

Talking about Sound and *The Sound Manifesto*

Director George Pursall (GP) and Director of Audiography Eddy Grabczewski (EG) discuss their work together on the short film *The Last Time I Saw You*, including their novel approach to sound for a no-budget production (10th April 2010).

EG: George, tell me about yourself and your new short film - just selected this year for the LIFF festival.

GP: I've been making films for a couple of years, since finishing a film course at university. I did one student film there and I've made one short film, *The Last Time I Saw You*, which was my first experience working on a fully budgeted, professionally run film.

EG: Who did you work with?

GP: I worked with my filmmaking partner Caitlin Catherwood and our friend Ricky Pooni. We have a company called *Beaninbox Productions* where we do most of our film work. Caitlin and I produced and directed *The Last Time I Saw You* working with two very good actors, Keith Hill and Dan Paton, together with Eddy Grabczewski as DoA (Director of Audiography) and Marco Menestrina, the DoP.

EG: When you came out of film school, what was your attitude towards sound in film production?

GP: At university we weren't taught anything about sound. The course I did was meant to be a full film production course, where you learnt about screenwriting, lighting, camera and editing. It was meant to be the whole process but in the three years I think, quite literally, we might have talked about sound for a couple of hours. It was completely brushed over. But of course throughout those three years of making films, I began to realise that sound was incredibly important - simply through the fact that you can have beautiful visuals but if you have very poor sound then it completely destroys the film.

EG: What did they teach you about sound? What topics did they cover and what experience did you get?

GP: They showed us the best direction to hold a boom mike - that was literally about it! There was nothing about sound mixing, sound design or strategies to get better location sound as opposed to studio sound. It was completely brushed over, almost like it was a triviality.

EG: How did you come across *The Sound Manifesto*?

GP: You contacted me after I posted an ad in *Shooting People* for *The Last Time I Saw You*. I wanted to make sure the film was made as well as possible, so I got key crew members onboard as early as I could. We already had a DoP and I was looking for a sound person too. When I saw how important sound was to you guys after reading *The Sound Manifesto* web site then it seemed perfect!

EG: So at that stage you *knew* that sound was a critical factor in filmmaking. Somehow, you'd figured this out for yourself.

GP: I had. In preproduction I frequently fell into the trap of considering visuals first – the lighting and the shots - and never thought of sound as being *equal* to the visuals. I thought of it as something

secondary, something to think about later on. That's the kind of attitude I fell into at first. Lots of us had that attitude on the course.

EG: What did *The Sound Manifesto* do to help you to understand the relationship between photography and sound?

GP: The key thing they did was to help me become aware that they're both *equally* important. Without good sound to back up your visuals then it won't work.

EG: From the very beginning of preproduction right through to postproduction, how much time did you devote to sound in those different parts of the filmmaking process?

GP: Our film was very simple – two people sitting at a table having a conversation – so it didn't call for enormous sound design issues. Preproduction mainly consisted of checking out locations - making sure they were suitable – and workflow issues. The most time spent on sound was in postproduction – syncing the sound to the pictures, editing the sound and remixing it at Pinewood.

EG: So you found that a lot of the time was spent on sound in postproduction.

GP: More time was spent in postproduction in this particular film, but I'm sure that if I were doing a more elaborate film I'd have spent more time with sound in preproduction - if it warranted it.

EG: During production, how much time did sound occupy? As a director, was it more than you would have expected?

GP: It didn't take up *too* much time; the crew were good. Sometimes you're ready to roll but the sound man can hear a buzzing and everyone gets a bit impatient. On our set it was very quiet and we didn't have too many sound issues. I think, working with you, we spent a little more time waiting for sounds to die down or solving problems with buzzing on set than if we'd worked with a regular sound mixer and boom op.

EG: When you're on a production set and the cameraman decides the lighting needs to change and then you spend maybe five or ten minutes moving lights around and checking the picture, nobody complains about that. But when the sound people say there's a buzz and we need to fix it then that's viewed differently, isn't it?

