cast a halo of sacred grandeur onto the dialogue track which it doesn't necessarily deserve.

It seems obvious to me that every word spoken in a given movie will not be intelligible to every member of the audience. But if intelligibility is our main goal, then movies obviously should not contain any music or sound effects because, even if we're talking "My Dinner With Andre," there will be moments when a musical note or clinking glass will obscure a word or two for some member of the audience.

The more rational position says that we should do what we can as mixers to make sure that nearly all of the dialogue is intelligible to nearly all of the audience. But even that apparently reasonable notion presents problems.

To name one, it means that we probably should not use actors who have heavy accents. Accents other than our own are hard to understand. If intelligibility is God, accents are

not acceptable.

If we allow accents in movies we have suddenly begun sliding down a slippery slope. That slope leads to an assumption which takes more or less the following form: The film maker's primary job is to tell a good story, or at least to present us with something which is entertaining and/or interesting. Period. There are no other rules.

Actually there are plenty of rules, plenty of conventions and traditions like the one that says all dialogue must be intelligible. A good film maker knows most of these conventions, and knows equally well the desirability of violating them when it will help to tell the story.

Most of you are familiar with some of the films of Robert Altman. "McCabe and Mrs. Miller" and "Nashville" are two of the best known, and are generally thought to be fine films. In these and most of his other films, Altman frequently mixes several conversations simultaneously. The result is that one conversation may seem to dominate most of the time, but there are also times during which secondary conversations compete for attention. Words are masked, phrases and entire lines are difficult if not impossible to understand. This conscious use of unintelligibility can serve several dramatic purposes.

In some cases it can actually tell us more about the characters than their

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TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

by Steve Hawk, C.A.S.

- D.I.Y. (DO IT YOURSELF) PROJECTS -

Before I was sidetracked a couple of issues ago we were talking about interfacing equipment. So to try and get back to that subject again, I thought about two simple projects you can make yourself. Both are fairly inexpensive and can save a lot of time and money.

- CABLE TESTER -

I've been building most of my own cables and adapters for at least 25 years (I started when I was age 4 — NOT!). Even if you make your own, you can spend thousands on wire and connectors. I didn't wise up until about 12 years ago when I built a

simple cable tester. Since then I've expanded it to include about every type of connector I've come into contact with (except TELCO—Hmm ... maybe I should add that one too). Fig.#1 shows a simple cable tester circuit that lights up an L.E.D. (light emitting diode) when a cable is connected around the circuit and one of the switches is engaged. The only real expense is the cost of the jacks. It's well worth it to put on as many types as you can. Think of all those different cables you have at work or at home for your stereo, computer or video gear. You might want to expand it to 5 switches and L.E.D.s for those 5 pin XLR or D.I.N. plugs. Use your imagination here, but I'd at least make it for 3-conductor cables.

CONSTRUCTION: Lay out a pattern of two rows of jacks vertically with the switches and L.E.D.s in a row across the top of your project box. Connect all the shields, pin #1's and the sleeves of the 1/4" and mini jacks of each row. Then connect the center conductors, pin #2's and the tips of the 1/4" and mini jacks in each row. Finally connect the rings on the 1/4" and mini jacks to the #3 pins. The cathode (short lead) on the L.E.D.s goes to the resistors.

USAGE: Connect the cable you want to test to the appropriate jacks with the switches in the off position. Turn the #1 switch to the on position, and the #1 L.E.D. should light up. If not, you have no connection. If another L.E.D. lights up, you have a reversed wire. If more than one L.E.D. lights up, you have a short. Test using switch #2, then #3.

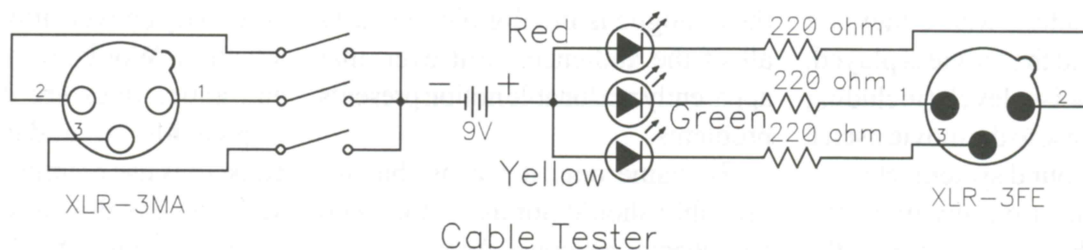
- MIDI DATA TESTER -

Looking at Fig. #2, you'll see a simple "MIDI Data Tester." This device lights up at the presence of MIDI data. In fact, the more MIDI data present, the brighter the glow.

The connector is a 5 pin DIN type, either male or female. I would suggest a female inline jack as this will allow you to also test male to male MIDI cables. However, the MIDI ins and outs on equipment are female jacks.

