

COMPOSERS

Using music for emotional impact and flavour

WITH many attracted by the 22-piece Cove Chamber Orchestra performing original music newly written to scenes from the classic Australian film *Gallipoli*, the Australian Film Institute (AFI) held a successful industry seminar earlier this month on music and film.

Arranged in conjunction with the Australian Guild of Screen Composers (AGSC), the well-attended seminar featured the work of composers Art Phillips, Ian Laurence, Nick Palmer and Guy Gross.

Working on fictitious "briefs", the composers demonstrated how different music can add emotional impact and flavour.

Palmer, for example, composed his piece to a scene from the film to be both militaristic, yet sad. The chosen scene began at a formal dance in Australia then cut from the lights and laughter of the dance hall to the dark, still waters of Suvla Bay in the early hours of the morning as barges of young Australian soldiers were preparing for their first taste of war.

Close ups on the faces of lead actors Mel Gibson, Mark Lee and Bill Hunter showed the fear and apprehension of drifting into battle in near darkness.

Palmer used a repetitive snare drum as the underlying theme. To depict the "sadness from going into battle for the first time", he overlaid the snare with a pensive, mournful string arrangement.

To demonstrate the range of musical sources a composer calls on, the snare was provided by an electronic sample, while the strings were played by the Cove, conducted by Phillips.

The picture was provided by a large video projection system,

By GERARD KNAPP

with the all important time code numbers underneath the images. This time code was synchronising the range of electronic instruments which the composers used, mixed with the live strings from the Cove.

Phillips' brief required dark, brooding, mysterious music to accompany the scene. He chose a melodic motif and variations of rhythmic movement, based on his pan flutes digital keyboard sample - "my engineer's favourite" - with string orchestration.

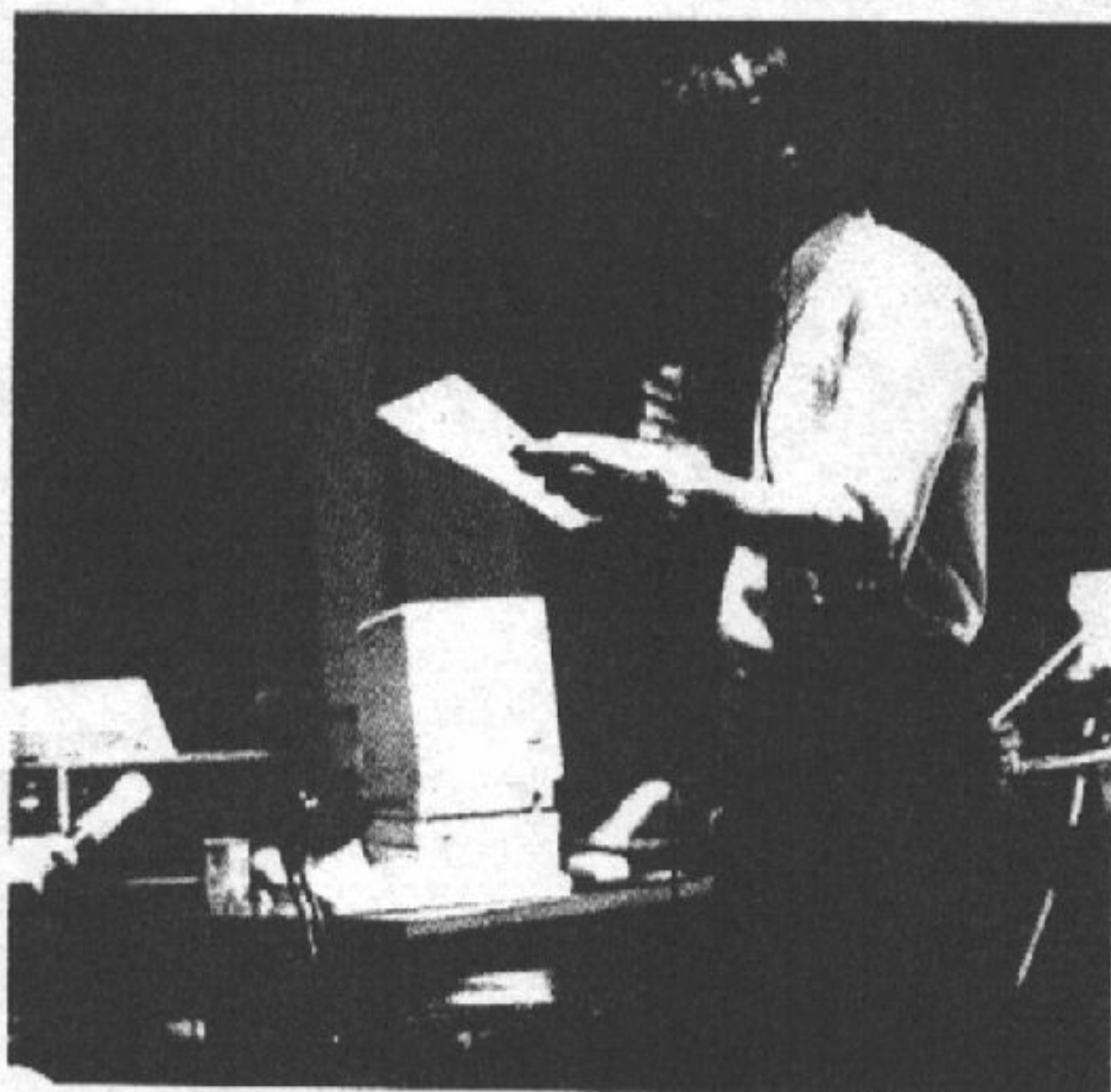
He said he kept the music in minor keys until the scene cut to the determined visage of Bill Hunter, playing the role of an officer (possibly a major).

