



Merlin watches over Tom Misner's SSL.

## Richard Lush records Olympics soundtrack

With up to 700 people in one session, a programme of 15 musical pieces has been recorded for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Olympics. The title of the tracks is under a strict embargo until the event this month.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra were recorded in the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall, and at the new Studio 301 complex in Alexandria. Starting late June, the sessions ran until early August, and were recorded onto Fairlight's new Merlin multitrack recorder.

The Merlin was transported to and from the Opera House, and was used alongside a Fairlight MFX 3 plus, which was on hand purely as a backup device.

During the Ceremonies, sound engineer Bruce Jackson will mix direct from the 24 tracks supplied by the Merlin. Over 200 hours went into the sessions.

Connections spoke with Richard as the sessions were completed at the end of August.

For Richard Lush, expecting the unexpected is part and parcel of a long career in the recording business. Most recently resident at the new Studio 301, he is surrounded by the best possible ambience that Tom Misner's millions can buy. The place sparkles with the best new and old equipment anyone could get their hands on.

So when the call came in March, he pondered the task of recording the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and a choir of up to 500 voices, in two locations. The Sydney Opera House concert hall was the obvious place, although the Sydney Town Hall was initially in contention too.

But Richard was more concerned about the actual recording devices. What would he have used? "God forbid - maybe DA-88's" he laughs, cringing at the concept of lots of 8 track tapes, formatting and juggling backups.

At the initial meeting, Fairlight's new Merlin multi track recorder was suggested as the medium. It is an Australian product, after all, and Richard had been invited down to see

a working prototype last year. It seemed like a good idea, and Fairlight were very keen too, as they were about to start shipping production versions.

A Merlin configured for 24 tracks, sampled at 48KHz was conjured up, the hardware frame came loaded with an Exabyte Marmoth tape backup drive, and a Kingston carrier slot for a 36Gb hard drive. It was loaded with 24 bit A/D and D/A converters.

"I was very pleased it was 24 bit, not 16 bit," stated Richard. "16 bits is slightly chronic and loses ambience more than 24 bits, which are much better. Anyway I've always been a tape man, but this Fairlight is the next best thing".

Over at the Sydney Opera House, the new studio isn't commissioned yet, but the prewiring was all done. The house provided consoles and hardware in consultation with Richard, and a studio was set up in the space that is to become the studio control room. It is quite some distance from the Concert Hall,

>continued on next page

## Olympics bust?

Does the Closing Ceremony signal a dangerous overhang of production equipment and endemic unemployment amongst the technical fraternity? No way, says the trade.

Like many other production suppliers around Sydney, **Tony Davies of Chameleon Touring Systems** has invested in extra inventory - to the tune of 1.5 megadollars. "It's compressed 18 months normal business into 8" he says, explaining that his firm has solid bookings for well after the Paralympics is over.

But this isn't like 1988, when Expo finished in Brisbane and the whole inventory went to auction. After the Bi-Centenary celebrations, a deep recession hit with the production industry travelling backwards for almost three years.

Chameleon have renewed all their control consoles, taking delivery of 14 new desks, and plan to slowly sell the old ones once things return to normal.

Olympics production has fuelled extra work for other Eastern seaboard vendors. **Mick Privitera's Australian Concert Productions** have systems in Sydney catering to live music concerts within the Athletics Village. Melbourne's **System Sound** hung eight tonnes of Meyer in the Sydney Superdome for Mahler's Symphony Number 8 - better known as Symphony of a Thousand. This was but one of many Olympic's Arts Festival attractions.

Downstream from the main events, subhires have fuelled extra inventory for firms not directly involved. **Lots Of Watts** in Sydney have added new EAW KF-750 PA boxes, powered with Crown amplifiers. This is an identical specification to that run by **Norwest Productions**, who hold the contract for the Olympics Opening and Closing Ceremony audio.

Ceremonies Lighting vendor **Bytecraft** have wisely hired in a large production system from Procon in Germany, avoiding overcapitalisation. Bytecraft already have a large production inventory, which is fully utilised as you read this.

## Who is doing what?



Richard Lush with Steve Logan (above), Merlin rack with Merlin processing at top, and MFX 3plus system below



## Richard Lush (continued)

down stairs and an elevator ride away.

Steve Logan from Fairlight was seconded to the project and worked as Merlin operator. He arrived with the Merlin and the MFX 3 plus in the back of his car. The device was wheeled in, plugged into the desk outputs, and proceedings commenced.

"I had eight 36Gb drives" Steve commented. "They were split between the two systems, so I had four for each. "I got 180 minutes recording time - 24 tracks at 24 bits - on each drive."

Immediately after each session, the Mammoth drive was fired up, and a backup tape was manufactured. These went straight back to 301's tape room, a converted bank vault.

Several times during the project the action shifted to 301, where smaller orchestral pieces were recorded. "If the orchestra was 70 pieces or under, we recorded at 301" says Richard. "Mainly, we did theme type pieces

there".

The biggest day featured an 11 minute segment, with a 500 voice choir, and a 110 piece orchestra, plus the organ in the Concert Hall, plus the conductor. Richard allowed the whole day to record this, but was surprised to find it was all recorded by lunchtime. Such is the unpredictable nature of recording!

It was all edited by 5.30 in the afternoon.

"It's a matter of just getting the best take - very few songs work right through, and then there's the edits and patchups". This is where the Merlin was found to be brilliant. "There was a hell of a lot of editing to be done".

"There are three magic buttons" enthuses Richard.

"One, there is the Play Again button. Which just plays the previous segment again!"

"Then there is Record Again, which lets you just keep hitting it until the guy gets it right".

"Finally, the Jump in Seconds button lets you jump back one or two or five seconds, whatever you program."

"I can't imagine what we would have done without the Merlin. It's a blessing, a saviour".

Having worked with the SSO before, Richard understood they have a limited call, which works out to two and a half hours, including teabreak. It adds to the pressure.

The microphone list centred on a tree of three Neumann 149 mic's, and totalled up to 32 mic's for the biggest day. They were placed according to Richard's plot.

"It's been a great experience, I've met some great people and worked with some great conductors. I can't tell you who they are, though!"

When you watch the Opening Ceremony on September 15th, the sounds you hear will come straight off the Merlin hard drive, mixed live by Bruce Jackson. Two great Australians at work!

- Julius Grafton



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