GP: It is. I don't know if it's due to the fact that obviously everyone can see the lights and considers film a visual medium. Regarding the buzz, because only you've got the headphones and only you can hear it then perhaps everyone else thinks is an inconvenience because if *they* can't hear it then it can't be *that* bad. It mainly stems down to the fact that everyone considers film a visual medium – which of course it is – and I think *that's* the main reason everybody gets impatient. Especially on less experienced productions then it's seen as *less* important than the visuals and therefore less time should be devoted to it.

EG: Is that a side-effect of the poor training many people get nowadays, resulting in a lack of sound awareness and respect for sound on the film set?

GP: I don't know. I can only speak about the course I went on, which in all other respects was very good. I haven't been on any other film courses to comment on how other people are taught sound at other film schools.

EG: In the Studio era, every department crew member was trained to cooperate with the sound department. Now that Studios employ mainly freelance staff, education has devolved to the film schools; *some* of who have forgotten that sound is half a film. So now there's a certain degree of ignorance about sound.

GP: I would agree with you. Certainly the attitude is that sound is not seen as *as* important as getting the lights, shots and camera angles right.

EG: If sound isn't as important then what are Directors doing with it? Are they underestimating sound in *preproduction* and *production*, and deferring all considerations until post?

GP: I think that's generally the attitude. On a set then sound looks so simple to do. In layman's terms it's just someone holding a microphone over someone's head. How much thought do you have to give to *sound* dialogue as opposed to the aesthetics of *photography*? But I think it's at the Director's peril if he thinks sound is something not to be worried about and to be corrected in post. I think if you gave as much thought to sound as you do to visuals then you'd save yourself a hell of a lot of time in postproduction. If there's a buzzing in the background, it's far better to solve it on set than to think "*it doesn't matter, we'll solve it in post*". That just creates more headaches later on.

EG: You say that sound appears to be a simple case of holding a microphone and recording dialogue, but you're *not* just recording dialogue; you're *also* controlling the background noise in which it's being said - that's another important part of the job. So, when the job is defined as simply holding a microphone then it doesn't do it justice. What about the problem-solving aspects? If you don't take *responsibility* for sound on set then you won't care about the guy talking in the background or the poor room acoustics and so you won't *bother* trying to do anything about it. It'd be like the DoP ignoring the lighting or framing of shots. So maybe there's again some ignorance of what the full duties of the sound department actually are.

GP: I'm not speaking for *all* low-budget independent filmmakers but certainly in my experience the sound person is just the guy that holds the mike and that's it. It's seems like a very simple job.

EG: Do you remember what happened on the first day of shooting *The Last Time I Saw You*, when I told you that the Boom Op was arriving a few minutes late? Without hesitation, one of the crew who'd overheard our conversation suggested we use a runner instead. I was shocked by the suggestion because it implied that a Boom Operator's job requires no experience. I remember replying that the Boom Operator's job is a *skilled* one and that I'd do it myself until he turned up.

GP: Yes, the attitude was "*anyone can hold a boom mike*".

EG: If the Focus Puller was late, would somebody ask a runner to pull focus?

GP: No! But focus pulling is seen as a skilled job; holding a microphone isn't. On a film set, focussing is a delicate job but booming is just a man holding a stick – that's how it *appears*.

EG: And so there's a lack of education about what booming entails?

GP: Yes.

EG: I've actually seen this happen: you give a boom pole to a runner and they'll not only hold the mike too far away but they won't point it in the right place – at the actor's mouth. I guess something similar would happen if you asked a runner to pull focus. Interestingly, the two jobs are analogous. The Boom Op follows the actor's blocking and points (focuses) the microphone in the right position along each part of the path. The microphone has to be in the right place at the right time to pick up the required balance of direct and reverberant sound. The recording can't be *too* reverberant otherwise it won't be acceptable to a modern audience; nowadays our ears are accustomed to a close-up sound. The average runner doesn't know that a Boom Op places the microphone at the *edge* of the frame and negotiates the microphone position with the Camera Operator, *not* allowing the mike to be any further away than is *absolutely* necessary.

GP: Do you think you can get away with it though?

EG: No, you can't. If you've got too much reverb, the recording is useless; it won't be of professional quality. There's nothing you can do in post to *remove* reverb - you can only *add* it.