"That's the first time I use a major chord," he said to an amused audience. "It (the use of a major chord) does release the tension. It's amazing where your inspiration can come from."

Phillips said the composers had about a week to write their new pieces to the scene, fitting it in between paying jobs.

The scene was also run without any music and finally with the original piece, taken from *Adagio for Strings* written by the Baroque composer Albinoni "who unfortunately couldn't be here tonight because he died about 200 years ago," said Gross.

Producers Phil Avalon and



Composer Art Phillips explains his approach to writing new music to film at the AFI seminar. He normally watches the film a few times before writing any music, he said, "unless I'm immediately inspired, which happens".

Tony Buckley and directors Vince Marun and Noel Price joined composers Phillips, Palmer and Jan Preston for a panel discussion, mediated by Laurence.

Another scene from *Gallipoli* was then shown also with original music written by four of the composers present. The scene was, as Palmer put it, "a strange little interlude" where the soldiers indulge in some skinny-dipping in the water of Anzac Cove while the battle rages on in the hills.

During their swim, the naked soldiers are caught in shrapnel bombing and take cover underwater, which was the cue point for the composers to begin the music to accompany the underwater photography.

While Gross wrote a piece for strings: "not too dramatic, a little light-hearted, then with more tension (after a soldier is struck underwater by shrapnel)". Palmer took a more literal approach, using effects and music to create an underwater soundscape.

Writing music to this scene revealed how important dialogue is between the composer and director, Palmer said. Some directors prefer a more traditional, classical soundtrack, while others like the music to be literal, or descriptive of the action (which generally in-

volves use of electronic samples and effects), with crescendos timed with explosions and so on.

The communication between composer and director/producer was one of the major discussion themes for the seminar. While there was general agreement among the composers over their methodology, the producers and directors revealed quite different attitudes.

Most of the composers watched the picture at least a few times before writing any music unless immediately inspired - which happens.

With her classical music background, Preston still writes sitting at the piano, but has since developed "a resistance to writing the dots (notation)" due to the advent of computers, which remove much of the technical effort and allow the composer to concentrate on the music.

According to Phillips, the major role for compositional computers is to assist with determining the range of tempos, or timing, of the music.

Each scene which requires music - usually decided by both composer and director - has a specific start (cue point) and end, accurate to the frame (1/24th of a second). Given the different lengths of each sequence, only a certain number of musi-

Women in Film and Television present an

AFI Industry Seminar

Can We Make It Australian?

