



# Audio Engineering Society – New York Section

## NEWSLETTER – MEETING NOTICE

### 2009-2010

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**Tuesday September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009**  
**Join us for a Meet & Greet at 6:30pm**  
**Presentation at 7:00pm**

**Note: Change of Venue**  
**This meeting was originally scheduled for the Dolby Theatre at 1350 6th Avenue.**

**Digital Cinema Room**  
**(at Sync Sound)**  
**426 West 55<sup>th</sup> Street,**  
**(between 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Avenues)**

**THE DAWN OF SOUND:**  
**How The Movies Learned to Talk**  
**with: Ron Hutchinson, Film Historian**  
**& Head of The Vitaphone Project**

Host: **Robert Auld** - Auldworks; Chariman, AES NY Section

It all started with Thomas Edison. In 1894, Edison's lab assistant W.K.L. Dickson made the first attempt at a moving picture with sound, recording his violin playing into a cylinder phonograph while a silent moving picture camera filmed him and a pair of Edison employees dancing to his playing. The means to synchronize the picture and sound did not exist at the time, but the quest for the sound film had started and would persist for over three decades, until "The Jazz Singer", starring Al Jolson, became a huge success in 1927.

In 2007, Warner Brothers celebrated the 80th anniversary of the debut of "The Jazz Singer" with a 3-DVD deluxe reissue. As part of that reissue, a feature length documentary was made, "The Dawn of Sound: How the Movies Learned to Talk". For our September, 2009 meeting, the New York branch of the AES will be screening "The Dawn of Sound" in the superb facilities of Sync Sound's Digital Cinema room.

"The Dawn of Sound" features clips of early sound film pioneers and their work. D.W. Griffith, Lee DeForest, Theodore Case, and the engineers at Bell Labs who developed the Vitaphone sound on disc process all make appearances. There is even a reconstruction of the Dickson film of 1894.

In addition, the film features commentary by well known film critics and historians, including Ron Hutchinson, known for his work as head of The Vitaphone Project.

Mr. Hutchinson will give a talk prior to the film screening, filling in many of the technical details of early film sound that "The Dawn of Sound" did not have time to cover. He has also promised to bring with him a 16 inch Vitaphone playback disc and other artifacts of the Vitaphone system. Anyone interested in audio and film history should find this a most interesting evening.

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 13th at The New School Jazz Performance Space. Host: Roger Johansen (Tangerine Mastering) with guest, outgoing AES VP for Latin America, Andres Mayo. Subject: Mastering in the Home Studio Era.

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AES New York Section Meeting Report – September 15, 2009 - Report by Joel Spector

THE DAWN OF SOUND: **How the movies learned to talk**

Presented by Bob Auld, chairman, AES New York Section  
Guest Speaker: Ron Hutchinson, film historian, head of The Vitaphone Project  
Hosts: Sync Sound owners Bill Marino (in attendance) and Ken Hahn (on assignment)

About 50 members and guests gathered in the Digital Cinema dubbing theater of Sync Sound to learn the fascinating details of the history of sound for motion pictures. The evening opened with Bob Auld and Ron Hutchinson explaining the workings of the Vitaphone sound-on-disc process. They used system drawings and vintage photos showing the theory and installed equipment of the day.

Ron also showed an 16-inch Vitaphone transcription disc which had been recorded at 33-1/3 rpm to yield a playing time of ten minutes. This matched the length of one 35mm film reel. He then passed around a massive oil-damped tone arm from a Vitaphone playback turntable. It required a tracking force on the order of two ounces and a steel needle which had to be replaced after each use. Talking pictures proved to be so popular that the number of theaters equipped for sound jumped from about 200 in 1927 to over 12,000 by 1930. Ron also explained the mission of the Vitaphone Project: to collect as many Vitaphone discs as possible from around the world and reunite them with their matching mute film reels so that the movies and shorts can be restored to optimum quality and exhibited in theaters. Many are being released in DVD collections. UCLA and the Library of Congress are assisting in a major way.

Movies with a musical accompaniment were presented for many years prior to 1927 using live musicians in local theaters. Producers saw the new technology as a way to eliminate those thousands of jobs by supplying films with built-in music – and limited sound effects to boot. Early results were of poor quality because theaters did not have electrical amplification for their playback systems – only underpowered acoustic horns. This mode of presentation was a big money-loser, due to the poor sound quality.

With the advent of amplifiers using Lee de Forest's Audion vacuum tubes, adequate playback systems became possible and the new electrical recordings could be heard properly for the first time. Restored films such as those heard in tonight's presentation sound remarkably wide-range and distortion-free using modern reproduction technology. De Forest benefitted greatly from the pioneering research and development efforts of Theodore Case and Earl Sponable, who worked tirelessly to perfect recording and reproducing systems. Many scenes of Case's filmed experiments appeared in tonight's documentary presentation "The Dawn of Sound." An interesting historical aspect of this research was the business side, with Warner Brothers and Fox Films vying for Case's technology while denying him overt credit for his efforts. Studio executive Sam Warner actually died one night prior to the world premiere of his studio's breakthrough film "The Jazz Singer." The documentary was filled with numerous scenes of sound-on-disc and then sound-on-film musical and news footage.

The AES NY Section is pleased to thank our underwriters for their continued support, **NHT and Studio Consultants, Inc.** We also appreciate the support and assistance of **Christopher Hoffman** and the **New School University**. Remember to check our web site for the latest updates and information <http://www.aes.org/sections/ny/> PLEASE POST/This is an open meeting EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO ATTEND

PICTURE from Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009 AES NY Section meeting: **The Dawn of Sound** - How The Movies Learned to Talk



From L-R: Robert Auld, Ron Hutchinson and Bill Marino.