

Breaking into Concert Sound: Getting in the Door at Maryland Sound

Every industry has its movers and shakers, pillars of industry which shape and change the course of events. In computers it's the seemingly omnipresent IBM and the ubiquitous Apple Computer Corp. Professional sports has the Los Angeles Lakers basketball dynasty of the 80s, and the San Francisco 49ers, going for four Super Bowls in a row.

THE CONCERT SOUND FIELD IS NO EXCEPTION to this rule, with power companies like Clair Brothers and ShowCo, their huge mega-systems covering the largest touring entourage in the world.

It is also true, however, that there are smaller companies in each of these industries which come along and make a big splash with an amazing product or service. The home computer market, for example, was nearly cornered by the lowly Commodore 64 during the 80s. The Houston Rockets shocked the Lakers with elimination in the 1986 NBA playoffs. And in sound reinforcement, there is Maryland Sound Inc., a bright, efficient and well-managed sound company with a reputation for 100 percent customer satisfaction, a long client list of major superstars, and a bit of an image as an upstart underdog.

In this third and final installment of our series on breaking into live sound, we will spend the afternoon at the West Coast operation of Maryland Sound, learning about the company's history and getting the inside story from Michael Stahl, general manager of Maryland Sound West Coast. We will then visit with two of MSI's employees, Stephen Zelenka, concert production manager, and Carla Hixson, a relative newcomer who is moving up fast, and one of the few women active in concert sound.

THE COMPANY

Maryland Sound was founded in 1970 by Robert Goldstein, a former employee of Clair Brothers. Goldstein, a man who believes that cus-

tomers service must be the number one priority of a sound reinforcement company, founded his company on the precept of quality. He committed his company to three important concepts. The first was to never compromise the sound of a concert system. This meant a great deal of research and extra labor to insure that only the highest quality components and engineering were used in his systems. The second concept was that each and every employee, from the secretary to the front-of-house mixer, is important to the company and is in essence an ambassador to the world for Maryland Sound. The third concept was to have the right people in place, with the skills and experience to do each job right the first time.

These three concepts still permeate each and every job for which Maryland Sound is contracted, whether it be a permanent installation such as the Universal Amphitheatre, or a large touring system like Pink Floyd or Neil Diamond might require. The outstanding quality of Maryland Sound systems is well-documented and the loyalty and satisfaction of their employees is obvious from all the smiling faces one encounters upon entering the unassuming red brick building in North Hollywood, far from its more humble beginnings.

The mid to late 70s was a busy time for the young company with tour dates and reinforcement jobs. Acquiring his first major account, Frankie Vali and the Four Seasons, during this period, Goldstein concentrated on client retention, building his inventory of equipment and

strengthening his position in the industry. He made many contacts and enriched existing relationships with other sound mixers.

The 1980s was a period of rapid growth for Maryland Sound and saw the acquisition of several medium-sized sound companies complete with equipment and clientele. The biggest turning point of this period came when Maryland Sound acquired Northwest Audio, out of Portland, OR. This provided the company with headline acts such as the Eagles, Neil Young, and Crosby, Stills and Nash.

Around 1983, Goldstein began to do permanent installations on the East Coast under the leadership of Will Perry, another Maryland Sound engineer. These smaller installations were the forerunners of the large installations at venues like the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles and Universal Studios in Florida. Today, Maryland Sound is at the forefront of the permanent installation field, with major contracts in theme parks and clientele worldwide.

In late 1988, Maryland Sound made two extremely important acquisitions. The first purchase was the assets of the bankrupt Stanal Sound, whose client list included Neil Diamond. Industry interest in Stanal was high, and included such sound companies as ElectroTech and Clair Brothers, but Maryland Sound prevailed. This acquisition was a big boost to its West Coast operation. The second acquisition was the purchase of Audio Techniques, which was providing sound for the group Chicago. Audio Techniques had developed an excellent propri-



Figure 1. Maryland Sound technician Bryan Nemecek performing a console modification.

etary sound system and this equipment and technology became the sole property of Maryland Sound, which continues to expand on it.

A quick tour of the facility revealed stacks of high-tech sound equipment of every variety: Digital reverbs from \$300 units to top-of-the-line \$5,000 units; hundreds of speaker

cabinets stacked to the ceiling; thousands of watts of power; every conceivable microphone; and a very well-equipped lab, where all incoming equipment is thoroughly checked out. Even major modifications to the consoles can be and often are performed here in this high-tech wonderland.

In 1990, Maryland Sound continues to be a major force in the sound reinforcement industry. Reviews of the sound quality of Maryland Sound systems have been extremely positive and several concert reviewers stated it was the "best they have heard." This stands as a testament to the commitment to quality that drives this company.

THE WEST COAST MANAGER

Stahl began his career at about the same time Maryland Sound was getting started. After graduating with a degree in Political Science, Stahl started his own 8 track recording studio and a small sound reinforcement company. His system consisted of 16 Perkins boxes and a variety of 16 horns per side, with a 16 channel Tascam console. He did some work at this time for Stan Miller of Stanal Sound and for Clair Brothers. When the fuel crisis of 1972 hit, Stahl was unable to get the fuel for his trucks and was practically put out of business. He decided to look into working for someone else and was immediately hired by Clair Brothers, who

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also purchased much of his equipment.

Stahl remained at Clair for the next 12 years, rising rapidly through the ranks, to mix shows like the Beach Boys, Chicago, Queen, KISS and finally ending his career at Clair in 1984 on a triumphant note with the ten-month-long Jackson's Victory Tour. After many years on the road, and in particular the extremely arduous Victory tour, he was somewhat disenchanted with the life of a touring engineer and his position at Clair Brothers. Stahl felt it was time for a change, so he said his goodbyes to Clair Brothers and the rigors of the road. After a brief stint with Mountain Productions who staged the Victory Tour, Stahl moved to Los Angeles to seek employment as a "non-touring" sound engineer.