A panel debate on the issue of retaining cultural identity in the present climate of unemployment, US money, the FFC commercial orientation, and the AFC's new directions. Chaired by Jane Singleton, the panel will include Sue Milliken, John Morris, Anne Britton, David Williamson, Phillip Adams, Angela Punch-McGregor, Anne Shanks, Anthony Ginnane.

Wednesday 7 November at 8pm

AFI Cinema Paddington

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cal timings can be used.

Previously, composers tended to rely on their "bible", a manual called *Project Tempo* written by Los Angeles-based music editor **Carroll Knudsen** in the '70s. Now the computer interprets Knudsen's research to provide this vital compositional guide within seconds, rather than the composer having to leaf through substantial tables and charts.

When should the composer become involved in a film or program? "It's been our policy over the past 15 years to bring in the composer as soon as possible," said Buckley. "Send them a script, send them out to locations, give them a feel for the film". The more involvement, including attendance at rushes and rough cut screenings, the better.

Martin doesn't always agree. "Sometimes I think it's better the composer doesn't see a thing until it's finished... You have to ask yourself what kind of film it's going to be. Sometimes it's a great idea to have the composer on set, in period pieces for example. Either way can have its advantages."

For Martin and Avalon, a firm idea of how the music should complement their films

greatly influences their briefs to composers. Avalon said he "likes to see a composer with a copy of the script. He then feels he's part of the production process."

"But you've got to get a handle on what type of film it is you're making and choose music which is close to the film." After the style of music is decided on, Avalon then selects a composer to suit.

For Noel Price, the composer should only come on set for "social visits". Like producers, they "should stay away from the first editing". He believes the first full showing of the film to a composer is "essential" and should not be marred or hindered by the "too much crap" of a rough cut.

Price added that "it's not just rock clips which are shot to music". For opening sequences, "or if it's appropriate, there might be other parts of the film where you want the action to follow the music."

This leads to a much greater involvement for the composer, but it is quite rare. Almost always, the music is written after the action is edited.

Perhaps the greatest creative

Cont'd page 30

Biggest complaint? Budgets

DISBELIEF and nervous laughter greeted **Phil Avalon's** statement that "Australian composers are by far the best in the world. The Americans can't believe they get by with the money (they are paid)."

Avalon was one of several industry figures invited to speak at a recent AFI seminar on music and film. It was an opportunity for composers to explain their work and pose a few questions to producers.

One of the composers' biggest complaints - which was not aired until the end of the evening - was that Australian composers get around half in comparative terms to a composer working in the US.

A typical music budget in an Australian film is anything from 2.5 to five per cent of the total. In the US, it's typically eight per cent. Also taking into consideration the size of overall production budgets, Australian composers get by on very little.

Composer **Art Philips**, an American now permanently resident in Sydney, said the answers provided by the producers at the seminar offered "no real explanation" concerning this difference in music budgets.