CONSTRUCTION: Take two 1" pieces of flexible 22 gauge insulated wire and solder to each leg of the L.E.D. Slip on some heatshrink tubing or wrap electrical tape to insulate the leads of the L.E.D. Solder the cathode side (short lead) to pin #5 of the DIN plug. Solder the longer lead (anode) to pin #4. Now when you assemble

Figure #1



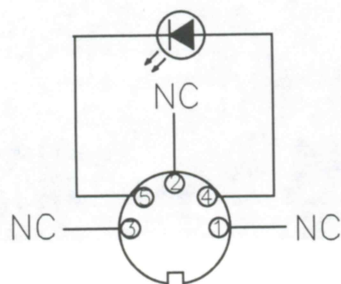
the plug, the L.E.D. should poke out the boot of the connector. You can hot glue or super-glue it into place if you like. This is well worth the \$2 and 5 minutes it takes.

This article assumes that you have some basic skills at soldering and can read a schematic diagram. In addition, you need a few tools such as a soldering iron, solder, drill and bits, wire cutters and strippers.

Think about all that time you'll save not fumbling around with the test leads on an ohm meter and knowing that your cables are in good working order!



Figure #2



MIDI Data Tester

PARTS LIST

CABLE TESTER:

- (3) SPST toggle switches
- (3) L.E.D.s (any color)
- (3) L.E.D. holders
- (3) 220 ohm, 1/4 watt, 5% resistors
- (1) 9 volt battery clip lead
- (1) 9 volt battery clip mount
- (1) 9 volt battery
- (1) XLR-3 male panel mount jack
- (1) XLR-3 female panel mount jack
- Miscellaneous hook-up wire and appropriate size project box

Suggested additional jacks:

- (2) 1/4" stereo phone jacks
- (2) Stereo mini jacks
- (2) RCA jacks
- (2) BNC female panel mount jacks
- (2) UHF PL-259 female panel mount jacks
- (2) Female "F" connector panel mount jacks
- (2) Dual-female "Pomona" plug jacks, etc.

MIDI DATA TESTER:

- (1) Standard 5 pin DIN plug (male or female)
- (1) High-intensity (or regular) L.E.D.

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Mixing the Dialogue on "Apollo 13"

by Rick Dior

In February of 1995, I began mixing work on Ron Howard's "Apollo 13" at Todd AO East in New York. I had worked with Ron on several films, including "Parenthood," "The Paper," and "Gung Ho," so I was familiar with what he liked in a mix. This worked out quite well because as it turned out, during the 4 weeks I spent on the dialogue pre-dubs, Ron could not spend much time at the studio. Instead, we set up an ISDN line to Ron's house from Todd AO East. He had a big screen video and DS-4 audio system set up, and as we pre-mixed a dialogue reel we would play it back for him, transmitting the video and the audio from my 35mm SR-encoded 4-tracks using the Lynx to synchronize the whole set-up. Ron would listen to the reel and then make comments or suggestions. We spent 4 weeks working in this way, getting the futzes just right and checking out and selecting the ADR.

Meanwhile, Steve Pederson was pre-mixing the sound effects for the show at Todd AO West. I did a dialogue temp dub for him to work against so that he would have some idea of what the dialogue in the film was going to feel like. I included futzing and EQ on this version, although I had a flat, unequalized version I was planning to work with

during the final mix. Supervising sound editor Steve Flick provided me with temp backgrounds to work my dialogue against as he was accumulating them. Crates of them arrived on DA-88 from Weddington Productions, although the final work came in on SR-encoded 24-track.

As we neared the final mix dates in March and April, it became apparent that Todd's 48-input (24 additional monitor points) Quad Eight board would not be able to handle the breadth of this mix. We simply needed more inputs. Todd engineer Bob Chefalas spoke to the people at Martin Audio, and they sent 2 side-cart boards—each of them equipped with 24 inputs and 6 outputs with no EQ, however automated with flying faders. These would work just fine for Steve's effects pre-mixes.

The music came off a 20-bit Sonic Solutions — 16 channels worth. Music mixer Scott Millan, C.A.S., ran those through the Quad Eight board, with a few extra channels for some of the tons of reverb we rented. Steve and I used the rest of the faders for his effects and my dialogue premixes and all the other outboard gear we were using.

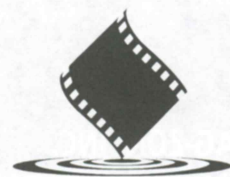
The Quad Eight board sounds great, although it is limited by its inputs. It helps make up for this shortcoming, however, by its

versatility in patching -- with every patch point namable to mankind.

By the time Steve and Scott arrived in New York in March I had the dialogue and ADR in shape and we were ready to final. We spent four weeks on the actual dub, with an additional couple weeks for Printmastering, making additional copies and the M&E work.

