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## Preparing for Surround Sound: Are You Hearing Things?:

By **TyFord**

First developed as Quadrophonic Sound, the promise of surround came and went back in the early 1970s. It didn't catch on, but the seeds were planted. The path toward surround has been lightly tread; being audible mostly as ambiences directed to the rear speakers to fill the average living room. The opening beach scenes of 'Saving Private Ryan' are an impressive demonstration of panned stereo and surround. How do those ideas translate into home theater? Why don't we hear more surround ear candy? When will surround become more prevalent? iCOM talked with four east coast audio pros to get a handle on what's going on with surround sound.

**DIGITAL PLAYROOM**

Jay Rose, C.A.S., runs the Digital Playroom ([www.dplay.com](http://www.dplay.com)) in Boston. He does audio post for high-end corporate, TV and indie films. He says the Boston spot market has yet to warm up to the idea of using



Control Room at Digital Playroom

surround sound. As a result, most of his efforts are applied to dialog and music editing and sound design. He points out that the use of surround has continued to evolve since its inception. "Go back 20 years and listen to the surround on 'Superman One' and you'll find it was used very differently than today. In scenes where Clark Kent was growing up, you can even hear the farm sounds in surround. As usual, a lot of producers used those effects to extremes when surround was brand new. After they got tired of that, they went back to telling stories."

The trend today, says Rose is to use surround more for effects than for ambiences. "Most of the dialog-driven movies today are 'fourth wall' and only use surround for music and some special effects sequences. Action pictures, of course, are something else again." Rose's current project is sound design for 'Two Weeks', a comedy-drama starring two-time Oscar winner Sally Field and Ben Chaplin. "The producer gave me freedom to get inside the characters' heads. Not with a cliched, echoey 'conscience', but by subtly changing their

environments to reflect their states of mind. Surround can be ideal for that."

The movie opens with a close-up of a man's face, sideways and severely distorted. "After a short flashback, we realize we've been looking through an airplane window. He's a passenger on a night flight, asleep with his face against the glass. A flight attendant gently wakes him. I wanted the track to be as disorienting as that first image. So I created a synthesized sound that *could* be an airplane interior, but isn't immediately identifiable as one. Then I distributed components of the sound into the four channels, and rotate them - panning each component, separately, in circles. It sneaks out of the main title music and swirls around you, and you don't know what it is."

Rose created the effect in an Eventide H-8000, a multi-DSP hardware processor. He also used the Eventide on the flight attendant's voice. As she starts to wake the man, he's still disoriented. Her voice doesn't appear to come from any identifiable direction. Once he's alert, she's in the normal dialog channel. "This wasn't a case of just panning her to the middle. Instead, I broke her voice up into lots of tiny frequency bands and distributed them around the room. It's a subtle difference, and probably couldn't sustain for long dialog, but nice."

Rose is still working on a dream sequence, motivated by music a character hears while he sleeps. "The director shot this as if it were real life, and doesn't reveal it's a dream until the end. So I have to subtly imply unreality leading up to the reveal... but nothing as corny as reverb. You can bet surround will come into play."

As this is being written, the director is shortening the movie for distribution. So some of these scenes might not make it to a theater near you. "But," Rose adds, "there's a good chance you'll be able to hear them as 'extras' on the DVD."

###

**Nationally Respected Sound Designer Jay Rose, C.A.S.**

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