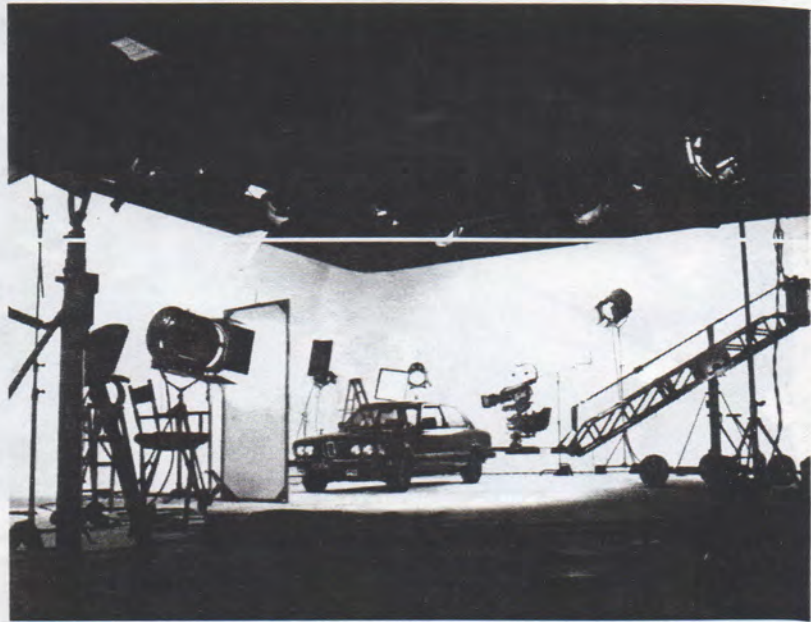


STAGE PLIGHT

by Karen Rathmell



Cine Rent West Stage A

All the world's a stage, but, unfortunately, the sound is bad and the lighting is unpredictable. A stage is really just a large, quiet, well-lighted space with plenty of parking and electrical power. That sounds simple enough, but in the Bay Area, it's not easy to find one space that simultaneously meets all those demands. To compensate, Bay Area stages have become specialized for different kinds of end projects. Some are designed and equipped especially for video and live-broadcast, some for film, and others for stop-motion or animation. Here's a look at some of the stages in the Bay Area and what they have to offer.

The closest thing to an all-purpose stage in San Francisco is Cine Rent West's Stage A. Located on a relatively peaceful side street, Stage A isn't the largest space in the area, but it's easily accessible, well-designed and quiet. The stage's total measurements are a little over 4,100 square feet, with 22 feet from the floor to the lighting grid and 1,200 amps of power. The shooting area is square and unobstructed with a 180 degree hard wall cyc. This design works especially well for film shoots, and many recent San Francisco-based features have used the space for rehearsals, and make-up/wardrobe tests. It also regularly hosts both local and out-of-town commercial shoots.

The ground floor also contains a working kitchen, production offices with several client phone lines, extensive Mole Richardson and HMI lighting, grip equipment, a dark room, wardrobe and make-up rooms, and set storage space. There's a client lounge and another production office with an observation window upstairs. The stage is street accessible by a large, drive-through door (big enough to drive a semi truck and trailer right onto the stage). Also, it's not entirely impossible to find a parking place on the street for other production vehicles.

Although Stage A does not provide post or screening facilities on-site, Cine Rent West does have five KEM edit suites and a large screening theater at its Fell Street address. Cine Rent West recently converted its insert stage (Stage B) into a camera department, and it regularly supplies local and national productions with Panavision, Arri and other camera and support equipment.

Not far from Stage A is Studio Colossal. Colossal's main stage is technically the largest shooting space in the Bay Area. The stage is 4,300 square feet with a 20-foot-high lighting grid that covers a little over half of the total area. One advantage is that Colossal's converted

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Cine Rent West Stage A "Reunited" produced by Video Caroline for Greg Khin. Photo: Robert Specter

warehouse holds another, smaller sound stage and an annex stage (with no cyc, grid, or sound proofing) for big effects shoots. This allows clients to shoot different elements of a project simultaneously and in the same vicinity. Also, services such as screening rooms, off-line post-production facilities, set construction and model shop, and a small inventory of props are available on-site.

Since Colossal Pictures is a full-service production, animation and effects company, it books nearly two-thirds of its stage time for in-house productions, with one stage completely devoted to motion-control photography. Colossal claims to have the only portable real-time motion-control system in Northern California, which cuts the time for complex jobs considerably.

The third largest stage (and the newest) lies across the bay, in the shade of Mount Tamalpais. Golden Gaters Productions' (GGP) serene Marin location gives it certain advantages; truck access and parking is no problem, and the small business park setting is private and quiet.

GGP has always specialized in television and video production, and its stages are especially well-suited for those mediums. The larger of the two stages is approximately 2,400 square feet with a coved hard cyc and a lighting grid with a 16-foot clearance. The smaller insert stage is 900 square feet and also has a hard cyc and grid. Between the two stages is a large, well-equipped kitchen — the only one in the area suitable for shooting.

Chroma-key shoots are popular at GGP, and it owns one of the few Ultimatte systems in Northern California. Both stages are hooked up to a control room with capabilities for 3 camera switching and satellite up-link. As a full-service video production company, GGP offers flexible support to its clients.