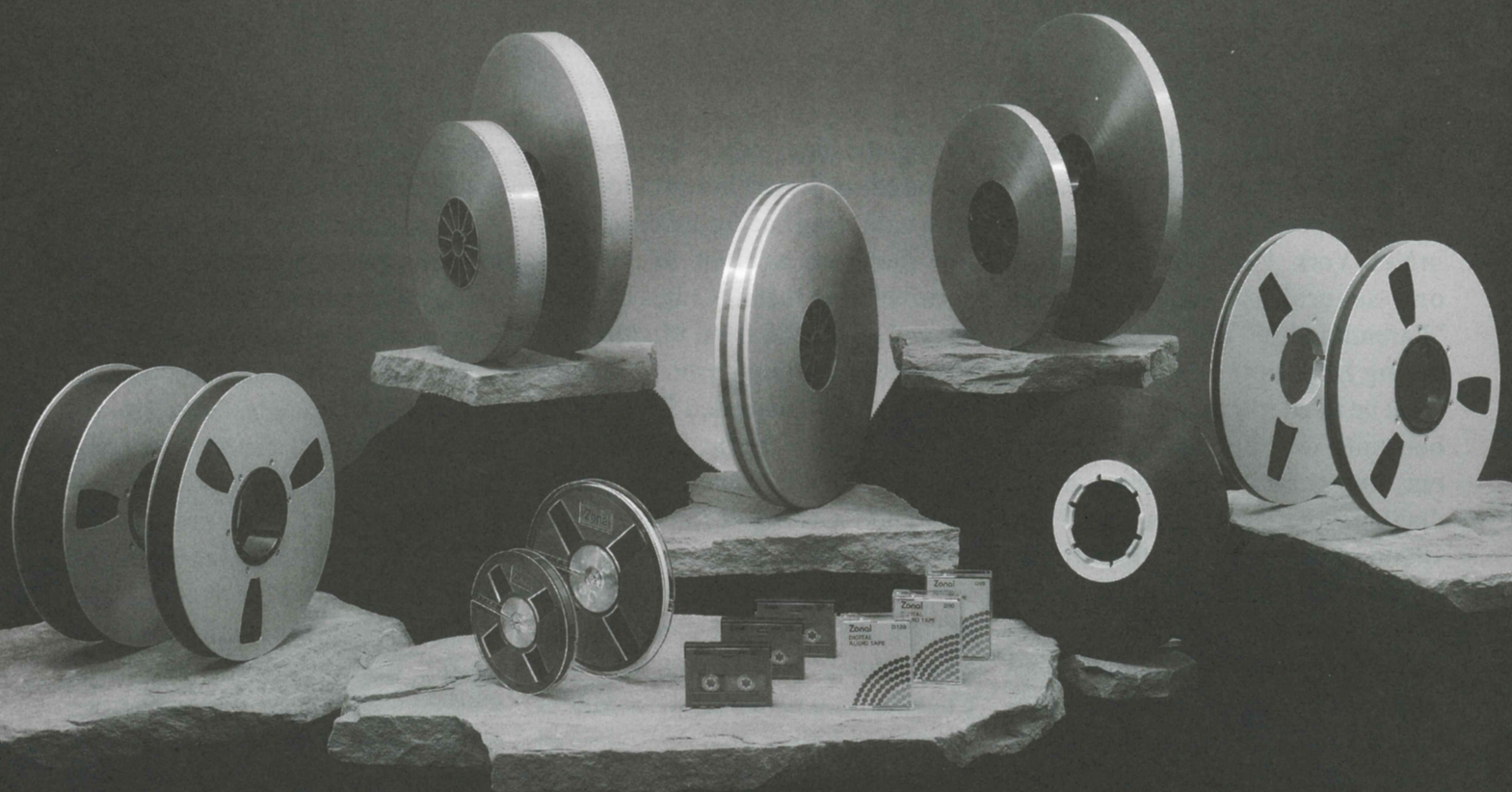
I had worked with most of the crew at Todd AO East for almost 20 years, from back when it was Trans-Audio, so I felt very comfortable with them. And although I had never worked with Steve and Scott before, we got along great. They felt right at home at our board as Todd AO West has similar flying fader Quad Eight consoles.

Ron was great to work with, that's the whole thing - the atmosphere from Ron Howard. Dan Hanley and Mike Hill, the editors and Todd Hallowell, the producer, were also a pleasure to work with. All in all it was a very enjoyable and rewarding experience.



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*"E.R."***Cont'd from page 1**

feel for what this act is about. A luxury nowadays when the norm has become to hit the record button and go for it. The music mixer, Frank Jones, solos the music in a couple of scenes to get just the right sound to some source cues. The tape races back to the top as we listen to supervising sound editor, Walter Newman give us a little direction about the opening scene. Just about that time Wendy arrives.

"Good Morning," she exclaims. "How is everybody doing today? Did you get a chance to look at the act? Great! Let's record it."

The dialogue tracks are prepared on a Studio Frame digital audio system and loaded into the re-recording stage's computer before the mix. The sound effects and music tracks are also assembled on a digital audio work station and then transferred to 24-track units to be used during the mix. Walter and Barry Snyder at Warner Brothers have put together a top notch editorial staff including Darleen Stoker, Stacy Saravo and Patrick Foley cutting dialogue, Terri Fiyalko and Beth Wiehe pre-laying music, and John Bonds handling sound effects to name but a few. They are too familiar with the frantic pace of the "ER" schedule. Many weeks this staff will not get the picture turned over to them before Friday. The show is mixed on Monday and Tuesday, laid back to final picture on Wednesday and delivered to NBC for a Thursday night airing. Tom Harris, the supervising ADR editor enters the Stage.

"I received the ADR from Chicago early this morning for act 2. It will be

ready for you when you get there" he says assuredly.

