

ART FOR ART'S SAKE...

Ever wondered how orchestras explode along with car crashes, how percussionists go insane to swordlights? *Backstage News* finds out about the fine art of composing for film and TV with Art Phillips...

Art Phillips' work is probably familiar to you, regardless of whether you recognise his name or not. A career of session-based guitar work has put Phillips on many albums, and more recently seen him composing music for TV and films. Fans of *Neighbours* have been listening to his musical scores, as have all those *Love Boat* devotees, but his work is probably most prolific on the US soap series *Santa Barbara* (he was awarded Emmys in '87 and '88 for outstanding Music Composition & Musical Direction In A Drama Series for the work).

Phillips' session recording credits include work on albums by Barry Manilow, Demis Roussos, Smokey Robinson, Minnie Riperton and Tina Marie. He's also played on high profile TV shows like *Laverne & Shirley*, *Family Ties*, *Happy Days*, *The Midnight Special*, *Solid Gold* and the *Tonight Show*, giving him a place in everyone's viewing history. He was also musical director, arranger and touring guitarist with Demis Roussos back in the early-'80s, which first brought him to Australia. As much a touring staple as a studio session musician, Phillips has toured with Barry Manilow, Dory Previn, and the Lettermen among others.

Originally based in LA, Phillips moved to Sydney five years ago, where he "prefers the lifestyle and finds the current work challenging and rewarding." He is now involved as music composer on feature films and TV dramas, with recent movie credits including scoring the Australian feature films *Signal One* (due for cinema release in late October), *Fatal Bond* and *Sheer Mountain Mystery*. He received an AFI nomination (1990) for best Original Music Score In A Feature Film.

Signal One stars the always-energized Jacko, along with Christopher Atkins. It's predictably an all-action affair, and action compositions are a far cry from the gentle strains we hear on *Santa Barbara*. For starters, you have to get the music accents in time with all those punches, crashes and explosions. For all who've spent sleepless nights wondering just how they do it, Phillips explains.

"The way that I usually work is that, if there

is a budget to use a lot of live musicians or an orchestra of whatever size, I'll do all the pre-production on the MIDI equipment to get the actual composition in shape and then overdub the orchestra over the top of it. The way that I score is that I lock up to image as I'm writing so I can see how things are working - if it's the right mood or if it's the right texture for the scene - and to make sure the music's not getting in the way of the dialogue in certain cases."

How do you get the timing so perfect?

"It's basically a mathematical equation. You work out exactly where the music is going to start in the scene - which we call a cue - and, say for example about ten or 12 seconds later there is a hit point or a swell, what you have to do is make sure that falls in some sort of musical place, a certain beat in the music that it actually hits. For example, if it's a car that's crashing and it tumbles and falls over a cliff, as it hits the ground, that's a hit point. To work out exactly where that is going to hit, you have to time it all in seconds and work out the appropriate tempo that would have it hit on a quarter note, eighth note, 16th note or whatever the case is."

If that sounds complicated, imagine the actual recording of the finished works. There's a whole orchestra sitting in a room, working with a click track and playing in time to the movie on a screen.

"All the stuff is recorded to image, and locked up to image and conducted to image. There has to be a reference for that."

