

Honoring the Tool Makers

As we celebrate the 80th year of the Society's service to the motion imaging industries, we look back at the reasons for its formation, the significance of its contributions, and its future role. The objectives of the Society, as stated in 1916, were (and are): "The advancement in the theory and practice of motion picture engineering and the allied arts and sciences, the standardization of mechanisms and practices employed therein, and the maintenance of a high professional standing among its members."

The Society's first contribution to the advancement in the theory and practice of motion pictures was 35mm film. In 1916, the Society's President, C. Francis Jenkins, reported in his chairman's address: "Fortunately, one of the factors of our industry is already standard, the film. In this it is unique, for motion picture film is the only thing that is standard the world over." This standard provided the creative community with a means of reaching an international audience and formed the basis of all that has been achieved since.

Society Recognized by Creative Community

In April 1928 the Society, celebrating its first dozen years, held its conference in Hollywood. The recently formed Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences held a banquet in honor of the Society, and the opening remarks by Douglas Fairbanks made clear the Society's already established role in the motion picture community. Fairbanks welcomed the assembled guests with the following comment: "We are here tonight to do honor to the gentlemen who are responsible for the mechanical and scientific instruments with which motion pictures are made — to you who make and perfect the tools and have made possible the achievements of motion pictures today. Those of us who get our names in electric lights are inclined to forget the debt we owe. It is by such means as you have provided that the film was



Stanley N. Baron

discovered and enabled many of us to leave the one-night stands, the barber chairs, and the fur business, and amass a fortune sufficient to allow us to take our yearly trips to Europe. And so we bow our heads and pay homage."

On the same occasion, Louis B. Mayer stated: "It is quite proper that the engineers should come to the capital of the film world, where their inventions and contributions are put to practical use. When we look back two or three years and can remember and recall when an author conceived a great idea in an unusual and imaginary situation, we said: 'Remember the limitations of the camera.' We are so blasé and spoiled that nothing fazes us now. The sky is the limit. Yesterday, it was a task to show a flooded village, and now if we have to show the destruction of the world, we put it on paper and then 'shoot' it." Mr. Mayer must have been anticipating *Independence Day*.

Cecil B. DeMille, in his remarks, added: "There is no firmer foundation than science. There is no industry more dependent than we are today, upon science."

While the technology involved in the production of motion imagery has evolved a thousandfold in the past 80 years, the basic relationship between the Society's members who are the tool makers, and the creative community who use the tools to create the art form, has not. Today, the industry is still very much dependent upon science to create the images.

Looking Toward the Future

The future also looks promising. The scientific fields that support the production of motion imagery have by no means been depleted. Who is to say what new problems the creative community will wish to explore, and what new principles and processes we will need to develop to solve those problems. As we have seen from our prior experience, most progress will be incremental; spectacular leaps are rare and exhausting events. But the process of discovery will continue; to allow the industries we serve to communicate their art and their message to a broad audience and to create images of life as we understand it or images of worlds that reside only in our imaginations.

This creative process, both the creation of the art and the creation of the scientific means that allow the art to be expressed, requires support in two ways. First, there must be standards that allow for universal interchange of the media that carries the message so that there is a guarantee that no individual who wishes to experience the message is disenfranchised. Second, there must be a forum for education and discussion. The forum is where new principles and processes can be explored, allowing both the tool makers who must cope with the implementation of new technology and the creative community who wishes to use the technology to fully understand that which is offered.

These are two areas where the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers has a proven record of excellence. Our task of exploring the realm of what is and the realm of what can be is clearly not at an end. As the Society looks to the future from its current vantage point, the next 80 years appears to offer more challenges than the previous 80, and the relevance of the Society's activities seems more important.

In reflection, the honor paid to those "who make and perfect the tools and have made possible the achievements of motion pictures today" by Douglas Fairbanks and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences seems as appropriate today as it did almost 70 years ago.

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On behalf of RTNDA members throughout the world, I am pleased to offer our congratulations and best wishes to the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers on its eightieth anniversary,

Your tireless work on behalf of the highest standards of technical excellence has been crucial to the growth and development of the television industry and electronic journalism.

All of us at RTNDA look forward to working closely with SMPTE as our industry moves into a new century.

Happy birthday, and keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

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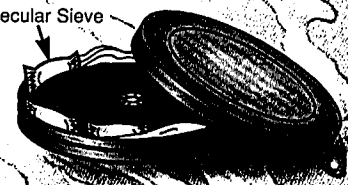


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Congratulations to the many volunteers whose dedication made SMPTE a significant society for 80 years

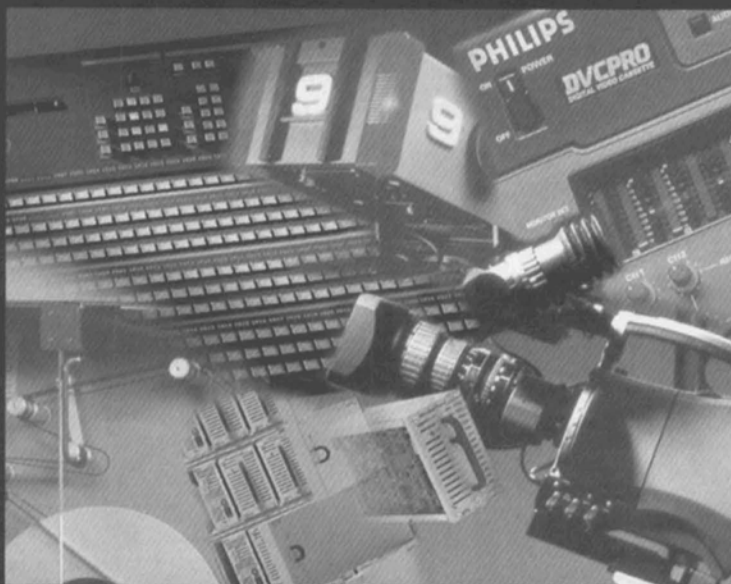
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