Tom and Wendy work closely together during the ADR sessions creating that myriad of voices that keep the hospital halls and corridors alive throughout each episode of "ER." If you see people talking in the background in any scene, Tom's covered it.

Very little principal dialogue is ADR'd. This makes Will Yarbrough's job as production mixer increasingly more difficult. The early episodes of "ER" had an open with a master shot then cut to a close up look for most principal lines. Now however, the producers have gone to a more real, hectic, or frantic look by staying in the master shot and using long Steady Cam moves to add a sense of urgency or real time to a complicated scene. This gives Yarbrough and his team the added challenge of getting his microphones in where he can and out without getting knocked over by camera -- an already impossible task made worse by overlapping dialogue and continual background movement. All this chaos is accentuated by the foley tracks. Every movement, footstep, grab, clipboard, stethoscope, locker, or medical tool is recorded on the foley stage. Walked meticulously by Casey Crabtree and recorded at Film Leaders, the foley tracks give "ER" that "in your face" reality to the sound effects track.

The day unfolds and as we finish act 4 the music editor Susan Mick speaks up --

"Let's listen to the alternate music mix for the closing scene in act 4."

Frank plays the cue with the scene. "Let's use that one" Wendy says. The day ends with all four acts

recorded. Changes will be made before a playback for the writers and producers the next day around noon.

Day 2 begins with some small changes -- try a different take on a dialogue line, make sure there is a significant change of backgrounds from one room to another in the hospital, try a different source cue at the nurses station. The stage recordist, Bill Olson, keeps detailed records of any editorial moves or recorded versions that are created on stage. Bill's is that voice behind the curtain that keeps us all together. Without him we'd get lost. John Wells and his producing staff watch the show and take notes on areas they would like to change.

John says, "Great job everyone -- I only have a few changes."

Everyone is allowed to speak up as the mix is discussed from act 1 through act 4. A large part of these changes stem from a medical standpoint. Whether the rate of a heart monitor is too fast or slow or the alarms on the various life support systems are correct. Walter Newman has gone to great length to create a symphony of beeps and buzzers in the trauma scenes that not only add to the tension of the scene but must also be authentic.

The score, composed by Marty Davich, adds another dimension to "ER" -- emotion! Marty is able to quickly change from writing rhythmic driving trauma cues to hauntingly simple melodies while retaining that distinct "ER" musical feeling. Notes are taken; raise a dialogue line here lower some footsteps there, ease the beginning of a music cue in a little

Continued on page 18

"Fx" -

Cont'd from page 1

space program and as a kid growing up never missed a launch. I can still recall the images of the Saturn 5 lifting off the pad and the telephoto shots of it hurling into space already miles above the earth. One such image was captured in the film, and I recall discussing the shot with Supervising Sound Editor Stephen Flick—I asked him if it was stock footage that had been retrieved from NASA and was surprised to learn that no stock footage would be used. All the rocket visuals were to be provided by Digital Domain

under the supervision of Robert Legato. I had an opportunity to meet Robert at a pre-Oscar party and we discussed the enormous contributions that visual effects have made to modern movies. He was quick to point out that sound is a crucial element in making the images work. From his perspective, it's easy to see the model of a "rocket" that's really twenty feet tall or the computer generated "ice particles," but when the visuals are integrated with sound and properly delivered to the audience the experience can be magical and the illusion complete.

Part of our challenge in the mix on this film was to make it exciting, yet remember the story is based on historical facts. We were dealing not with X-Wing fighters or celestial invaders from another galaxy, but with real spacecraft that could only do and sound what technology in the 1960's allowed for. Steve Flick and his editors had conversations with astronaut Dave Scott regarding what

you could or couldn't hear in the capsule. Even the sounds of the buzzers and beeps were discussed, and the master alarm frequency and duration—were noted and emulated by the editors. However, we realized that we would have to "bend" reality a little to keep the soundtrack interesting and full. Steve had some discussion with director Ron Howard about going silent on the exterior shots in space -- no sound as it would really be. The concept however

***- Part of our challenge in the mix was to
make it exciting -- yet remember the
story is based on historical facts -***

could not be tested until we had all the elements including music up in front of us and played them against the picture. We therefore predubbed the effects to hear everything in or out of the spacecraft.

We were given about three weeks to predub the effects. Assisting me on the predubs was Ezra Dweck, an editor/mixer who had worked at Weddington for quite some time. Originally, Ezra was to predub the foley with me and then another Todd AO mixer would help on the effects, but Ezra did a great job and stayed on for all the predubs. While we were working at Todd AO Stage B in Hollywood, Rick Dior, a New York mixer who had worked with Ron Howard before, was premixing the dialogue, ADR, and Group at Todd AO East in New York. Stage B in Hollywood was where I first started mixing back in 1986. Although I've worked in all of the Todd AO stages, most of my time has been spent on Stages A and B. Both rooms are

equipped with Quad Eight boards that were installed in the mid 1980s, and updated with Neve Flying Fader automation in 1991. Though I was comfortable on Stage B, I also found it to be frustrating at times dealing with the limitations of the board. There are a total of 48 inputs with sends and EQ (16 per section), plus another 24 faders-only in a wing section added a couple years ago. The room had one 4-channel joystick! I asked engineering to secure another joystick and make it a 5-channel out for the split surrounds. Bob Weitz, an engineer for

Stages A and B, came through by using a 4-channel stick and utilizing the DS 4 matrix on the stage to derive 5 channels out. The Left and Center outs from the stick became the Lt and Rt inputs to the matrix whose outputs were LCR. The Right and Surround outs from the stick were patched to the Rs and Ls respectively. It took some getting used to, panning from Left to Right had formerly been a pan from Left to Center, but it worked.