GP: It comes down to the fact that if I knew nothing about film and I was on a film set, I would see a DoP barking orders and the gaffer and grips running around adjusting lights, the Focus Puller carefully measuring distances with a tape and lots of other very skilled technical activity going on. Then if I looked over at the sound people, I'd see a man fiddling with some knobs at a mixing desk and somebody holding a long stick; it doesn't look particularly skilful or difficult.

EG: Well, it depends. The average person can't operate this thing (pointing to a Sound Devices 442 mixer) or even hold a boom pole properly. But the hidden part is the technical knowledge that's needed to do the job and solve problems; the more you know, the better prepared you are.

GP: Also, the camera department needs a lot more people to make a shot look interesting than you need to record sound.

EG: In the camera department then you need at least three people to run the camera (Camera Operator, Focus Puller and Clapper Loader). Lighting and Grip are really separate departments. A basic production sound crew *also* needs three people: the Production Sound Mixer, Boom Operator and Sound Assistant. Even the Sound Assistant's job is an important one, filling out Sound Reports and helping the Boom Operator with cabling and keeping a safe and clear path for the Boom Op when they need to walk backwards or sideways; it's all about being part of a specialised *team*; that's not something a runner can do skilfully without a lot of experience and technical knowledge.

GP: So what experience do *you* have Eddy and how did you get involved in The Sound Manifesto?

EG: Well, I'm a *Director of Audiography* – meaning I'm responsible for *all* sound on a film from start to finish - as well as a *Production Sound Mixer* working on low-budget productions. I've had an interest in music and sound from a young age, when I was into Hi-Fi, Rock, Classical music and Stockhausen! At first I wanted to be a sound technician for BBC Radio 3, so I applied several times but didn't get in. I thought that getting a degree in electrical & electronic engineering might increase my chances but it didn't. By now (1986) I'd learnt computer programming so I became a software engineer. I guess if someone had told me that I could get work as a sound recordist in film then I'd

have probably done it. But since that never happened, almost two *decades* passed until one day, after working about thirteen years in software and IT, I realised I needed a change and learnt some multimedia skills. Shortly afterwards, in early 2000, I started to teach a multimedia degree course at university where I eventually found myself writing a module in *movie production*. The research I did for that module got me interested in filmmaking. I taught the students *double-system sound* - where sound is recorded separately onto a sound recorder and not directly into the camera. I could have taught just *single-system* straight into the back of the video camera but by teaching students how to record sound separately with a clapperboard, and to combine sound and picture in a video editor, they learnt the same *synchronisation* technique used in filmmaking. It was 2005 before I started to think seriously about getting personally involved in filmmaking.

GP: And this eventually led to The Sound Manifesto.

EG: Yes - mainly because of something remarkable that happened while I was researching my course in *movie production* in the summer of 2000. I had dozens of questions to ask about filmmaking but I didn't know any filmmakers, so I remembered there are hundreds of *newsgroups* (the forerunner of Forums and Blogs) on the Internet, where you can go and get help from experts on any topic. One of the questions that really bugged me was who the Production Sound Mixer reports to on a film set. I just couldn't see it. I'd read many books but they gave *different* answers. There's a well-known book on directing that said the sound mixer "answers to" the *Director of Photography* - which I thought was *highly* unlikely! Why would a busy DoP be concerned with sound on set? Another book said it was the *Director* - which seemed logical except that I wasn't convinced the Director was particularly concerned about sound, even though they *should* be! A third book said it was the *Producer* - which was an odd thing to say because some Producers aren't always on set, so how would you address day-to-day issues? So in short, I was confused! Eventually I found an Internet newsgroup called RAMPS (rec.arts.movies.production.sound) and asked the experts my question: "*who does the sound mixer answer to?*" I started to get some replies and realised that most of these guys were Production Sound Recordists from Hollywood and New York - so they knew what they were talking about! I had to go off somewhere for a few days but when I returned I logged-in to check the replies again. It was 1 am and I was about to go to bed when I saw *dozens* of replies, so I knew something was up. After reading a little further, it became obvious that I'd opened up a can-of-worms. There was a *major* gripe from what seemed like every sound recordist on the planet! Each had a story to tell of how sound had taken *second* place on several of their productions [1]. Remember, these were *professional* sound recordists, not some newbies working on a no-budget shoot; and yet they were *still* unhappy about the attitude of their professional colleagues towards the sound department. I finished reading all the replies by 4 am and I was surprised at what happened next! One of the leaders of the discussion thread, John Coffey - a sound mixer who runs a sound store in Hollywood - wrote that this was one of *the* most important threads they'd ever had on RAMPS and drafted a letter, which he called "*An Open Letter from your Sound Department*" [2] and is now read, quoted and used by sound professionals around the world. The letter was sent to the *Writer's Guild*, the *Producer's Guild* and the *Director's Guild* of America, in the hope of making them more aware of the feelings of their sound department colleagues in film. So, in short, I was staggered to find that my simple question had caused ructions in Hollywood! All this happened in August 2000. After mulling over these issues for several years, in 2005 I decided to become a Production Sound Mixer. Although sound seemed to be the underdog of the filmmaking world - certainly less glamorous than photography - it was nevertheless an area I was interested in and it was also an area that clearly