To Stahl's surprise and chagrin, the only job offers forthcoming were to go back out on the road. This was contrary to the purpose of his coming to Los Angeles, so he turned down all offers. A point of irony in his story is that he unsuccessfully applied at both Stanal Sound and Audio Techniques, both of which were acquired

Figure 2. Carla Hixson demonstrates that she can keep up with the best of them.



by Maryland Sound and whose assets Stahl now controls.

Finally, out of necessity, he began to look for employment elsewhere.

This led him to a three year stint in the construction field where his skill as a crew manager served him well, but the audio engineering story





Figure 3. Michael Stahl makes a point to the author about getting into the concert sound field.

being written here, might have ended there.

When an old friend, Leo Bonamy, former production manager for Chicago, became production manager at the Universal Amphitheatre, he called on Stahl to do some work for the Universal Studios Tour. Stahl soon found himself working part-time as stage manager at Universal

Studio's Screen Test Theatre, as well as doing occasional shows at the Amphitheatre.

It was this work and Stahl's continuing contact with Bonamy that opened the door to Maryland Sound. Bonamy told Stahl that Goldstein was looking for a West Coast manager and recommended that Stahl apply. It took some time for Stahl to

decide if this was something he wanted to pursue, and he let several months go by. While Stahl was in Boston during a family illness, Bonamy called to urge him to call Goldstein, and he did. Goldstein suggested they meet and talk about the West Coast position—which they did. He was favorably impressed and persuaded Stahl to take the position as the new West Coast manager of Maryland Sound.

A most interesting and ironic point of Stahl's rise to the top is that years before, as a mixer on the road, he met Goldstein at a show where both were mixing for different acts, and now years later, Goldstein was in the position to offer Stahl an incredible career opportunity. This underlines the concept that one should never burn bridges, because one never knows where a person or band will end up. Remember that bands like U2 and The Beatles were once opening bands for someone else.

THE STAFF

The saying goes that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. So, too, a company is known by the employees it has. This is one area where Maryland Sound really shines. The company seems to have a deep commitment to fairness towards each employee and a real respect not only for their skills and abilities, but respect also for who they are as people. During the course of the afternoon, we were able to speak with several Maryland Sound employees about their history and feelings about the company.

CARLA: A FRESH FACE IN PRO SOUND

Carla Hixson is a new face on the pro sound scene. Only 23, she is very excited to be involved with Maryland Sound. Hixson started her career in her home town by running sound for small local bands in Illinois, and began to develop an interest in sound and electronics. This led her to attend a technical trade school in Arizona to study electronics. Upon graduation, she put together a resume of her education and experience and sent it to several large sound reinforcement companies.

"Maryland Sound responded within a week," Hixson said. "Michael Stahl called me in Arizona and asked me to FAX a copy of my re-



Figure 4. Stephen Zelenko stressing the importance of bringing enthusiasm to the job.

sume out to Los Angeles." Because of time constraints, however, the position she applied for was filled by someone else, but Stahl encouraged her to stay in touch.

"I made a follow-up phone call about a week or two later and Mike said that they were looking for someone to work out here in the lab. He wanted to fly me out that day!" she said. Maryland Sound eventually did fly Hixson out to Los Angeles for a week-long trial run which gave her the opportunity to be evaluated 'under fire', and to meet the other Maryland Sound staffers. "About a week after I got back, and after they interviewed several other people, they called me back and offered me the job. I accepted," she said smiling.

Hixson worked for a year in the lab fixing, tweaking and learning the equipment from the inside out, but had her sights set on eventually doing mixing for shows. "I figured that knowing how to fix equipment would help me in the long run," she said. "If I go on tour and something breaks down, it's one less thing I would have to send back if I can fix it there."

After Hixson's year as a lab-tech, Stahl talked to Geep Parker, shop foreman and equipment manager, and they decided to give her the chance to move up. Now she is working in the shop and doing set-up for smaller shows. Hixson is closer than ever to her coveted mixing position.

There are not a large number of women active in live sound, and Hixson responded to a question about being female in a male-dominated industry, as well as the attitudes she has had to cope with. "It's never been 'You can't do this because you are a female', but it's an attitude that you sense," Hixson said. "The men will brush you aside or select other men to do certain jobs, as if all you could do is wrap mic cables or some simple job." When asked how she handles the situation, she smiled and said, "I try to be assertive and sort of stay in their face. I'm not naturally an aggressive person, but to make it out there you've got to be!"

Asked what her goals are, Hixson was quick to respond. "I want to go out on the road. I want to be the front-of-house mixer for a major tour!"

A smiling Stahl quickly added, "And I see no reason why she can't

attain that goal. No reason whatsoever."

STEPHEN: BRINGING IN NEW BUSINESS

Stephen Zelenka is the person responsible for getting new acts onto the Maryland Sound bandwagon. His career began as a bass player in his native London. After buying himself a top quality bass rig, he found that others wanted to rent his equipment. Tagging along on the more interesting rentals, he made many contacts in the music business. Finally, he purchased equipment from a band called Gentle Giant and became friendly with the band. He was soon offered a job as third man on the PA, and with his acceptance, Zelenka's career in concert sound was launched.

I think one of the things I look for the most is enthusiasm. If someone has enthusiasm for the job, that is very infectious and represents the company very well to others.

Early in his career, Zelenka was given the nickname 'Zoomy' by his peers because of the way he worked. "Sometimes I was like a wild man, trying to do three things at once and running around at top speed, so they started to call me Zoomy," he said. "It helped me get more done and the name still sticks today!" As he grew in knowledge, his determination to move into the upper echelons of concert sound also grew, but he found the desire easier to come by than the next job.

"I wrote letters of introduction and sent them all around. Unfortunately, over a period of time, I got no positive responses," he said. "The main complaint was that I did not have enough experience. That old catch-22!" Not being a quitter, Zelenka laughingly related a story where his determination and creativity finally landed him a job with a major touring company which was doing sound for Rod Stewart.

"I got in by being persistent and gutsy. I literally crawled in under a receptionist's desk, and waited all day outside the hiring person's

office," he said. "When I finally got to see him as he was leaving for the day, he hired me on guts alone!"