The most complex reel by far was Reel 5 -- the launch reel. We had over 400 tracks including BGs and Foley. Originally we planned one and a half to two days to predub the reel, it took three. At the conclusion of the third day we invited Ron Howard, who was in LA for the scoring, to come by for our playback. Needless to say, Steve Flick and myself were a little anxious, as we had been predubbing on our own. The picture editors, Mike Hill and Dan Hanley, were in New York working with Rick. Ron and producer Todd Hallowell came by

around six o'clock and we met for the first time. After the usual pleasantries, we sat back and watched the reel sans dialogue and music. It played beautifully and when over, Ron stood up and said, "It's all I could've hoped for." Although Steve and I had a number of things we wanted to finesse, we were pleased that the reel delivered the punch our director was looking for. Ron did have a couple of minor adds to put in, but we all felt we had what we needed to go back to New York and final. We concluded our predubbing on a Friday evening with a plane to catch the following Saturday morning. There were still a number of predubs to finish or update, but we left those in Ezra's capable hands. Scott Millan, who was mixing the music, joined me on what was for both of us our first trip to New York.

We spent several hours that Sunday checking out the stage and going over our layout on the board. It was a familiar sight, another Quad Eight, circa mid 1980s, with Flying Fader automation. As I recall, I had about 30 faders on the main console plus two Martech portable wing boards with 24 automated faders each.

We weren't sure exactly what the music requirements would be until we got going and whether or not Scott would need one of the Martech boards. Thankfully he didn't and I got both, The Mackie board (no automation) that had been set up for me was, I'm happy to say, never used. At first, I think all of us from the west coast were a little apprehensive about how we would be received by the New York crew. Any concerns we had however were quickly put to rest. Mike Hill and Dan Hanley were very supportive of our respective talents

and opinions. Dialogue editors Chic Ciccolini and Lisa Levine were terrific, and Rick Dior and the staff of Todd AO East were very accommodating. Engineer Bob Chefalas provided great technical support, and music editor Tom Drescher welcomed Scott's contributions to the music. We began our final mix the following Monday morning and since we were going in reel order had a couple of easier days to get settled in. Reel Three had a surprise for the audience and was our first real challenge with the effects. The "nightmare" sequence followed what appeared to be a time dissolve from a routine training session in the capsule simulator to an actual flight where all hell breaks loose. We covered the obvious in our predubs, but Ron wasn't quite happy with the alarms that we played. The master alarm on the panel was covered and worked but two other alarm sounds for offscreen sensors did not. When I dumped those two, the scene lost some of its chaos for a period of time. Ron asked if we could do something more with the master alarm he liked, While Flick went to the digital workstation to cut something, I grabbed an AMS 1580 harmonizer and using both sides pitched up one send from the master alarm and pitched down another—introducing them at different times and placing one in a joystick and moving it around the room gave us back the chaos we had lost. The effect worked and Ron was happy, no further editorial work would be needed. Sometimes those mixing tricks work, sometimes not.

I was very happy to have editor Dean Beville and his Pro Tools workstation standing by for the many times they did not. Dean was a real asset to

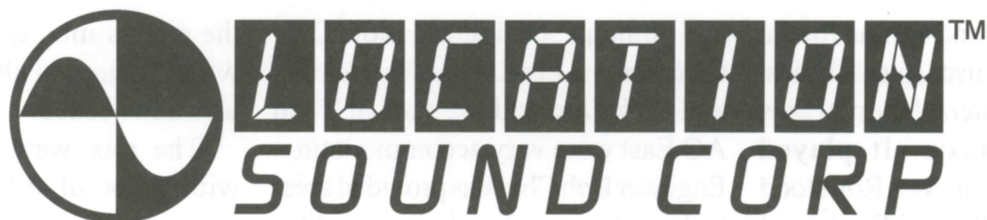
the effects mix, quickly coming up with solutions or alternatives to offer us when needed.

The mix went well throughout with a lot of effort put forth by everyone. Once we got into space, we realized that the "silent" theory would not work. It just lacked energy, and the visuals of the capsule exploding or spinning wildly out of control with thrusters blasting away cried out for sound.

One day Ron got a call from producer and his partner at Imagine -- Brian Grazer. Brian wanted to make sure we were playing it all up -- he had a big summer movie and wanted a BIG dynamic soundtrack. We were happy to oblige!

