

ASSEMBLING A FINAL SOUND-TRACK

EDWIN WETZEL*

The dubbing or re-recording process constitutes one of the final operations in producing a motion picture. It consists in blending additional sound effects and music with the dialog in order to match or enhance the pictorial effect that the director has achieved through the use of the camera.

The process was developed shortly after the advent of sound. It was discovered that the necessity of moving the camera from one location to another, and the impossibility of predicting exactly how the picture should finally be edited, made it impossible to maintain a constant level or any semblance of smooth continuity in the added effects or background music if they were recorded at the time the picture was being photographed.

When the picture is completed, so far as actual photographing is concerned, and when the editorial department has finished its work, the picture is then shown to the sound effects and music departments, at which time is decided the nature of the effects and music that are to be added.

The effects department then refers to the sound library to determine which of the required effects are available from stock and which must be especially recorded to complete the picture in question. When this material is made available, it is then necessary for the sound-effects cutter to synchronize the various effects to the picture, and the number of sound-effects tracks he must build depends upon the number of effects that are to overlap in any one situation or sequence of the picture.

At this point a scene from "Wings over Honolulu" was projected, with dialog only, just as it was photographed and recorded on the set. The scene showed the interior of a house where a birthday party was in progress, Miss Wendy Barrie descending the staircase to join the party. A storm arises outside, during which Miss Barrie and Mr. Kent Taylor step to the veranda outside the house. A shift of scene shows an aeroplane landing near the house in the midst of the storm.

During Mr. Wetzel's analysis of the scene, short samples of the individual sound-effects tracks were reproduced to illustrate the points made in the analysis. At the end of the presentation the scene was projected again, this time with all the various effects mixed together with the dialog at the proper points and in suitable intensities, just as they would occur in the finished picture.

Analyzing the scene we find that in the interior of the home we need additional background voices coming from the guests (*voices*) and

*Dubbing Mixer, Universal Pictures Corp., Universal City, Calif.

dance music (*music*). Although this is a birthday party there is no pictorial evidence of the fact, so we must establish the fact off-stage by having an orchestra play and the crowd sing *Happy Birthday (music and song)* which evokes the laughter from Wendy Barrie on the stairway.

Later, the flash of lightning at the window establishes the fact that a storm is approaching, so a clap of thunder might be used (*thunder*). Now we cut to the exterior, and perhaps the chirping of crickets might add to the general effect (*effect*). Of course, we must continue the thunder and the music; but now the music accomplishes two purposes: it adds to the romance of the veranda scene in addition to indicating that the party is still in progress inside.

The significance of the succeeding effects is quite interesting. As Kent Taylor finishes the line, "Are you waiting for a knight to ride up on a white charger and carry you away?" everything happens at once—a terrific flash of lightning accompanied by thunder, the rain falls, and you see an aeroplane approaching (*effects; singly, then combined*). The combined sound-effects are used not only to match the action on the screen but to act as a fanfare ushering in the hero of the story.

Note that while all this confusion is going on we must stop the music, because the director wants to create the impression that when the plane lands the two men will think that they are lost. If they were to hear the music coming from the house there would be no reason for believing so.

MR. TASKER: It has been said that all that the picture industry has to sell are a few flickering shadows and a few undulated sound pressures. This evening we have taken you through the "House of Magic" where those shadows and pressures are created and where they are given vitality and meaning. We hope you enjoyed it, and we who presented this program to you were very, very glad to do so. I should like to express our own appreciation to a number of persons whom you have not seen tonight, but who have labored behind the scenes to make this meeting a successful one. A large number of people have contributed their time and efforts here this evening, as well as on previous evenings to prepare this program. They were very glad to do it for the Society, as typifying the spirit of the New Universal by the way in which the technical staffs have put their efforts together in this demonstration this evening.