Zelenka's career also had some elements of luck which helped him rise even faster. He was asked to assist on a production of The Who's rock opera "Tommy," and consequently met Pete Townshend. Because of technical problems, Zelenka and Townshend had to work closely together and Zelenka's natural enthusiasm for the job impressed Townshend so much, he hired Zelenka to run his private sound company.

Zelenka's career now spans over fourteen years and has included tours with major world-class acts such as The Who, Bob Seger, and Deep Purple. He was employed at Stanal Sound when it was acquired by Maryland Sound and stayed to take a less road-oriented position as production manager. He now finds himself in the position to give input on hirings and firings.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE UP AND COMING

When the subject of getting in the door for aspiring engineers and sound people came up, each of the three had some good input about attitude, education and getting started.

Important Attributes of Beginning Sound People

Michael Stahl: The three most important things I look for in a new employee are attitude, attitude and attitude! I would rather train a total beginner with a great attitude than some know-it-all who's impossible to work with. We are a team. We work together toward the same goal. If a person doesn't want to be a team player, then get off the team.

Stephen Zelenka: I think one of the things I look for the most is enthusiasm. If someone has enthusiasm for the job, that is very infectious and represents the company very well to others.

Michael Stahl: If you want to make it, you've got to be where it's happening. That means you might need to relocate to Los Angeles, New York, etc. Also, never lose the attitude of learning your craft. If you are flying 20,000 pounds of equipment over patrons heads, it better be *perfect* the first time!

Stephen Zelenka: I would suggest latching on to a local band that has a

future and mixing for them. Also, you can get a job in club where touring acts come through and be as helpful as you can. They might need someone and they will remember you if you are very helpful.

On Education in the Audio Field

Carla Hixson: It was my interest in electronics that led me to ITT Trade School in Arizona to study it. This was one of the things that interested Mike on my resume. That knowledge has helped me a lot in the lab and out in the field.

Michael Stahl: I'm a firm believer in education, but it's important to remember that a degree in audio won't necessarily get you a job. There are many other attributes I look for in a candidate but education will never hurt you. You never stop learning.

Stephen Zelenka: If someone comes in here and says he's put in four years at say, Berklee School of Music and now he knows everything, I'm really put off by that.

I don't buy the line that women can't do the job because of the lifting or living arrangements

It's a catch-22 that experience often counts more than education, because how do you get experience if no one will hire you?

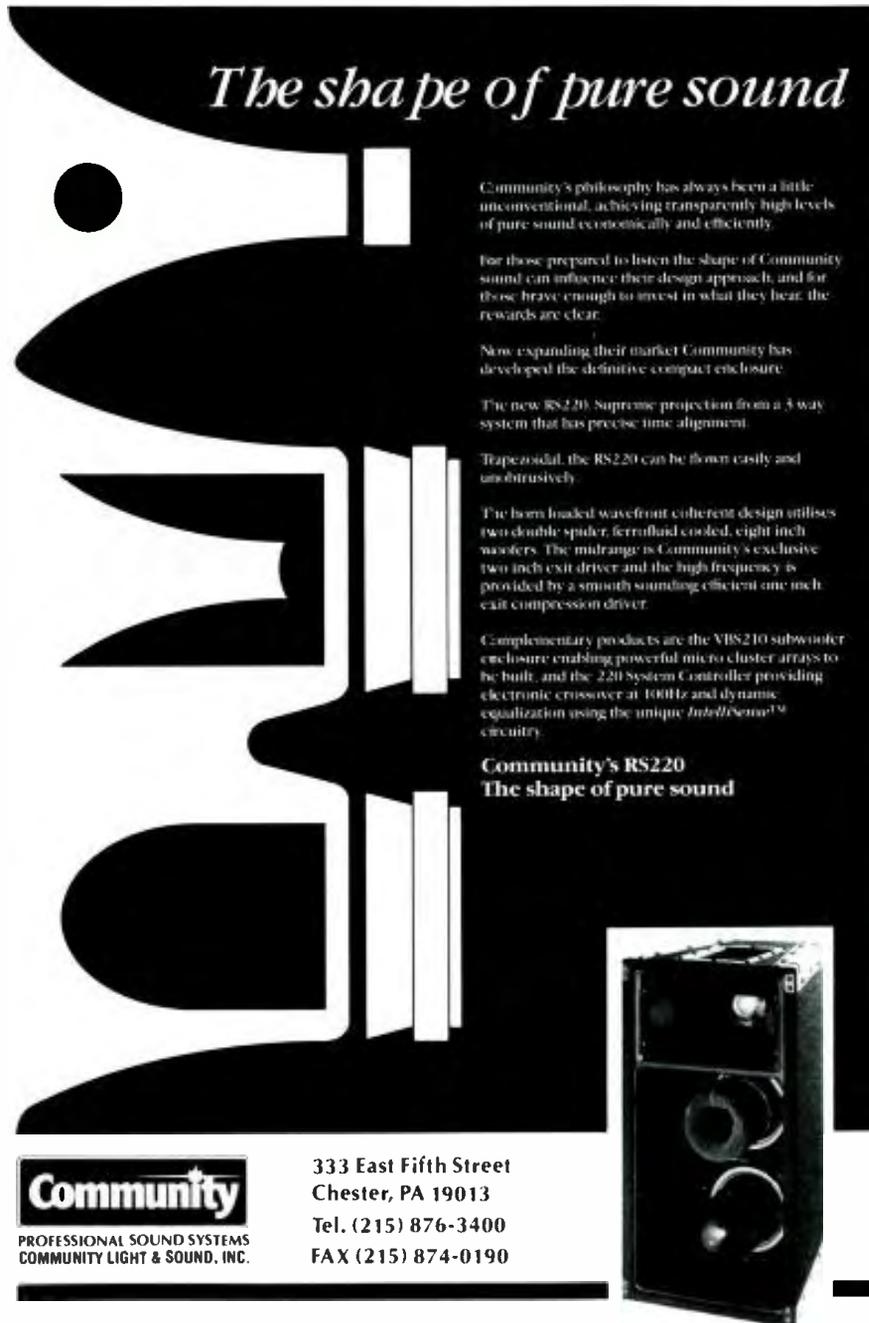
On Women Getting Into Audio

Carla Hixson: If you are a woman, don't get discouraged. There are places you can work and people who will hire you. If I can make it, so can other women!