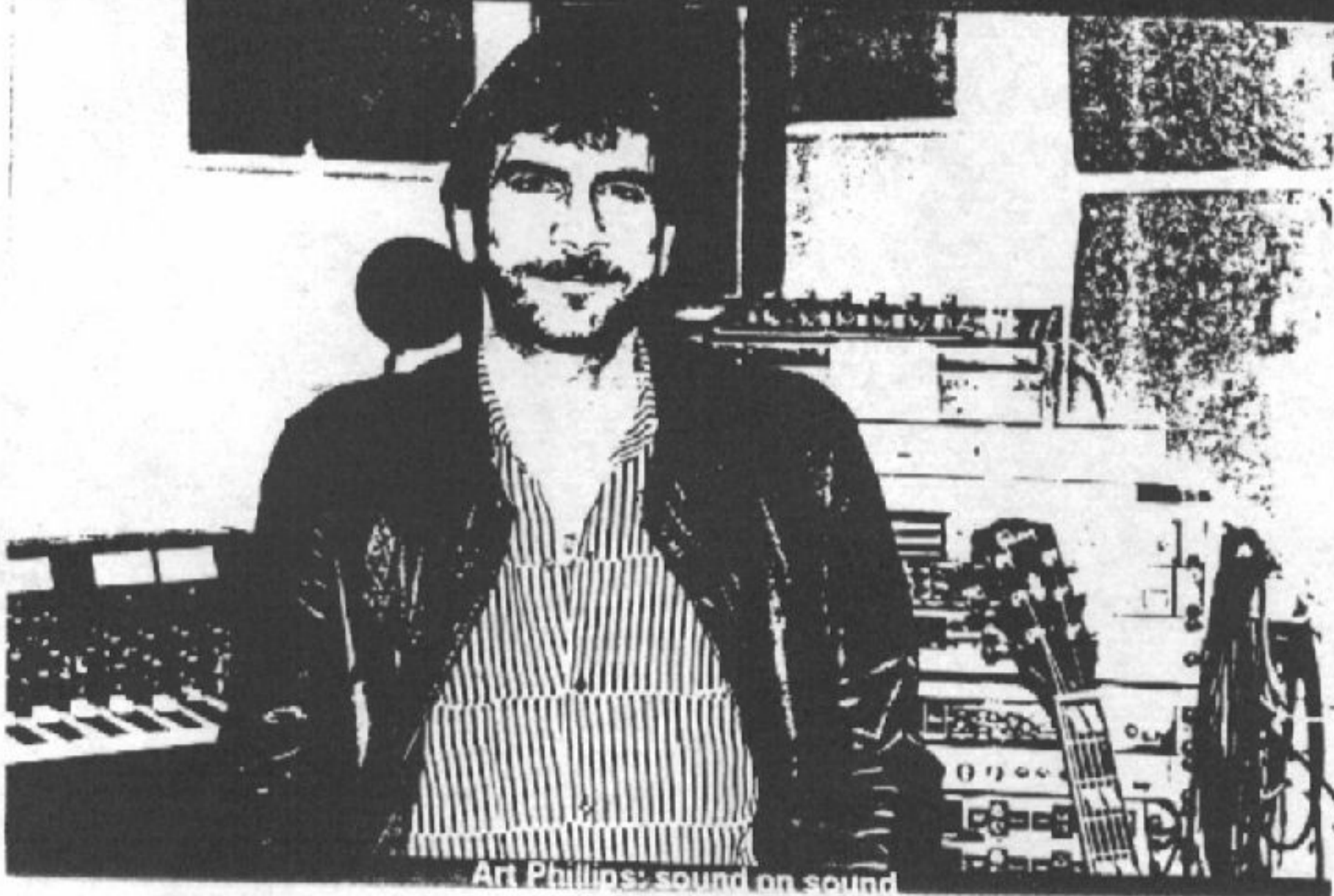
In addition to his composition commitments, Phillips is teaching guitar at My Music in Miranda as of this month.

There are also plans for a series of group workshops in the field of composition, with the emphasis on writing scores.

"It's a concept that Dave Meyer (of My Music) is trying to come up with. What it will be is a class situation, limited to eight to ten people meeting once a week. It would have a focus on composition, for screen as well as songs. I would imagine, I think that if we did do anything like that, the other side of the coin would be to concentrate on the MIDI aspects - actual use of a sequencer via a computer, that sort of thing."

They are interested in any response to this idea, so if anyone's keen, they should contact David Meyer at My Music on 540 3911, whether to learn to write for vision, or to learn guitar with a true professional.

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WITH SIMON WOOLDRIDGE



Art Phillips: sound on sound

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