I was in New York for exactly four weeks. Scott and I stayed through the 6-trk and 2-trk printmasters and then headed home. Working on "Apollo 13" was definitely one of the highlights of my career. It was great to see New York and a terrific experience working with Ron and his crew. We all had a lot of faith in this film and it was very rewarding to see it received as well as it was. The C.A.S. and Academy Award nominations and subsequent wins were the icing on the cake. To work on great films with talented people, and to be recognized for that work, what more could you ask for?





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"Piano" - Cont'd from page 1

directed by Lloyd Richards, edited by Jim Oliver, and the music score provided by Stephen James Taylor. Starring were Charles Dutton, Afre Woodard, Carl Gordon, Tommy Hollis, and Lou Myers.

"The Piano Lesson" tells the story of Boy Willie and his friend Lyman who plan to sell a family heirloom in the form of an intricately carved piano in the 1920's. As the story unfolds, the past of the characters and the ghostly story of the piano are revealed, culminating in a life-changing revelation for all.

The post schedule was December 5th - 7th 1994 -- 12 hr days. We came back for fixes on December 19th for 8 hrs, and December 29th for a half day. My crew at the Larson Sound Center was Sam Black, C.A.S. on SFX, John Asman, C.A.S. on Music/Foley, and myself on Dialog/Adr. The supervising Sound Editor was Steve Grubbs, with the editors at the Larson Sound Center providing all the adr/foley and editorial services.

Producers Signboard Hill hired Michael Moore to handle production sound and gave him the time required to do his setups -- it showed in post. We were able to MIX, not FIX, which is rare these days in television. ADR was recorded for performance or script changes mostly, not for off mic or distorted sound. Steve Grubbs and I sat with a cut of the show and worked through some of the problems just after the spotting session to see if we could eliminate some of the dialog problems -- low level lines, overlaps, off-mic lines. By listening to dailies, we were able to cross alot off the "fix" list by working EQ, or using

alternative takes. Also, many times, if we had to loop a line for a clunk or some other noise, we planned to record the whole line, but potentially only use the word or two we actually needed to fix the problem. If the line was originally recorded on an RF mic, we used the same mic AND a boom in the adr room to try to find the best match, record both, and I made the choice on the dub stage. This preplanning helped alot in maintaining the integrity of the original performances, giving a high comfort factor to the client. HOWEVER . . . the best laid plans . . . There is one long scene that is the description of the history of the piano. The production track contained the voice-over from production, which needed to be re-written in certain sections. During the spotting session, the approach was discussed. It was built like a montage, with period photographs dissolving into one another...and just the production voice-over as one of the characters told the story. The client wanted to use the production voice-over as much as possible, and just fill in the "blanks" with new lines to be written later. Steve was ASSURED that there would be music and sound effects wall to wall covering the entire piece. You may see where this is going. He did indeed build the sequence with "period" sfx, and there was score for the whole thing. My first run through felt pretty good, as I was able to mask the production crossfades, and the adr went in quite nicely. We did NOT have the luxury of dialog predubs.... So, after we were through, and did the playback . . . the producers told us to throw out ALL the music, sfx and backgrounds and play this 5 minute

sequence completely DRY, with just V.O. Thank you very much! Steve looked at me..shrugged his shoulders, smiled, ...and told me that of course if THAT had been the plan, the whole sequence would have been looped.... So I spent a significant amount of time pitching, and EQing lines to match. Sam Black, my efx mixer, just looked over as if to say . . . sorry..wish I could help! And John Asman tried his best to help with foley..since his music had gone away . . . but . . . I was all alone... We call it "Professional Luck . . ." It came out fine . . . and the client had no idea why we were all sweating . . .!

Sound effects in the movie played an important role in setting up the period. There was alot of offstage backgrounds, and use of period cars and trucks. This being a stage play initially . . . it was originally very quiet . . . but we did manage to squeeze our stuff in. Its a good thing we don't get paid by the DB sometimes -- in shows like this we'd go broke! The dynamic range of the show varied greatly from very very quiet to very big. Keeping that all in a range for television was a challenge, and we used every EQ and level trick in the book to make it read on the air. We were mastering for the medium of television, which has its limits, but they also needed an optical print at all the screenings, so we had to be compatible for many formats. Monitoring through the matrix was essential to keep things in order. We would mix on the big speakers, and play back on small speakers in mono, to make sure that America would hear the show as intended.

Musically, there were the usual subjective calls. Louder, softer, re-edit, steal cues, rewrites . . . but

through it all, John managed to keep it working well for TV broadcast. The piano played a couple of pieces live in the show by itself, and was rigged to do so IN SYNC on the set. However, when we got the track, it was BEHIND for some unknown reason. So we had to resync every piece. Also, there were several musical numbers sung or played LIVE on the set. Songs from the period, as well as original pieces were performed by the cast and recorded in stereo. We added foley for the impact of feet stomping and glasses rattling, as well as adr adds for others singing along. It is quite rare to get a piece recorded so well in the field, and then be able to enhance it with extra elements. It was quite a dramatic result. I also sat with the composer during another session, and we rerecorded many of the pieces for a CD release of the music from the movie.