needed some help and support. I thought the best way to address the issues of sound in film was to educate the filmmakers themselves – since the film schools clearly weren't doing a good enough job. Before starting work on film productions, I remembered the RAMPS "Open Letter" episode and decided to lay down some working principles so that I *wouldn't* end up feeling the same way as those sound guys from Hollywood; most of who appeared to be so jaded and bitter by their experiences. Fairly soon, Yang Xu and Rafal Flejter joined me to form the first crew of The Sound Manifesto. From the "Open Letter" [2] and David Yewdall's book *The Practical Art of Motion Picture Sound* [3] I distilled seven principles that were eventually formulated into *The Sound Manifesto* [4]. In 2006, we started *internal* training for six months - I thought it unfair to use other people's productions as our *training* ground; after that, we felt ready to work on *external* film productions. Our first film was shot in 2007; a cute short called *Pop Art* directed by Amanda Boyle [7] and starring the young Bill Milner. *Pop Art* was also the first film production to subscribe to *The Sound Manifesto*.

GP: So what exactly is *The Sound Manifesto*?

EG: *The Sound Manifesto* is a set of principles by which producers, directors and, indirectly, the crew agree to work on any given film production. It's a long overdue manifesto of beliefs about how to approach sound in film productions that anyone can subscribe to openly. The *first* principle states the obvious fact that sound plays a critical role in movie production and deserves the same attention as photography. The *second* principle states that sound communicates *most* of the emotional impact of a movie. You can prove this to yourself by turning down the sound on a film and observing how you respond to *just* the moving images.

GP: So you mean that sound is the key emotional factor in a film, *not* the visuals?

EG: Absolutely! Music and sound can move you in ways that a picture can't. That's why music is so important to most of us. The *third* principle of the Manifesto says that effective sound planning starts in preproduction; it can't wait until production or postproduction. Planning for sound includes thinking about the budget, sound locations, audio workflow, sound personnel, sound design, audio equipment and the management of all the resources necessary to achieve the Director's vision. So making sure there's a powerful sound department representative present on your production at an early stage is a *critical* success factor. Current filmmaking practice hires a *Supervising Sound Editor late* in preproduction to manage postproduction sound; but the absence of a sound manager at the *beginning* of preproduction almost guarantees problems right from the start. Often, by the time the *Supervising Sound Editor* turns up, you've missed several opportunities to organise and manage the sound on your film. To begin with, the Director may have unwittingly chosen a noisy location or the Producer may have under-budgeted for the equipment needed in production. Planning for sound in *preproduction* is the weakest link in Western filmmaking, so perhaps we should learn something from the Eastern world where, since at least the late 1950's, Bollywood filmmakers have employed a *Director of Audiography* in preproduction - probably because of the complex mix of sound, music and choreography found in Hindi films [5]. The *fourth* Manifesto principle states that movie productions should employ a *Director of Audiography* (DoA) to manage the sound department from the *start* of preproduction through to postproduction. By the way, the American film industry introduced the role of *Sound Designer* in the mid-1970s to mean a *creative* Supervising Sound Editor [6]. Soon the job description grew to include the *preproduction* management duties of a *Director of Audiography* - some twenty years after Bollywood! In Britain the role of *Supervising Sound Editor*