Michael Stahl: I don't buy the line that women can't do the job because of the lifting or living arrangements. I believe that is used as an excuse for not hiring women. One of the best engineers I ever worked with was Cathy Sander who was my second on the Chicago tour. Cathy caused far less problems than the men, and always found a way to get every job done.

As the clock was showing nearly 2:00 p.m., it was obvious the Maryland Sound staffers were gearing up for another night's show. The trucks were being loaded, and the air was charged with excited anticipation.

These people obviously love their job, and it was with a bit of lingering regret that I shook hands all around, said my goodbyes, and prepared to leave. As I watched Maryland Sound's busy loading dock fade in the rear view mirror, I couldn't help feel a bit of envy for Carla, Stephen, Michael and all the gang there. It was obvious from their smiles and anticipation that as my day's work drew to a close, the excitement of their day was just beginning! 



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Breaking Into Concert Sound, Part II

High-powered live concerts are the lifeblood of the music industry in Los Angeles. Brightly lit scenes where top recording artists storm the stage and perform their special magic to an adoring multitude. Instantly recognizable are the names of these “concert cathedrals” where lively throngs come to venerate their musical idols. But there is one place and one name which stands both figuratively and literally far above the others: The Greek Theatre.

Sitting high above the city of Los Angeles in the hills of Griffith Park, The Greek Theatre is built within a natural amphitheatre and is one of the city’s oldest and dearest concert venues.

On September 24th, 1990, The Greek Theatre will celebrate its 60th anniversary in Los Angeles. If only the hallowed halls there could talk, what tales they could tell, like a who’s-who of the music business stretching from the 1930s into the present day and still going strong! What stories could be told of artists like Neil Diamond, Crosby Stills and Nash, Henry Mancini, Judy Garland, Victor Borge, Frank Sinatra, Bob Dylan and Richard Marx.

And these are only a minute fraction of the superstars who have graced the Greek Theatre’s stage. Oh, to be the lucky few charged with the awesome responsibility of the sound system at this venue of venues!

In this, the second of a three-part series on breaking into live sound in Los Angeles, we will spend the better part of a warm July morning with Jeff Cox, the sound system coordinator at the Greek Theatre.

front, punctuated by large posters of currently appearing superstars.

The air is charged with a feeling of expectation, as there are several semi-trucks with ALABAMA painted on their sides parked in front of the theater. This is load-in day for the band *Alabama* who will perform tonight!

The most striking feature from the entrance is a vast sea of bright, orange seats (about 6,200) which stretch hundreds of feet away from the stage and high up into the upper reaches of the amphitheatre. At the very front of all the seats, the stage looms larger than life and is a beehive of activity as the crew sets up for the show at a steady, but unhurried pace.

One cannot help but notice the large

speaker arrays flanking each side of the stage, poised in readiness for tonight’s coming onslaught of country/rock music. The look and feel of the stage area and its speakers, lights and risers state clearly that this place means music (see sidebar for a partial equipment list).

An island in the sea of seats is the house mixing position, sitting dead center, about 100 feet in front of the stage, and just above stage level. A small group of people are gathered around this island and as I approach, I am greeted with a warm hello from a smiling face with dark, mirrored sunglasses on.

This friendly greeting is followed by a self introduction which confirms that this is the man we came to see, Jeff Cox.



Figure 1. The front view of the Greek Theatre.

GRIFFITH PARK

Our trip begins on Los Feliz Boulevard in one of Los Angeles’ high rent districts. On the right are million dollar homes backed by the mountainous hills of Griffith Park and from the moment we make a right turn and start up the hill, it is evident we are headed toward a very special place. The narrow, winding road is divided by a belt of greenery, and huge old trees reach with outstretched arms to form a living tunnel as up and up into the hills we go.

Finally, we pass a large gate which announces our entry into Griffith Park, and just beyond the gate on the left stands the front facade of The Greek Theatre, looking like a Hollywood version of a modern day Acropolis with white columns adorning its

HE WASTES NO TIME IN STARTING OUR INTERVIEW.

"I want to start by stressing what I think is the most important point; here at the Greek, we have employees from Maryland Sound (the company which employs Cox and is contracted to provide sound to the Greek Theatre), employees from the union (International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees), and employees from the theater itself, not to mention the band's road crew, and the thing is, we are all a team!" Cox says. "It's not just me or any single person, but each person doing their job and working with the others toward a common goal. That's what makes it work," he says.

With that statement as a preface, Cox began to dig into some biographical material. He is 39, has been in the business for over 20 years and is happily married to a woman who has played a very important part in his career. Like many successful people in the music industry, Cox' interest began at a very young age.

"As a child, I had the opportunity of being given music lessons," he said. "I tried drums. I tried saxophone. I tried guitar. I tried EVERYTHING, but I just didn't have the brain-to-finger dexterity that musicians have. But you know, I had something inside of me that wanted to get out. So finally in 1968, my first year of college, I happened to room with a couple of guys who had a band. We started out with a Bogen amplifier and two Cobraflex horns, two Shure Unidyne microphones and a station wagon. We played college fraternities and dance halls," Cox said.

He laughed as he recalled the excitement he and the bandmembers felt at the prospect of upgrading their sound system to two Vox columns and a Shure Vocalmaster head. "When we got the Vocalmaster, it was like, 'WOW! Real reverb! Six channels! Colored buttons and knobs!' and in the process at this time, it was absolutely nothing," Cox said. "No monitors, no EQ, no nothing! Just a couple of mics plugged into an amplifier and that was it," he said.