In one scene, Boy Willie and Lyman go downtown to the local movie theater. Walking down the street, they stop in front of the theater. The movie sound track is playing through small speakers next to the ticket booth. After they buy tickets, they go into the lobby, and then into the theater itself. Each step of the way, the soundtrack changed perspective and character to give the feel of the different locations. This kind of treatment is always fun, because you get to recreate reality with reverbs and echoes and EQ, and not fight the production dialog. The key here is the build. If the layout is not edited in a manageable way, you can never create the sound field you are aiming for. Fortunately, Steve laid out the tracks in a very "mixable" manner, and I was able to go from

scene to scene with presets that I worked out in advance. Fixes also then become more manageable because you are not editing on the stage, and you can recreate your presets (if you have good notes . . .)

During the climax of the movie, a ghost appears, and rattles everyone. This ghost was never seen, but heard and felt. Steve had his editors build a variety of sounds to try for the ghost. As happens most often, the simpler approach was the best. I took one of the whistling winds that had been prepared, sampled it, processed it with some slow flanging and Lex 480 verb and used that. It panned around the room behind people and then upstairsd. The direction here was quite superb, as all the actors made us believe there was something there. Again, alot of offstage effects, winds and crashes. Sam played these with rooms he created, and it worked quite well.

We did have a couple of hours of downtime, however. Thanks to the now infamous OJ/White Bronco chase, we HAD to watch it on the monitors during one of our late nights. The chase got much higher ratings than the movie did!

For a movie that was a stage play, there were plenty of "sound moments." When it was quiet, it was really quiet . . . but you still had a sense of the neighborhood. And when it was big, nothing felt "held back." My hat goes off to Michael, Steve, Sam, John and all those who contributed to a job well done!



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From Dusk Till Dawn with Axiom

With some scenes requiring as many as 80 channels of effects elements, the new Robert Rodriguez movie 'From Dusk Till Dawn' was always going to be a challenge for any console. Fortunately, effects mixer Tennyson Sebastian III used an SSL Axiom digital console with integral DiskTrack random access recorder.

"To retain transients and punch through the premixes and finals, the all-digital system was great. Operation of Axiom is totally automated, and I also like the fact that you have one knob per function – it feels like a normal console, except everything is handled digitally. Conforming audio and automation to picture changes was simple. We couldn't have produced such a vivid mix without the Axiom."

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Effects mixer Tennyson Sebastian (rear) with Director Robert Rodriguez, at work with the SSL Axiom film console with integrated DiskTrack recorder.

The Sebastian quotes are © Mel Lambert. All rights reserved. Quotes excerpted from the April 1996 issue of Mix.

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT . . .

Sound mixer **Kim Ornitz C.A.S.** along with **Gary Theard** and **Paul Coogan C.A.S.** have begun "**Money Talks**" an action-comedy packed with dialog and gunfire, presenting a challenging dynamic range. **Tom Brandau C.A.S.** is on "**Leave It To Beaver**" for **Universal** thru August. Many Features, Mow's and TV series such as "**Baywatch Nights**" have **Tommy Goodwin, C.A.S.** busy recording ADR and Foley at **The Magnolia Studios** in Burbank. Tommy says "Hiatus? What's that?" **Richard Lightstone, C.A.S.** is currently in Chicago on "**Reach The Rock**," a **John Hughe's** project with first time helmer **Bill Ryan**. Richard then slides over to "**A Thousand Acres**," starring **Michelle Pfeiffer**, and **Jessica Lange**, directed by **Jocelyn Moorhouse**. Senator **Mike Michaels C.A.S.** has been doing the production mixing for TNN's #1 daytime show "**Creative Living**." **Don Hale C.A.S.** just returned from Mexico for **ABC Television** on a special 1 hour prime time documentary to air in the fall called "**Chariots of the Gods . . . Messages from the Past**." He was on location in Teotihuacan, Chechen-Itza, Venta/Villahermosa, and Mexico City recording on DAT. **Terry Porter C.A.S.**, **Mel Metcalf** and **Dean Zupancic** completed dubbing "**Two Days in the Valley**" prior to leaving on well-deserved vacations as the main theater at **Disney** goes through renovations. When Terry and crew return they will immediately begin "**101 Dalmations**." **Rick Alexander** and **Tom Dahl** are scheduled to begin predubs on "**Nightwatch**" for **Miramax** and then will segue immediately into "**Anna Karenina**." Disney's all-digital Room 6 is up and running with AC-3 work and its first feature, "**The War at Home**" with **Emillio Estevez**. **Jay Patterson C.A.S.** and **Tom Pinney** just wrapped "**Love Kills**," an ABC MOW in Kansas City, their 25th feature length show together as a production sound team. **John Ross C.A.S.** is busy dubbing **David Lynch's** new feature "**Lost Highway**" at **Digital Sound and Picture**. **Jurg von Allmen C.A.S.** is sound-designing "**Dream of a Love**" at **Digiton Studios** in Switzerland. **Edward L. Moskowitz C.A.S.** wrapped "**Alien Nation**," "**The Udara Legacy**" and "**The Enemy Within**" for **FOX** which are now in final post at **West Productions**. He resumes work on "**Cybill**" and "**The Larry Sander's Show**" in August. **Randy Thom C.A.S.** is sound-designing **Tim Burton's** "**Mars Attacks**" and doing preliminary sound-design work on **Bob Zemecki's** "**Contact**." **Bob Wald C.A.S.** recently finished the last seven weeks of **Steven Seagal's** "**The Glimmer Man**" and is now on **NBC's** new series "**The Pretender**," shooting until mid-December.