gradually equated to that of *Sound Designer* [8]. So now we have *two* more names for a *Director of Audiography*. The *fifth* Manifesto principle believes that the *Director of Audiography* is an integral part of a creative, collaborative management team, led by the Director together with the Director of Photography, Production Designer and Music Director. The management team are employed from the *onset* of preproduction to manage the design of creative solutions to all the challenges of the film. By coming together at an early stage, they're more likely to be collaborate and cooperative across departments. The *sixth* principle says that in order to achieve high quality sound then you need the cooperation of *every* department head and *every* crew member. For example, if the crew doesn't understand the importance of staying silent on set during a take then that attitude might escalate production and postproduction costs. The *final* principle of *The Sound Manifesto* states that once a production has decided to recognise the importance of sound then it should communicate that fact to *every* member of the crew. Following that, the sound department can then expect the understanding, respect and cooperation of the *whole* production team. Meaning the situation I described earlier, where a crew member suggested replacing a Boom Operator with a runner, simply couldn't happen; the Boom Operator's job is as skilled as the Focus Puller's and since sound is a critical *quality* issue on your production then you'd respect the skill of the Boom Operator and wouldn't take the risk of using an unskilled employee to do a skilled job. When a Producer and Director sign *The Sound Manifesto* then the Director has to think harder about fixing sound problems on set or in post. If there's a problem during principal photography then the heads of department collaborate and find a solution. If that's not possible then yes, they might have to agree to fix it later – maybe in post. This is where the *Director of Audiography* can advise the Director how a sound problem *could* be fixed. If the DoA can't see a way of removing the sound of a hammer-drill from recorded dialogue then yes, maybe you have a problem; but you also need to *agree* a solution before moving on. For example, you might agree that you'll need to schedule the actor to make a wild track recording of the *same* lines later that day; otherwise you'll need to agree to ADR those scenes in post, with the possible risk of losing your actor's performance. As usual, the Director has the final say but the decision is made with respect to the specialised knowledge of each department head.

GP: Why do you think that sound is given short-shrift compared to anything else?

EG: The RAMPS "*Open Letter*" discussion had one or two theories! Following silent films, sound was added in the late 1920s but some influential academics and filmmakers felt it was a retrograde step. In America and Europe they argued it was an unnecessary addition to an essentially artistic *visual* medium. Of course all of that has changed; now most people don't have the patience to watch *silent* films. But filmmaking had over thirty years to develop *without* sound; the whole film industry was already established by the time sound technology had matured in film. When sound finally commercialized in the early 1930s, it became *so* popular that it helped establish some of the big Hollywood Studios. Those Studios had sound departments, each of which had an influential *Sound Director* who'd stamp his name on each film. Because of this management structure, sound in films was never neglected. Before shotgun mikes were invented they'd be using recording studio mikes. This meant the film studio was built with sound recording in mind, which is why it's still called a *Sound Stage*. Every head of department and crew member was trained to understand the needs of the sound department. Any problems and the *Sound Director* would come down and sort things out with a personal touch!

GP: When you watch a really good film with good sound then you don't notice it.

EG: Yes, sound works at the subconscious level - but so does a lot of visual stuff too.

GP: Sometimes when I watch a film, if it's got really beautiful shots then I can really appreciate it and I come out thinking it was beautifully lit or beautifully filmed – even if it's a poor film. But I don't think anyone has ever come out of a film saying “that had fantastic sound, didn't it?”

EG: Well, it's not impossible! It's just a reflection of how aware you are of these things. But I often come out of films *not* having focussed on the sound, because it was such an integral part of the whole experience and it was done well.

GP: If it's done well then you don't notice it but if it's done badly then it stands out more than anything else.