Cox continued to work with his roommates' band, 'Paste', for about a year, and at the same time, there were many growing opportunities in the sound-reinforcement field. He was able to see major touring acts like 3 Dog Night and Steppenwolf in

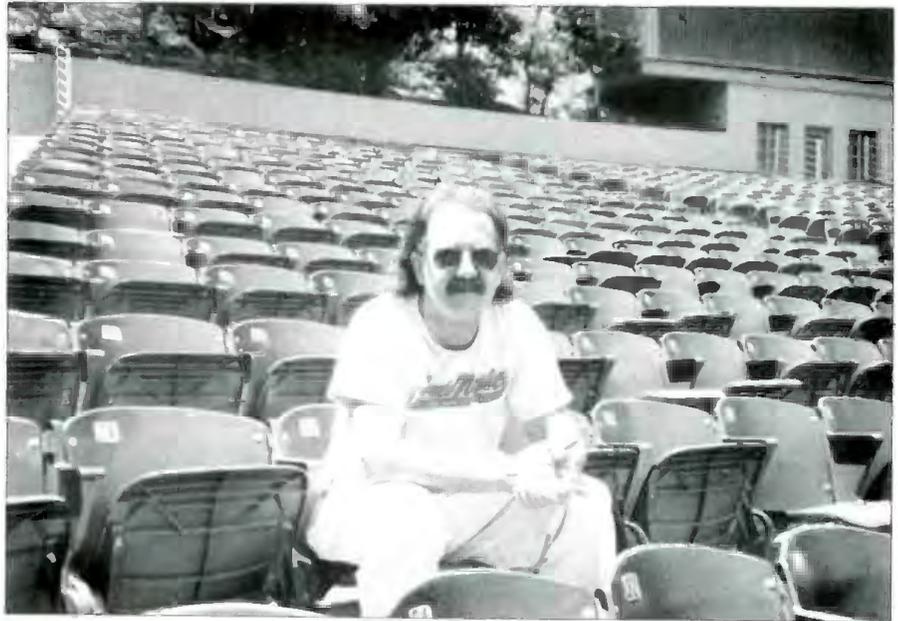


Figure 2. Jeff Cox at the top of the house.

concert. However, after the band broke up, Cox did not do much in music for nearly two years. But true to form, when an opportunity presented itself, he jumped at the chance.

RADIO

"The next thing that I did musically was to get into radio," Cox said. "Myself and a couple of other people developed the campus radio station at Western Washington State College. Because of my penchant for music, the people developing the sta-

tion invited me to get involved, so I got my FCC license and I came to work with them," he said.

At this time, Cox made a major change that would be a big step in a long journey toward his current tenure as an integral part of the Southern California music scene.

He was then majoring in education, and was destined to become a teacher, a far cry from the live concert scene. But, involvement in the radio station convinced him to change his major to communications.

Figure 3. The Greek Theatre stage with its speaker arrays.

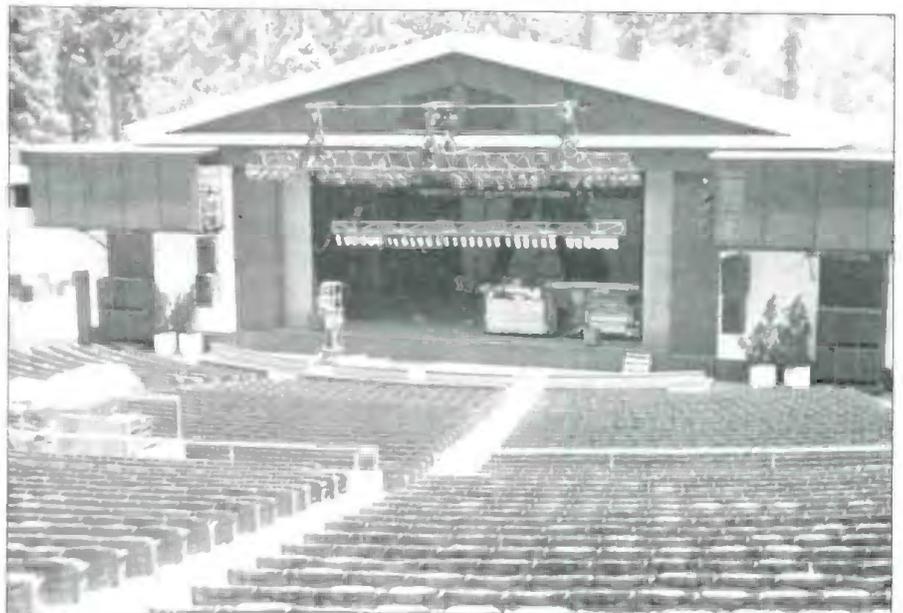




Figure 4. Power amps, equalizers, limiters, etc., used for the Alabama show.

“The funny thing is that up until that time, I was not doing that well in college,” he said. “It was more of a place to hang out and have a good time with my friends. But all of a sudden, I was back in touch and dealing with music again, and it was like another set of rockets kicked in,” Cox said.

Soon after, he was offered a position in commercial radio in Seattle. He had his own morning radio show on KIL0-AM Radio called ‘Eggs and A Side Of...’ where he was given the freedom to be as eclectic as he wanted, and he thrived in this environment. Unfortunately, the station itself did not fare as well, and Cox eventually found himself out of a job.

“One day I showed up at work at six o’clock in the morning, and my key wouldn’t work in the door,” Cox said. “I called the station manager and he said something like, ‘Oh, we’re closed babe. Sorry I forgot to call you,’ and with that, the station was closed.”

Coincidental with the closing of the radio station, it was around this time, 1973, that an event occurred that would have life-transforming consequences for Cox, and during which he would make connections with people that, even to this day, still remain a part of his circle of friends. Little did he know what a profound effect hearing a radio announcement would have upon the rest of his adult life.