For nearly twelve years, Innervision Studio in San Francisco has supported both film and video production. Although Innervision is not a sound stage, it has about 1,600 square feet of shooting space with a hard cyc and some special equipment that makes it unique; a one-ton hoist runs on a track for the length of the stage, and there's a permanent catwalk for overhead shots. A network of pipes and steel support beams substitute for a permanent lighting grid. With its limited power supply (200 amps), a generator is usually necessary. A dressing room and dark room are on the premises, but Innervision does not rent equipment and does not provide technical support.

City Stage, also in San Francisco, is relatively small at 1,200 square feet, but it is soundproof. The lighting grid has a 17-foot clearance. Black sound drapes serve as a soft cyc and one wall is permanently painted chroma-key blue. It also has a silent air conditioning system that can be operated during sound recording. There's a prop room, wardrobe room and kitchen in the building, but no equipment other than a Betacam SP camera package. Equipment can be loaded right into the stage from a street-accessible loading dock, and street parking

is usually available.

Breene Kerr in Mountain View also has an air conditioned, 1,200 square foot stage, but its lighting grid is 15 feet from the floor. There is no hard cyc, but backdrops are available, and there's a set construction shop on-site. The stage is linked to both an editing and paintbox system, so graphics can be rolled onto live video footage. This set-up works well for corporate teleconferencing and other live-broadcast shows. Breene Kerr is a full-service production facility, and both equipment and support personnel are available.

Some are designed and equipped especially for video and live-broadcast, some for film, others for stop-motion or animation.

Although it's better suited for still photography, Studio Resources of Palo Alto has done a fair number of video projects, especially for corporate clients. Its low grid (12 feet from floor) and limited power supply (600 amps) might produce some problems, but it does have a 2,500 square foot main stage with hard cyc, and two 400 square foot insert stages. Dressing rooms, kitchen, private phone lines, and some still photography equipment is available on-site.

Steve Hathaway's studio in San Francisco is another

Continued on p. 24

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Sound of Music

Continued from p. 8

The groups may be non-profit, but the companies who hold the music rights are not.

• *Say, I'm editing material from a commercial program that was produced by someone else originally? Should I worry about it?*

WORRY. It doesn't matter how it got there, it's up to you to see that it is properly licensed.

• *OK, what about a commercial or program that airs on my station, but was produced by someone else--say another local TV station? Who is responsible for all the licenses?*

YOU! It is the producer's responsibility to get the proper music rights before including music in his or her production. The station only has the right to broadcast music that has been properly licensed. Ignore this and the copyright holder can seek damages from the station, even if that person does not go after the producers of the commercial--it's the old deep pockets story.

Is there any way to make this process easier--less of a headache? The way many smart television stations get around the cumbersome task of getting the proper music rights is twofold. They either have original music produced, often at great expense, or they pay a license fee to one of the many music production libraries. These CD libraries entitle stations to a wealth of music and sound effects. This is the route Channel 5's Deborah McNaughton has taken.

As creative services director at KPIX-TV, she tries to make sure producers are aware of music rights. Not that she stalks the halls giving speeches, it's just that she holds the keys to their extensive and expensive CD library. According to McNaughton, "Music libraries have become a lifesaver for many TV stations. If you're looking for a wide and diverse variety of music and sound effects with very few hassles, then a production library is the way to go."

If you're not confused by now, congratulations. The laws concerning music rights for television are complex. It's probably the reason creative types put this part of the mix on the back burner. No boss or viewer I know of has ever said, "Great commercial. I really

liked the special clearances you got from those union musicians."

Bottom line, it's illegal, whether intentional or not. And the cost of copyright infringement? According to the letter of the law, you can be fined up to ten times the cost of what you should have paid in the first place. So the next time you think, "Music rights? I don't need no stinkin' music rights," think again! **CUE**

Stage Plight

Continued from p. 7



Nynex "Big Gym" shot on Studio Colossal's motion control stage.

still photography studio that's occasionally used for film and video. Its 3,700 square feet of shooting space is coved and fully finished out, but there's no lighting grid and the ceiling is low. Although there's a ground floor drive-in, the studio itself is on the second floor of a commercial condo, and that could present some logistical problems for shoots that require a lot of equipment. A kitchen, conference room, and shop are on the premises.

Because the stages mentioned here are meant to represent the range of stage services available in the Bay Area, some facilities have

been left out for various reasons. Notably absent are TVA of Mountain View and Center Stage of San Jose, which didn't respond to our inquiries. Also absent is Artichoke Productions of Oakland, whose 1,500 square foot stage is being remodeled, and American Zoetrope and Industrial Light and Magic's stages are used primarily for in-house productions.

The Bay Area film and video industry has adapted to the existing stages, but many feature films and other out-of-town projects are being lost due to a lack of adequate facilities. Whenever there's so much as the prospect of a feature coming to San Francisco, there's a frantic scramble to find warehouse space that can be hastily sound-proofed. More often than not, it's just not possible or practical to pull something like that together. If there's one thing the Bay Area knows it needs to enhance its film industry potential, it's a bigger studio.

So, even though Shakespeare thought the world was a stage, the San Francisco Bay Area would happily settle for 10,000 square feet. **CUE**

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