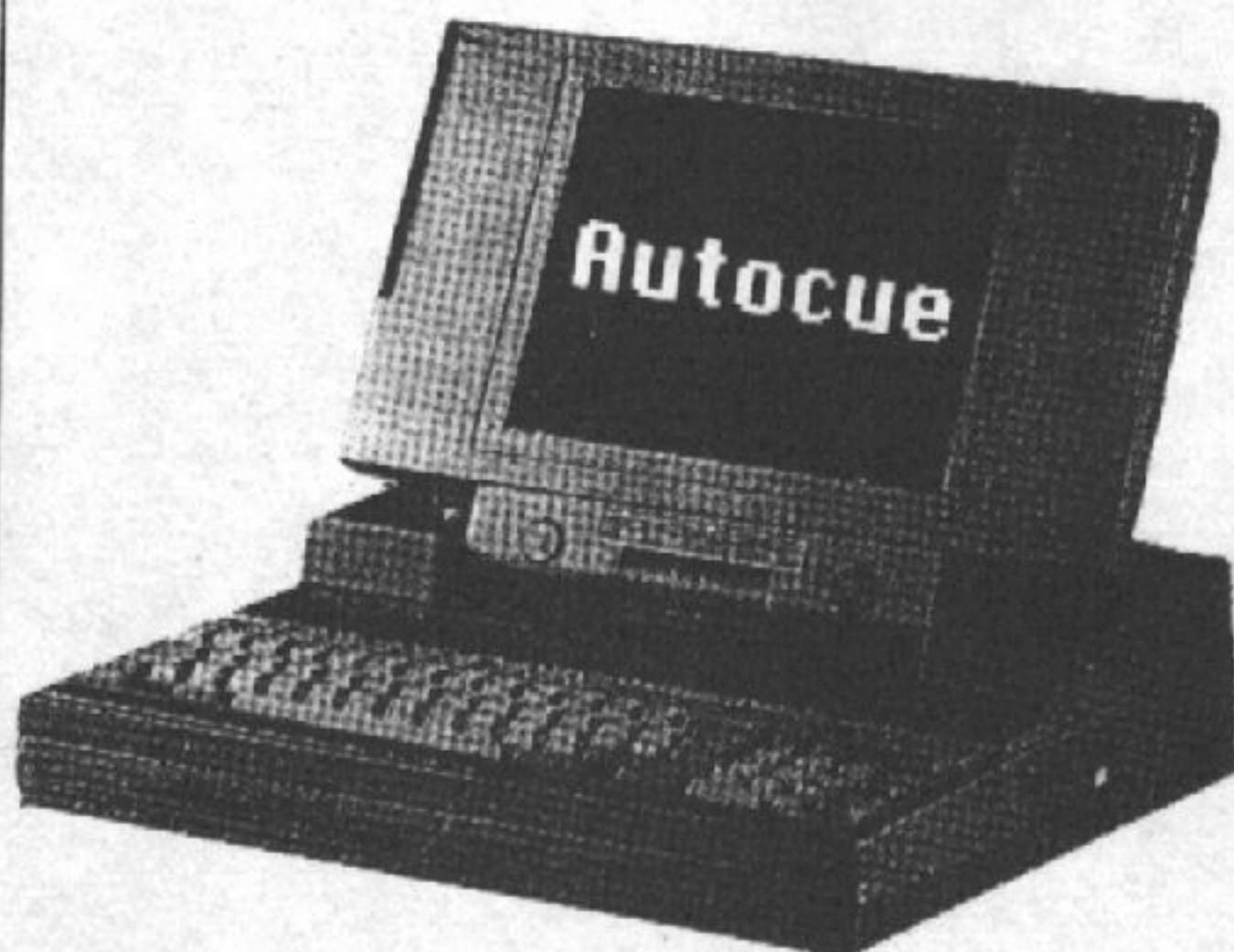
"It's the music which always ends up coming last" in the production process, and usually has to absorb any cost blow outs by other departments.

Perhaps things may be changing. In the film *The Delinquents*, for example, the producers left eight per cent of the budget for music. This was largely to cover the use of previously published songs from the '50s, which are becoming increasingly expensive because of copyright costs.

It also covered the cost of the original score and hiring an orchestra to record it. However the composer on this FFC-assisted film was American **Miles Goodman**.

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COMPOSERS



The Cove Chamber Orchestra performs new music written to a scene from *Gallipoli* at the AFI's seminar on music and film. A group of composers wrote a variety of new music to demonstrate how music can influence the emotional impact of a scene.

Using music

From page 17

bane of the modern composer's working life are "temp tracks", the pieces of previously published music which the director and picture editor may use as a guide during editing.

As Martin said, it can help "to hold the sequence together", however, the music can't be used for release due to financial or creative reasons so the composer is then expected to come up with music which resembles it.

Jan Preston said she recently worked on a feature where "the producers had laid in so much Vangelis (as the temp track) that as a kind of joke I started calling myself Jan Gelis. But the point is I'm not Vangelis, I'm Jan Preston."

Buckley said he is totally opposed to the use of temp tracks, describing them as an insult and a hindrance to the

composer. Their use "shows a singular lack of imagination". Price agreed, describing it as "cheating on the composer".

According to veteran composer **Bob Young**, picture editors should use the basic click track - "untuned percussion" as he called it - as their guide during editing.