“I heard an advertisement on the radio for a recording studio seminar held at Sea West Studios in Seattle. Rick Keifer, who owns Sea West, was conducting a six-week seminar on recording,” Cox said. “There was something in hearing that on the radio...I can place exactly where I was,” he said. “I was in the living room—it’s etched in my mind—I heard this announcement on the radio and said ‘That’s what I’ve got to do! I can get that much closer to the music...’” Cox felt that this would get him as close to the music as he could be without actually being a musician. He also knew that Keiffer was the owner of the studio where several early *Heart* albums had been recorded, and this was the chance to meet the man himself, so Cox somehow scraped together the tuition for the six-week seminar (\$150.00).

GETTING TO SCHOOL

“I remember I was driving this old beat-up Falcon, so bad that the driver’s side had no floorboard, just a piece of plywood,” Cox said. “But there I was with this seminar to attend for six weeks. In the course of this seminar, and I will always God bless Rick Kiefer for this, he brought in a guy named Charley Morgan from Seattle, Washington. Charley was Gordon Lightfoot’s engineer and owns Morgan Sound, perhaps the largest audio company in the northwest. He came in and gave a couple of night classes on live sound.

Whoa! My ears perked up and I thought, ‘Wow, what a great thing’, and so I cornered Charley both nights after class and talked and talked, and I kept in touch with him,” he said.

With his head full of new ideas but his wallet empty, Cox found it necessary to get a *real* job and naturally, he fit right in at Budget Tapes and Records in Seattle where again, he would be working around music. But little did he suspect that this job at the record store would be the very thing which would open up the door into his first professional gig as a concert sound engineer. A local cover band called *Skyboys* at the time was making a name for itself around the northwest. They were doing tunes by *Graham Parsons*, *Emmy Lou Harris* and the like, which happened to be the very kind of music that Cox loved to listen to. He first became a fan of the band, catching them in concert, and then a fateful meeting occurred at the record store.

“One day at Budget Tapes and Records, the lead singer came in with the pedal steel player looking for music,” Cox said. “I had ordered some European pressings of several hard-to-get record albums and when these guys came in I said, ‘Hey you guys, I’ve got this great stuff...’ etc. and we just hit it off,” he said. “So I started going to more of their concerts and one day I approached them and said, ‘I don’t know anything about doing live sound, but I’ve had some experience doing it on a very small level. If you are interested in having someone purchase some equipment as a beginning neophyte, I am really interested in becoming an audio engineer, and I’d like to work for you,’” Cox said.

The *Skyboys* expressed interest in Cox’ offer, and by this time, he had built up the ability to secure a loan. He immediately borrowed \$7,500.00 to purchase sound equipment. Prevailing upon his former acquaintance with Morgan, Cox went straight to Morgan and asked him what to do.

“Charley said first I had to build my own snake, so I sat in my living room with 150 feet of 19 pair-cable, a box of cannon connectors, a solder gun and heat shrink which I had to shrink in my oven because I had no heat gun!” Cox said. “So I built my first snake, and Charley helped me get together some gear. I bought a

Yamaha PM-700 board, a UREI third-octave EQ, some Shure SM-57 and 58s, and some Northwest bin with JBL 15s and two-inch JBL hi-end drivers, etc., and we got started," he said.

Cox ended up with a biamped, balanced, and very usable sound system with Crown power and JBL components. The system's capabilities far exceeded the abilities of this fledgling young audio mixer, and it gave Cox the opportunity to grow along with the system. By 1981, it had grown into an active four-way system which he sold for over \$10,000 shortly before the band broke up.

"The *Skyboys* gig is what really got me going," Cox said. "We opened for bands of the caliber of the *Charlie Daniels Band* in front of thousands of people, and this brings me to a very important point," he said. "I have been blessed with situations where the engineers I have worked with have been forthcoming with knowledge and helpful and understanding. I have been fortunate enough that the people I worked around have not been closed-mouthed and egocentric about the knowledge and experience they have garnered. They have been open and sharing, and are what I consider to be truly professional engineers," he said. "The nature of this business is circular, and we need to cooperate with each other the way that the musicians do."

Laughing heartily as he relayed some of the nightmarish experiences of his early apprenticeship with the *Skyboys*, Cox spoke of their tours around the Pacific Northwest and Canada. He expressed a genuine feeling that this time was truly the pivotal point in his career, and that every up-and-coming engineer should develop a relationship with a working band. This gives an engineer the valuable opportunity to learn, grow and practice their art.

MOVING ON

Cox' experience up to this time had been limited to the Pacific Northwest, but just around the corner was his best opportunity yet—a chance at a national tour with a major touring group. The opportunity to do this tour came as a result of a bit of luck, some contacts, but mostly by the sheer strength of his determination to do what he had to do in order to get

the job, as his telling of the story demonstrates.

"I was in a club in Portland, Oregon, and a friend of mine who was the engineer for *Quarterflash* came in and mentioned that there was a position open for a monitor engineer with *Quarterflash*'s opening band, *Prism*, out of Vancouver, British Columbia," Cox said. "It was Saturday night, and we were finished with the gig, and I drove from Portland, Oregon to Seattle, Washington, took a shower, changed clothes and drove straight to Vancouver, British Columbia. I got there the next morning and interviewed with the engineer for the gig, drove back to Seattle, went to sleep and woke up later that night with a phone call from him, and he said, 'OK, great, meet us in Chicago'. Two days later, I was in Chicago and out on tour with *Prism*," he said.

After a year with *Prism*, which included concerts with *Marshall Tucker*, *Quarterflash*, *Loverboy* and even the *Beach Boys*, Cox finally made the decision to give it a try in the big city and moved to Los Angeles. He believed that to really make it big, he had to be in one of the places where music was really happening. He felt rather strongly, however, that it was important to develop the drive, the respect for music and many of the skills necessary to make it. Then a person can bring all that with them into the big arenas.

