

45 Years of Sound Engineering



Loren L. Ryder

In 1948 Loren L. Ryder, a pioneer in sound recording, formed his own company—Ryder Sound Services. This year Ryder Sound Services celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Loren Ryder is unique in many respects, not the least of which is the fact that when he retired he retired to a whole new career. And he planned that career and had it waiting for him when he retired to it.

Loren had been head of the sound department at Paramount Studios for 20 years when he founded his company, and he remained with Paramount eight more years before resigning to devote more time to Ryder Sound Services, which, by 1956, had become one of the most innovative and prestigious firms in the field.

The year 1948 must have been an extraordinarily busy one for Mr. Ryder. In addition to founding his own company and continuing as head of Paramount's sound department he was also President of the SMPE, having assumed that office in 1947. It was the Society's good fortune that Loren found the time to provide strong leadership during his two-year term as president.

Loren Ryder graduated from the University of California in Berkeley in 1924. He lived and worked in San Francisco before coming to Hollywood, and while in San Francisco one of his jobs was to tune all the light-valves then in use there for early transmission of pictures by wire across the American continent. Sound Motion Pictures brought him to Hollywood in 1928.

Shortly after arriving in Hollywood, Mr. Ryder attended an SMPE section meeting, and became interested in the Society. He asked about becoming a member of the SMPE, but was discouraged about joining because he was a sound engineer and had no training or experience relative to motion-picture cameras or projectors. He was not easily discouraged, however, and in 1931 he applied for membership once again. This time he was successful, and he became one of the first sound engineers to join the Society. He became a Fellow of the Society shortly before World War II. Mr. Ryder held many different offices in the SMPE, progressing to Executive Vice President in 1945-1946 and President in 1947-1948.

Loren became associated with Paramount Pictures in 1928, and during his 28-year career at that studio he contributed some outstanding innovations, not only to sound recording but in other areas as well. Among his many accomplishments, he had a large responsibility for the development of VistaVision, the wide-screen system in which the film bore a double-frame image and instead of moving down vertically through camera and projector, it moved horizontally from right to left. The VistaVision system was first used on 14 October 1953 at the Radio

City Music Hall in New York City. The picture was *White Christmas*.

Loren Ryder received an Oscar for his part in the development of VistaVision. He has also received Academy Awards for other technological achievements, among which was the first studio-wide application of magnetic sound-recording to motion-picture production.

From 11 Tons to 17 Ounces

Mr. Ryder's recollections of the early days of sound bring into clear focus the remarkable technological advances that have been made in four decades. For example, in the early days with Paramount, he designed a self-contained recorder for use on location—an 11-ton truck which, in those days, represented a significant innovation. With the invention of transistors, technology turned toward the age of miniaturization and at present recording can be done on location with a recorder weighing 17 ounces—and the quality of the sound is better than that achieved with 11 tons of equipment. The recorder is the Nagra SNN, developed by Stefan Kudelski; it can fit in the palm of the hand.

In his capacity as a Governor and an officer of the SMPE, Loren always had a clear view of the relationship of the Society to the industry as a whole and of the advances made by the SMPE during the years from 1916, when the Society was founded, until 1948, as is indicated in excerpts from his Report to the Society in his capacity as President. From the September 1948 *Journal of the SMPTE*:

"Few people realize that much of the early world-wide standardization for silent pictures was worked out by SMPE members . . . this is important, for our market is world-wide and dependent upon the existence and the retention of standards under which our product can be played . . . a look into the future would indicate that television will bring more and greater problems in standardization . . . magnetic (sound) recording has arrived at a state of development where it is now finding its place as a tool for the broadcast and motion-picture industries . . . new color processes are now in commercial use . . . and there are other fields in which there have been marked advancement and I say with pride that these advancements are well recorded in the JOURNAL of our Society . . . Over the years the Society has progressively and solidly grown into a large and businesslike organization." (This statement is still true—in 1948 the SMPTE had 2,787 members; at the end of 1972 it had 7,485.)

With his eyes always on the future, Loren Ryder has never ceased to contribute significantly to the advancement of the state-of-the-art of sound recording for motion pictures. This is an important reason why Ryder Sound has enjoyed outstanding growth and prestige, not only in Hollywood but throughout the world.

Mr. Ryder is the author of a number of *Journal* papers, among them, "Importance of Cooperation Between Story Construction and Sound to Achieve a New Personality in Pictures" (Jan. 1940); "New Scoring Stage Shell and Vocal Studio Design" (June 1944); "Modernization Desires of a Major Studio" (Sept. 1946); "Motion Picture Studio Use of Magnetic Recording" (Dec. 1950); (with Bruce H. Denney) "Magnetic Soundtrack Placement" (Feb. 1952); "Economic Aspects of Utilizing New Engineering Developments" (Feb. 1956); "Looking to the Future in Sound" (Nov. 1956); and "Improved Synchronizing System Using Magnetic Tape" (June 1961).

Mr. Ryder is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. He is also an Associate member of the American Society for Cinematographers. — *Wilton R. Holm*, SMPTE Past-President