Young offered a simple approach which composers should follow when writing music to films. It's analogous to the relationship between a performing artist and his or her accompanist, he said. The accompanist should play in a manner which enhances and assists the artist, as it is the artist "who puts bums on seats".

The composer is the accompanist to the film and if there is a quiet scene in the film, such as landscape shots, "that is not the cue for the composer to do a PR job on his next symphony," he said. "The composer should never upstage, or should I say, upscreen, the film," he said.

DDTV moves ops to Coffs

From page 3

Toowoomba will send material back via the microwave link to Coffs Harbour, however, the news stories will still be edited in Toowoomba.

The same production and on-air crew at Coffs Harbour will present the news for NRTV (from 6-6.30pm) then for DDTV (from 6.30-7.00pm).

Walburn has also resisted - through economic necessity - buying any new hardware, apart from the transmission equipment.

"We're going in lean and mean," the engineer said in part reference to the millions of dollars being spent by other regional broadcasters in Queensland, such as QTV and Sunshine who have both purchased seven library management systems (LMS) from Sony worth \$500K each. "Everything we do will be revenue driven."

He will use DDTV's existing two Betacart replay machines to assist with the program output. On January 1 next year, NRTV expects to be taking the Network Ten program feed for relay up to Toowoomba and the Sunshine Coast, while NRTV's

output will remain a composite of programs from all three networks.

"The Betacarts are quite capable of doing program splits and individual program feeds. We don't believe in having seven LMSs (library management systems). We think it's extravagant stringing an LMS across each program line."

"Our way is a lot simpler and cheaper. We will look at the log each day for tight spots (conflicts in commercial spot replay) in the schedule. If you've got a tight spot, you can do a compile on I" or a BVW-75 for that break."

During these occasions it is more labour intensive than the automated LMS approach, but as Walburn said, "people aren't that expensive (to hire), really".

Walburn said DDTV will be capable of doing program splits in Queensland once its microwave links are completed without buying any new hardware.

DDTV is still to commit to buying or leasing an office in the Sunshine Coast region, but it has an ENG/EFP stringer based in Gympie lined up for news and commercials.

PRODUCTION REPORT

Encore's production report appears in every second issue. It is now in two sections: the first includes all known features and television drama in pre-production and production; the second includes non-drama television programs which are networked (excluding children's and news). Projects in the planning stage appear only once. Production office staff are contacted each month in an effort to keep all details accurate. Contact Tracey Prisk for a listing, tel: (02) 699 1344.

Drama

Features
Pre-production

FRIDAY ON MY MIND

Prod co.: Boulevard Films. Prod office: Melbourne. Prod/dlr/script: Frank Howson. Exec prod: Peter Boyle. Script ed: Alister Webb. Prod des: Nigel Triffitt. Underwriter: Pacvest Securities. Presale: J&M Entertainment. Dist guarantee: Bravo. Shoot: Oct 29 for 6 weeks.

BLINKY BILL

Prod co: Yoram Gross Film Studios. Prod office: Sydney. Prod: Yoram Gross. Script: John Palmer, Leonard Lee, Yoram Gross. Music: Guy Gross. Length: 80 mins. Gauge: 35mm. Shoot: Sep 1 1991 - Jan 1992. Synopsis: The adventures of a mischievous little koala in the Australian bush - and his efforts to save his home from destruction.

WHO LEFT THE ... VIDEON

Prod co.: Jarjoura Films. Prod office: Beverly Hills, NSW. Prod/dlr: Gary Jarjoura. Assoc prod/music: Gep Bartlett. Story: Gary Jarjoura, Mat Ford, Dave Ingall. Script: Gary Jarjoura. Cast: Dave Ingall, Troy Nesmith. Budget: \$1m. Finance: Jarjoura Films. Length: 90 mins. Gauge: 35mm. Shoot: From Feb 1991. Synopsis: Martin Lunning, a boring member of our video watching society, is kidnapped by Beef and Noodles, an old fashioned husband and wife team. They decide to kidnap someone for fun and take them to the country and show them a fun time, and that there is more to the world than watching videos.

Features
Production

GARBO

Prod co.: Eclectic Films P/L. Prod office: Melbourne. Prod: Hugh Rule. Assoc prod:

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