IT'S DIFFERENT IN THE BIG CITY

Cox was a little surprised to discover just how competitive Los Angeles can be, and how many qualified engineers there are in this city. "I was finding work opportunities fewer and further between than I did in Seattle," he said. "Here, you might be at the store or in the bathroom and miss that all-important phone call. Even if you have a phone machine, by the time you get back to the person, they may have called five other people and someone else got the job. So I found the key was to make a network," Cox said. "A person can't be everywhere at once, and occasionally, a friend would get two calls and could pass a job on to me," he said. At this point, Cox went on to stress the importance of networking. He said this includes making friends in management, record labels, engineers and anyone else that

might be responsible for recommending or hiring and firing for an act.

Los Angeles was good to Cox, and after several tours and shows, another large tour, this time with a headline act, came his way.

He signed on with the *Ventures* as house mixer and road manager. This relationship continued off and on for about four years. There were other bands too, and it wasn't all roses during this time. There were incredible highs and lows.

"I mixed at places ranging from the smallest, slimiest and most pathetic little clubs to major, major concerts," Cox said. "I can remember mixing for a club in the hills of West Virginia with less than seven people in the house which was able to seat 300, and I also remember mixing for huge concerts for 50,000 people and above," he said. "We even did a show at Taos, New Mexico in the snow, where all the equipment had to be brought in on toboggans!"

Despite being so busy during this period, Cox somehow found time to go back to the recording studio in Seattle for a year, and engineer and produce several albums, including two with the *Skyboy's* lead vocalist using Glenn Frey's band and JD Souther on vocals.

BURNOUT?

Cox said he began to reach a sort of burnout during his years with the *Ventures*. After mixing 200 to 250 nights per year for several years, plus the rigors of the road, he began to feel his passion for music ebbing. Cox decided to take some time off and do a little soul searching. Going back to Seattle, Cox actually got a job doing something completely unrelated to the music business.

It was during this break that Cox began dating a woman he had met several years before. It soon became apparent they would marry. With a new wife and new energy, Cox felt ready to go out and mix again. At just about that time, Mel Taylor of the *Ventures* called and asked Cox to come back on the road. Without hesitation, he said, "You bet!" and two days later, he was back on the road with the *Ventures*.

After a three-month tour with the *Ventures*, Cox was hired at McCune Audio in Los Angeles as a sound-reinforcement engineer, and he had the opportunity to do public-address

audio as well as music. Finally, in March 1989, another large national tour was in the cards for Cox, but this time with a difference. This was the Julie Andrews national tour with a fully-equipped 40-piece orchestra, and Cox was chosen as the front-of-house mixer.

"Some might scoff at this, but for all my time in the studio, I always wanted to mix a full orchestra," Cox said. "I had the time of my life and it was a gas. Julie Andrews is a really good vocalist, and we had a great time!" he said. "I got to mix a full-on 40-piece orchestra!"

This tour lasted another four months and as before, another offer was just around the corner, and it turned out to be the best and most incredible opportunity yet to come. A large East Coast sound company, Maryland Sound, was gearing up its West Coast Division, and was looking for someone to handle a very important and prestigious position—a real dream come true!

MARYLAND SOUND WEST

"In May of 1989, just before the Julie tour, the phone rang right at McCune Audio and it was for me," Cox said. "It was Michael Stahl from Maryland Sound. He said, 'Look, I know that you can't talk right now, but I would like you to come to work for me and run the sound system at the Greek Theatre.' Just like that, and I was absolutely dumbfounded! So I met with Michael the next day and told him I would love to, but I was committed to the Julie Andrews tour. The funny thing was that this tour ended with two nights right here at the Greek! So Michael said no problem, to go do the tour and to stay in touch with him on the road," Cox said. "I did, and when we finally came here to do the last show, Michael came out and said, 'Walk around and get comfortable. This is your new home!'"

There was one more little hurdle to get over, and Stahl told Cox that the time was not quite right just yet, but if Cox could hang on a little while, he had the job. Needless to say, Cox was dismayed and excited all at the same time, but with almost infinite patience, he waited. When Stahl finally called to say the job was a go, he also said that Cox' new job would be coordinating the sound systems at the Greek Theatre AND at the Universal Amphitheatre!

"It took a lot of patience, but I kept hanging on and I can tell you it was worth the wait," Cox said. "Finally, on the first of November, 1989, I came on board full-time with Maryland Sound, and was put in charge of both venues, the Greek and the Universal, and here I am today telling you the story!" he said.

One of the high points of the morning came when Cox talked about how his marriage fit in with his career. As he spoke about his wife, Cox' face lit up, and another of his warm smiles which come so naturally appeared. "I have an amazing wife. Her name is Debra and she has been incredibly supportive. I love my marriage and I love my home. The decision for me to not travel definitely stems from the fact that I have a wonderful marriage and a great wife and I am really happy to stay home," he said. "I love going home each night to my own bed."

Cox says there are definitely ways to balance a career and a family, and told of another example, pointing down to someone standing way down at the mix position. "Chief Parker, who is going to mix the actual show tonight, was Jackson Browne's engineer at the very beginning, and is Neil Young's monitor engineer. He has a wonderful wife and home, and he doesn't travel anymore either, except to go out and do monitors for Neil when Neil needs him to go," he said.

Cox had nothing but high praise for Maryland Sound, which has developed their West Coast Division only within the last year, and has taken on the sound responsibilities for the Greek Theatre even more recently.

"Michael Stahl, our boss at Maryland Sound, handpicked the people that are on the staff out here," Cox said. "He found some people that wanted to tour and put them into that situation, and those that did not want to tour were given the opportunity to have a home life and not feel the pressure of having to go out constantly on the road," he said.

COMPANY LOYALTY

Cox commented that companies like Maryland Sound breed real loyalty in their personnel, and that in his experience, it is difficult to find that kind of company and that kind of loyalty in this industry. Cox says the industry itself tends to weed out

those who are not committed or those without the drive to really hang in there. He believes if a person doesn't have that kind of drive or commitment, they should look for another kind of work.

