



SMPTE Almanac SPONSORED BY TELEVISION BROADCAST TECHNOLOGY

By Michael Dolan

In this column we provide interesting historical briefs from the Journal articles of days past. The purpose of this column is primarily entertainment, but we hope it will also stimulate your thinking and reflection on the Society's history, how far we have come in the industry, and (sometimes) how some things never change. This is not meant to be an authoritative reference, and no attempt is made to correct any past errors or omissions of the Journal. We simply hope you enjoy the material.

25 Years Ago in the Journal

The January 1983 Journal published in "Understanding SMPTE Time Code," reprinted from *Playback* newsletter: "It may be that no element of video production is as misunderstood as SMPTE time code. Producers frequently, although inaccurately, characterize this universal videotape indexing system as "complex," "expensive," and even "unnecessary." But these adjectives defy the facts. SMPTE time code (V98/12) is a simple electronic inscription system that accurately identifies every frame of videotape...[and] also allows the programming of simple words (termed "user bits") to identify the source of material, subject, location, and other pertinent information...Unlike proprietary coding systems, which either count electronic pulses from a tachometer linked to the tape transport mechanism or mark tones on the videotape, SMPTE time code is not disrupted by tape slippage or signal dropouts..."expensive" may have been accurate yesterday but, like so many other video technologies, the SMPTE code is now affordable by the professional with limited resources. Portable time code generators to inscribe code while in the field cost just a few hundred dollars...The SMPTE code remains intact even when bumped down to 1/2-in. tape for storage, and this can serve as the basis of a cataloging system of all videotape in stock."

50 Years Ago in the Journal

The February 1958 Journal published in "Automatic Announcing Techniques for Television Stations" by R. A. Isberg: "Magnetic tape recordings of local announcements for use with film and network programs can be easily prepared at the convenience of the

announcing staff. The equipment used for this purpose makes it possible to record most of the local announcements for an 18-hour operating day in less than an hour's time. Sub-audible control tones, recorded after each announcement, automatically stop the tape transport. The technician on duty does not need to refer to the announcement continuity once he has started to play an announcement on the air. This technique can also be used with additional control tones to operate projection equipment, thereby eliminating errors on the part of operators when they are required to switch large numbers of slides during an announcement...**Figure 3** shows the master switcher console with the tape recorder remote control panel mounted on its top surface. The tape recorder is rack-mounted with its automatic stop controls and tone generator."

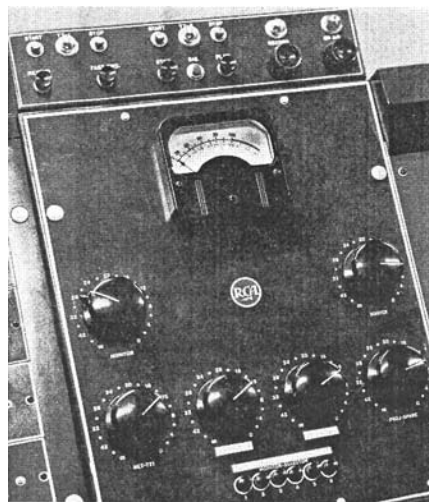


Fig. 3. One remote control panel for the tape recorder is mounted on top of the audio-video master switcher console. A similar panel is mounted on the audio console (Feb. 1958, p. 89).

75 Years Ago in the Journal

The January 1933 Journal reported in "Practical Problems in the Recording and Reproduction of Music for Motion Pictures" by David Mendoza: "In discussing the practical problems that confront us in the everyday experiences on the stages of the studio, let us first disregard entirely the attitude of the industry as a whole—disheartening, to say the least—toward all endeavors of pioneering into new realms of imagination and fantasy...Many present-day troubles result from two factors: (1) a lack of understanding of the other fellow's problem, and (2) the yet unconscious and unexpressed opinions of our audiences at large as to their reactions to "sound." I feel that our stages are sorely lacking as to physical proportions and proper material for the effective recording of music. The stacking of deadening and in many instances reflective sets is most harmful. Our orchestras are shunted into all manner of positions and locations so as to be out of the way, as it were, of camera lines, and to be "conveniently" placed. Soloists are usually placed at absurd distances from accompanists. Under such conditions, balancing for the mixer becomes merely a catch-as-catch-can affair. Even on the coast, with the stupendous stages found on all the lots, the sets are generally built with a thought only for the cameras...Also, when a dramatic scene is on the screen and silence prevails for a few minutes, the issuance of music from the same source whence comes the dialog seems unnatural. The producers always try to create an apologia for the music, and either place a radio or a phonograph in the scene. The audiences are becoming aware of this clumsy form of excuse, and are making many humorous comments about it."

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