*"Been There, Done That" would like to hear about
the projects you've been mixing lately.*

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"Style" - Cont'd from page 3

clearly enunciated words can. It can make them seem absurd, frustrated, futile, or funny. It can make us in the audience listen in a way we otherwise might not listen. It can set us up emotionally for a completely different kind of situation in the next scene.

There is one other argument I will make against the proposition that all dialogue must be intelligible. This argument is central to my own philosophy of movie sound, and it goes something like this: All sound is music.

When children learn language they do not generally use dictionaries. They occasionally ask what particular words mean, but usually they don't ask. Once they hear a word used they are likely to know what it means without asking. Spoken language is improvised music. It is multi-timbral, it has rhythm, tempo, dynamic range, uses variations on themes, etc. These are the characteristics of music. When we listen to someone speak, much of the meaning we derive comes from an essentially musical interpretation of their performance. In fact there is often a conflict or dissonance between the performance and the dictionary meaning of the words used.

Altman might not admit it, but I think this is one of his tricks. He forces us to interpret dialog as we would interpret music, which makes us listen differently, which may confuse us momentarily, but which ultimately may push the story farther than would the conventional approach.

Clearly, most dialogue in most movies should be made to be intelligible. It is inevitable that people

will turn to their partners to ask about a line here or there, just as they will whisper comments or questions about locations, costumes, plot points, etc. But the idea that every time a lip flaps we must clearly hear what is being said strikes me as way too simplistic a philosophy.

In the next issue of the Journal I'll throw caution to the wind and speculate about creativity in movie sound. What is creativity, and how can we foster it in our own work?

**"E.R." - Cont'd from page 9**

more gently, then let it play out as recorded. After lunch we make the producers' changes.

We work on an old Quad Eight mixing console, retrofitted with GML moving-fader automation. Automation makes this phase of the mixing process simpler. The Quad Eight console has a nice warm sound and is easy to use compared to some of the newer electronic monsters out there today.

With mixing completed, Wendy will take the 24-track master over to video operations for a final quality check while laying back finished picture and sound to a digital format for NBC.

Thanks, Bill, that's a wrap!

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Letters To The Editor

17th March 1996

Dear Robert,

I would like to thank you and the Board of Directors and Members of the C.A.S. for the warm welcome extended to me and for the honour of receiving a nomination for the C.A.S Best Sound Award. A rare privilege to be included with such auspicious company, and I was glad to be able to attend the Awards Banquet to meet with you all. My trip to Los Angeles was most enjoyable and informative, and I would particularly like to formally thank Melissa Hofmann for her initial contacts and continuing help, Richard Lightstone for so effectively taking me "under his wing," and Ed Moskowitz and Dennis Maitland for allowing me to visit them on their productions. John Coffey, Scott Bernard and Ed

Somers too added to the welcome when I visited their facilities.

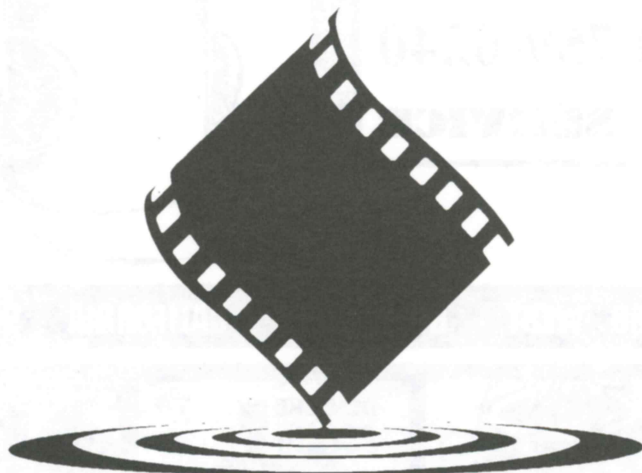
As a Council officer of the Association of Motion Picture Sound, I look forward to the opportunity to increase the exchange of information between our organisations, and can assure you and your Members that we, too, share your commitment to the advancement of motion picture sound recording and reproduction.

Again, thank you all for a memorable evening.

Sincerely,

Brian Simmons,
A.M.P.S.
Walton on Thames
Surrey, England

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Next Issue:

**Creativity in Movie
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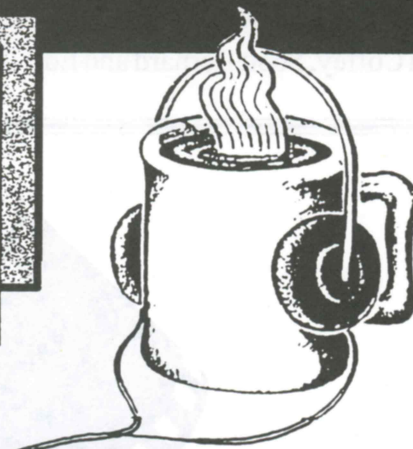
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