With the advent of so many recording schools and institutions where a person can go to accelerate their learning curve, it is interesting to note Cox' reaction to a question about education in the live sound field. When the subject of schools came up, he flashed a big smile and carefully stated his position. "I am under the impression that there are a number of good college classes," he said, "and I believe that even UCLA has some classes that you can take. I know that George Massenburg has hosted some classes there, and he is a recording engineer. There are a lot of similarities between live sound and recording. Perhaps the most important thing that is not as involved in recording engineering and is at the center of live engineering is acoustics and dealing with rooms and speaker arrays and the cabling, etc." Cox said. "Education, however, is not necessarily a requirement to get a job in this field."

By now, the sun was directly overhead, the shade was gone and things were heating up on the stage as well as off. It was almost time to bring this meeting to a close, but it was difficult to just let go. Cox is a warm, intelligent and pleasant person to be around. It is obvious that his success has been no accident, and when asked if he had any concrete pointers for those at an earlier stage of their career, he was more than happy to oblige.

"First, ask questions," he said. "My feeling is that no matter how stupid the question may seem to you, I mean you may be embarrassed to ask it, but it doesn't make any difference because you need to ask that question when you don't know. And it's better that you know or try to know, than to walk around with unanswered questions and not understanding.

"Abandon your ego and remember that the most important thing is the music that you're mixing," he added. "Keep in mind that you are being handed the 'muse' of someone's music, and develop the thought that it's a golden opportunity any time a musician hands you their music to manipulate and to work with and to

become creative with. That attitude is the thing that I have seen work for myself and for those around me who have experienced success," he said. "The reward is incredible!"

READ AND LEARN

Cox added that it's important to buy or become familiar with state-of-the-art equipment, as well as reading up on the latest technologies.

"Read, read, read. Read **db Magazine**, read **Mix**, read everything you can get your hands on," he said. "Read specs of equipment. Fill out reader service cards at the back of the magazines and have the manufacturer send you literature on this new stuff. Be aware of what is coming out because the companies that manufacture the equipment that we work with dictate the growth of your abilities. Unless you understand the color of the paints and the quality of the brushes that you have to work with, you're tied by your lack of knowledge," he said.

"Go see bands! Hang out and listen to engineers mix. Talk with engineers. Approach engineers. Tell

them that you are interested. Tell them what kind of experience you have," Cox said. "Develop a resume'. And if at all possible, get it on floppy disk so that you can always update it and then it can be printed out at any given moment and mailed to someone. To me, those are the most important points," he explained. "Communication, working on your skills, and keeping abreast of the industry, and go see shows."

As a final examination at what it takes to go out and get work in the sound mixing field, Cox listed the important qualities that he would look for in hiring a person to work as an engineer for him. "First, personality, then experience, then maybe education," he said. "But in actuality, I'd say that the whole person is the most important thing. It is the sum and total of the person that generates to you who they are, what their desire is, how committed they are to becoming an integral part of the team," he said. "If it was down to two candidates, and the first had the experience and/or the education, and the other met more of the holistic cri-

teria, I would probably go with the holistic applicant."

Down at the mixing position, the show mixer was setting up *Alabama's* large Soundcraft custom console along with their outboard rack, and the stage hands were getting close to having the lights rigged. It seemed Cox was feeling the call of the stage, and the time to close was at hand. After a brief tour of the backstage area, we said our goodbyes and the trip back down the mountain began.

The vision of that sea of seats would not fade easily as the Greek Theatre was left behind, and I could picture Cox joking and talking with the light crew, the sound crew, the band, and his voice seemed to ring out like a quarterback on a championship ballclub, telling his partners, "We are all a team! It's not just me or any single person, but each person doing their job and working with the others toward a common goal. That's what makes it work."

Words to live by!

A Closer Look at the Greek Theatre Sound System

The sound quality at the Greek Theatre has long been questioned by many Southern Californian concert goers. But Jeff Cox, sound system coordinator at the Greek Theatre, was pleased to explain that Maryland Sound has installed a state-of-the-art system which he feels is the best the Greek Theatre has ever seen. Cox explained that much of the equipment used at the Greek Theatre was also used by the group Chicago on their recent World Tour. When he talked about the Greek Theatre's sound system, Cox sounded like a proud father telling of the exploits of a favored son.

The speaker arrays consist of 40 boxes, 20 per side. Eight are high-mid cabinets, six are low and six are sub-woofers. The high side of the high-mid cabinets are loaded with two JBL 2404 H Transducers which are powered by one side of a Urei 6300 power amp. The mid sides are driven by two-inch JBL 2445 compression drivers loaded on JBL 2385 60 degree by 40 degree horns, and

are also powered by one side of a Urei 6300 amp.

The low boxes are loaded with two JBL 2202 H 12-inch cones per box, and are powered by one side of a Crest 4001 power amp. The Sub-woofers contain two 18-inch JBL 2245 speakers and are driven by Crest 7001 power.

There is a center cluster of boxes serving the orchestra section which are almost inside of the sound wings and would not otherwise receive much high-end from the mains.

A pair of long throw clusters positioned high above the stage serve the very back of the house which is several hundred feet away from the stage, and are also elevated about 50 feet from stage level. Each side of the long throws are comprised of three JBL 4866 long throw boxes, each loaded with two JBL 2386 lenses with two JBL 2445 two-inch compression drivers.

The left-right configuration is also served by the following components:

- 2 Yamaha 1027 third-octave EQ's to tune the house
- 1 dbx 162 Comp/Limiter
- 2 Brooke/Siren FDS 360 crossovers
- 2 Yamaha 1027 third-octave EQ's for the visiting engineer to 'fine tune'
- 1 Teac C 3RX cassette deck
- 1 Tascam CD 501 CD player

● The center cluster has its own Brooke/Siren FDS 360 crossover, Yamaha 1027 third-octave EQ and a dbx 160 comp/limiter.

● The subwoofers also have their own comp/limiter, a dbx 160, and their own crossover which serves as an 80 Hz low pass filter.

The sound of the system is incredibly rich with all the frequencies properly represented, and the coverage is quite even, with a minimum of peak and nulls throughout the house. Maryland Sound and Cox deserve a lot of praise for a job well done. 