

HOLLYWOOD Tid-bytes

News From The World of Entertainment Software

THE AURICLE TAKES HOLLYWOOD BY STORM

by Wade Major

What do *The Mighty Ducks*, *A Few Good Men*, *Jennifer 8*, *The Bodyguard*, *A River Runs Through It*, *Dracula*, *Aladdin* and the upcoming releases *Hoffa* and *Toys* all have in common?

Give up? All were scored using a remarkable music scoring/time processing system appropriately called the "Auricle."

"It takes us seconds to do what used to take hours," says programmer Richard Grant, co-designer of the Auricle software and founder of Auricle Control Systems in Sherman Oaks. And Grant is hardly exaggerating. The film composer's craft has long been one of the most under appreciated in the entertainment industry. Forced to work within the difficult time and rhythm constraints dictated by a given film's editing structure, modern film composers face roughly the same challenges encountered by their forerunners more than 60 years ago. Any change in a film's score, or in the visual composition of an already-scored film could wreak havoc with a composer's sanity, requiring hours of intensive labor to correct problems of synchronization and the realignment of musical cues.

But, thanks to the Auricle, composers can both *write* and *execute* their scores quickly and efficiently without worrying whether or not a fractional miscalculation will throw a King Kong size monkey wrench into their laborious efforts. Facilitating immediate access to any part of a score, the Auricle can instantaneously reconfigure any tempi and meter changes for an entire cue, automatically adjusting all so-called "streamers" and "punches," the visual markers that composers use as a sort of silent metronome while conducting.

The Time Processor was first developed in 1983 for the Commo-

dore computer and switched to IBM a few years later, a move which won almost immediate praise and adoration from the community of film composers. Shortly thereafter it won a Sci-Tech Academy Award and Emmy. Oddly enough, Grant did not begin his career as a programmer, but as

...a remarkable and revolutionary addition to the art and science of film scoring. It is a tool that no self-respecting composer should dare find himself without.

an attorney. He dabbled in programming at the time and developed an operating environment for the HP that actually facilitated the same versatile use of menus, rulers and windows as IBM Windows and Macintosh, only without the memory drain.

What Grant lacked, however, was an application with which to demonstrate the practicality and versatility of his operating environment. Enter Grant's brother, Ron, a successful television composer known for such shows as "Knoll's Landing." Ron suggested to Richard that his operating environment might be ideally suited to alleviating the all-too-frequent nightmares of film and television composers and the two set out to develop what eventually became Auricle [The Film Composer's Time Processor].

Nowadays, Grant has traded in the book-laden lawyer's office for the spacious expanse of studio sound stages, spending much of his lime running the Auricle for such A-list composers as Alan Silvestri, Bruce Broughton, Alan Menken, David Newman, Mark Shaiman, Mark Isham, James Horner, Hans Zimmer and Jerry Goldsmith.

"Thank God for the Auricle!" exclaimed Silvestri during a re-cent

scoring session for *The Bodyguard* attended by this writer. Grant quickly jumps in to point out the more personal applications of the Auricle as well. "What you see here are only the studio applications. But all of these guys like David (Newman) and Alan-they also *write* with the Auricle."

Still, the tremendous studio applications of the Auricle cannot be overemphasized. By cutting the time required to rehearse, record and even fix a score, (the Auricle has made the use of live orchestras more feasible than in recent years, which had seen a decreased use of live musicians in favor of electronic scores. Ironically, this development serves the bottom-line considerations of producers while simultaneously salvaging jobs for studio musicians.

As to why he finally chose IBM to further the Auricle, Grant cites numerous factors, including the market saturation of IBMs and compatibles as well as the increased speed and greater ease-of-use of his own operating environment. "I have a Mac at home," he says. "Macintosh is easy to learn, but not necessarily easy to use." Grant also points out that the Macintosh's less-than-perfect internal timing capabilities automatically exclude it from the field of feature film scoring where precise timing can make or break a given cue. "The Macintosh is off 10 to 15 frames unlocked per 10 minutes because the operating system steals licks, whereas the IBM is accurate to within one frame per 10 minutes."

Arguably the system of choice for Hollywood film composers and music editors, the Auricle Time Processor and its accompanying operating system are a remarkable and revolutionary addition to the art and science of film scoring, by any standards. It is a tool that no self-respecting composer should dare find himself without.