

# Committee Study of Television Sound

The Joint Committee on Inter-Society Coordination (JCIC) has formed an Ad Hoc Committee for the Study of Television Sound (AHCSTS). An organizational meeting of the AHCSTS was held in Chicago, Ill., 11 April 1973, concurrent with the Technical Conference of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE).

The JCIC member organizations consider that improvement of television sound quality warrants prompt attention.

JCIC concerns itself with engineering problems in interrelated areas that would benefit from joint action throughout the television broadcasting industry rather than being addressed by any one organization. The study of television sound fell into this category.

The purpose of the AHCSTS is to examine the entire television system from original production to the sound heard in the home, to identify areas of possible improvement, and to assign to appropriate organizations specific questions for resolution.

The JCIC is composed of representatives from the Electronic Industries Association (EIA), the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), the National Cable Television Association (NCTA) and the SMPTE.

Besides these five organizations, the AHCSTS will have representatives from the Audio Engineering Society (AES), the Network Transmission Committee (NTC) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Engineering Com-

mittee. In addition, observers will attend from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The chairman of the AHCSTS is Daniel R. Wells, Director, Engineering and Technical Operations, of PBS. The administrative organization is SMPTE with its Engineering Vice-President, William T. Wintringham, as the administrative officer of the committee.

During the 11 April meeting, it was determined that the television sound study will consider categories that include studio production, film, videotape, inter-city distribution of the television signal, over-the-air broadcasting, cable television, master antenna systems and the television receiver in the home.

Mr. Wells pointed out that "Improved sound depends on proper handling of the television signal in all of the above categories. The technical quality of the program, as finally received in the home, can be no better than the quality in any part of the production, distribution and reception processes." Preliminary reports of the subcommittees which were formed to identify the problem areas for study will be considered at the next meeting of the AHCSTS in June 1973.

This is the third ad hoc committee formed by JCIC. The first was formed for the study of color in television and the second for the study of ancillary signals in broadcasting.

## Letter to the Editor

### Re: Technology's Role in Motion Pictures and Television

Dear Sir:

Since I started the exchange in response to Mr. Holm's paper in the July 1972 *Journal*, pp. 509-511, with a Letter to the Editor in the October 1972 *Journal*, pp. 796-798, which drew responses published in the February 1973 *Journal*, pp. 95-97, perhaps I may be granted the privilege of wrapping up the matter with a few closing remarks.

I have nothing to add to the comments in my original letter or to Mr. Holm's rebuttal thereto. To Mr. Anderson, who personally prefers the "widest screen and stereophonic sound" — I cannot argue his likes or dislikes; I can only point out that he is in a minority. The widest screen of all, was, of course, Cinerama, and only a little has been heard of it recently.

My objections to the wide screen were, firstly, aesthetic — as a working cameraman, I could not learn to like the job of composing in such an awkward frame — and, secondly, economic: the wide aspect ratio is incompatible with the television screen, from which an ever-growing proportion of the film industry's revenue is derived.

These are peripheral matters; I would like to address myself mainly to the letter from Mr. Vlahos in the February issue of the *Journal*.

He makes a telling point when he states that methods or subjects linger on after the novelty is gone. In the case of subject, it is probably due to the time-lag; by the time we see a film in the theater and a trend has begun, it is one to two years after the idea was first born in the producing area. In the case of methods, all too often the problem is simply that a sizable sum has been invested in them, and they cannot be so freely dropped. This, I suspect, is the main reason the "wide screen" is still with us — the theater industry has a huge investment in lenses, screens, anamorphosers, etc., and will not lightly scrap them.

I must disagree with Mr. Vlahos' disavowal of responsi-

bility for these things. We are not, indeed, the decision makers; yet we must not forget that it was not management that invented the wide screen, stereo sound, anamorphic projection, and other gimmicks. It was engineering that devised these things, and engineering that "sold" them to management, as the hoped-for panacea to bring back the lost theater audience. Lacking technical training, management could only gamble that the engineers in question were right; decision making, in this area, was hardly more than the toss of a coin.

I have never been a huge admirer of the kind of thinking that goes on in some management circles; yet, on the other hand, I cannot quite accept Mr. Vlahos' theory that all the "rational minds" gravitated to science and engineering. There are bright souls and dunces both inside and outside these fields, I fear.

Certainly the motion-picture engineer cannot crow over his "rationality" in abandoning decades of standardization in favor of a hodge-podge of film widths, aspect ratios, screen sizes, and a wild assortment of hardware for all of this, merely for its novelty value — a frantic effort to find something that TV could not do, in an attempt to woo back an audience lost to the lure of a "free show."

And now, rather than admit his error, we find the engineer designing and selling some fantastic optical printing equipment, requiring an extra and costly duping stage, to restore wide-screen films to the normal aspect ratio of 1.33 to 1 for TV release — a step which would not and should not have been necessary had the films been shot in standard ratio to begin with.

I submit this process of reprinting to standard format as Exhibit A in any discussion of overengineering.

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