

## MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER CHOOSES BAG END INFRASUB FOR LOCATION WORK



Academy Award nominee Danny Michael usually still has to explain exactly what it is he does for a living in the motion picture industry, sometimes even to those also in the industry.

"I am a production sound mixer," Michael patiently explains. "That distinguishes me from a sound mixer, or re-recording sound mixer, which is post-production." He said. "What I provide is the raw sound material for post-production."

Most movies are not shot on sound stages these days, so his work is done on locations that many times are outdoors and usually not under the greatest of conditions. For instance, Michael knew he would be earning his money when he traveled to Detroit one cold winter day to do technical scouting for the feature film "8 Mile," which would star rapper Eminem, Kim Bassinger and Brittany Murphy.

"Usually a month to three weeks before a project is to begin shooting a number of key personnel – director, producer, production designer, production sound mixer, electrician, gaffer, key grip – are get together for what we call a 'tech scouting' tour," he said. "We tour all the various locations being considered so we can determine what our needs will be at each location. And, in is this day-and-age of "al fresco" locations, recording clean, clear dialog for motion pictures that also involve a large amount of ambient sound as well as on-location music, such as singing or dancing – as in "8 Mile" – the challenge is even greater.

And that's where BAG END Loudspeaker Systems enter the picture, so to speak. "In film sound often times, we need to use what we call a thumper line," Michael explained. "It's a very low frequency – usually around 37, 38 cycles – thump that duplicates a musical beat. The 'thumper line' provides the actors with something to key on that they can almost feel rather than hear. Thus, they can stay in time with the music, even though it's really not there.

"Let's say you have a scene where two actors are talking but there are a number of people in the background dancing to a piece of music," he said. "If the music were played at the same volume you hear it in the movie theater, it would ruin the dialog. So we need a clean way to play the music beat for the dancers while not destroying the dialog that we are trying to record."

"The 'thumper' is played at a low enough frequency that it won't interfere with dialog so we can record clean, live dialog," he added. "Then in post-production, the 'thumper line' is used as a guide to lay down the actual music track and then easily removed from the sound track." So Michael went looking for a low frequency source that had to fit some very specific parameters. It had to be portable, it had to be self-powered, it had to be capable of good low-frequency range. And one of the major requirements, because it would be used on set most of the time: it had to function without using a fan.

"We needed a good low-frequency source that had little or no harmonics and would give us a clean 37- to 40-cycle thump," Michael said. Through research on the Internet and some word-of-mouth, we came to the conclusion that the BAG END Infrasub-12 fit our requirements and we decided to look at it." The INFRASub-12, powered by an internal 400-watt amplifier and controlled by BAG END's Extended low frequency dual integrator, also internal, has the capability of producing a flat acoustical response down to an incredible 8 Hz. And at just 57 pounds it's relatively light. The enclosure measures only 15½ inches high by 18 inches wide by 15.75 inches deep.

"It was perfect, so I was moved to look into it," Michael said.

Well, it wasn't quite perfect. BAG END engineers envisioned the INFRASub-12 being used primarily in recording studios and home theaters, not being dragged around the out of doors in all kinds of weather. But BAG END also builds a very successful line of loudspeakers for performing artists specifically designed for hard road use. So after listening to Michael's detailed explanation of what he needed, they customized a standard INFRASub-12, adding handles to facilitate portability and devising a metal grill to replace the standard cloth grille thus creating a more rugged enclosure to stand up to the rigors of out-of-doors elements and frequent relocation.

And then, in the words of Yoda, perfect it was.

Michael, a native New Yorker who vows to remain there despite the tug of Hollywood, is very much in demand, geographical problems notwithstanding. Launching his career in the mid-70s, his early years in the industry were spent cutting his teeth on documentaries and short film projects. By the mid-80's Michael was working with a virtual who's-who of directors and actors. His first "big time" motion picture production came in 1984 when he was the production sound mixer for the film "Alamo Bay," directed by Louis Malle and starring Ed Harris and Amy Madigan. Since then, he has worked on more than 50 major motion pictures, and worked with such well-known directors as Ben Stiller, Sidney Pollack, Ron Howard, Alan Parker, Mike Nichols, Ridley Scott, Frank Oz and Curtis Hanson, to mention just a few.

Michael was nominated for an Academy Award for his work on "Mississippi Burning" in 1989 and in 1990 won a British Academy Award for that film. Just a few of the motion pictures on which he has worked include (in addition to "Mississippi Burning") "Changing Lanes" (Ben Affleck, Samuel L. Jackson), "Hannibal" (Anthony Hopkins), "Shaft" (Samuel L. Jackson, Vanessa Williams), "Glengarry Glen Ross" (Al Pacino, Jack Lemmon, Alec Baldwin, Alan Arkin, Ed Harris) and "Billy Bathgate" (Dustin Hoffman, Nicole Kidman).

Asked "At what point is your job on a particular project completed?," Michael replied simply, "When the shooting is done."