EG: Yes, that's the problem when you don't treat sound with the respect it deserves. Now that everyone's making cheap films, live *locations* are the most common setting since proper Sound Stages are well beyond the means of the no-budget filmmaker. There was never a time when you could just shoot on location and expect it to be perfectly quiet but ambient noise has become worse in recent times. We've got more people, animals, aeroplanes, cars, trucks, air conditioning systems, electrical appliances, radio transmission signals and interference to mess up production sound. The fact that we now rely so much on locations means they've become our Stage – the main problem is that the “Stage” is not a *Sound* Stage and there is limited control over background noise. All this amounts to a game of *sonic* Russian roulette when you turn up on set, often resulting in a cleaning-up operation later in post. It's practically impossible nowadays to expect a location to be silent; nobody's going to wait until it *is* before you shoot - that's impractical and you'd be waiting till the cows come home! It's the job of the Production Sound Mixer to tell the Director when it's silent *enough*. If no-budget films continue to shoot on location then we're going to have to accept noisier backgrounds in recordings and more post processing and ADR work – which is an expense that no-budget shoots can't really afford and certainly don't budget for beforehand. So the emphasis for no-budget filmmakers will be more on making the right choices in preproduction – which means choosing the best locations you can find for production sound recording; and those locations need to be audited by your sound department.

GP: That's one of the things I remember from *The Last Time I Saw You*.

EG: Yes, we made sure the locations were good for sound. Talking of locations, a Sound Mixer friend of mine worked on a location recently that turned out to be a working factory; so there wasn't much silence to work with. The background of most takes was spoiled by constant talking, trolley noises and banging; there was nothing he could do to control it. The only consideration the producer and director gave when scouting the location was to find somewhere that looked good. They *should* have scouted with a member of their sound department; now they're faced with an additional ADR bill.

GP: For *The Last Time I Saw You* I remember going with you and the DoP to each location and it was *exactly* the same thing. At the beginning I thought “*if it looks good then that's fine*”. But there are other things you have to consider. Is it near a road? Is there a refrigerator or a machine? Can it be switched off? [One publican refused]. There are so many other things I never really thought about.

EG: Yes - you need to bring the person responsible for *sound* on your production. There's no guarantee that anyone else, not even a *professional* Location Scout, will be qualified to assess the sound issues; they might ignore sound completely and concentrate only on the Director's wishes. If a Director is unaware of the noise and acoustics at a given location, it will cost the production later on in post. If the film is a ten minute short then maybe that's not such a big problem. Equally, if it's a fifty million dollar Studio feature then maybe that's not a problem either since the Studio will find the necessary finishing funds. It just depends on how much money you've got to correct mistakes. In general, the smaller the production, the less money you've got for corrections. Independent no-budget *feature* film makers should be *particularly* careful about choosing good locations because they are the most vulnerable financially.

GP: So in your experience with no-budget independent productions, how aware are they, before you come onboard, of the importance of sound? Is it a sorry state of affairs out there or is there hope in certain areas?

EG: Well, because we tend to filter-out productions that disagree with our Manifesto then we usually end-up working for productions that try hard to be more sound-conscious. But, in general, awareness of sound among Directors is quite rare.

GP: Do any people disagree with *The Sound Manifesto*?

EG: I should have said "won't sign the Manifesto". Nobody yet has disagreed with it but the problem is they have to *implement* it when they sign-up. For some productions that's a big *constraint* and I guess they don't want to be shackled. Perhaps some feel it's not really *that* important; I suspect a few productions even think it's a lot of fuss over nothing! Sometimes it's not the Manifesto but our terms & conditions that are the sticking point. That's because we always charge for the *hire* of our equipment, however many productions expect us to work for *expenses only* and to lend them our equipment for *free*. "Blagging" is a very common practice in no-budget filmmaking today.

GP: Hmm ... well, as an independent filmmaker, you're taught to try and get as much for free as you can – aren't you?

EG: Yes but ... for example, we're recording this conversation on a professional Sound Devices 442 mixer costing £3000 new. Where am I supposed to get the money to buy this equipment when everybody wants to hire it for free?

GP: Speaking for myself, it *could* be worth £50 for all I know. I don't know anything about sound equipment. If you're not *into* sound equipment or not had much experience with it then you don't have much idea what things cost. Perhaps that's why some people feel they don't have to pay.

EG: Ignorance is bliss! Professional industry standard equipment costs a lot of money but the production either doesn't know or care. Sometimes the entire production budget is less than the cost of our sound equipment!

GP: Again, I think it's down to ignorance. I had no idea how much these things cost.

EG: Most professional mikes cost well over £1000 each – and second-hand ones are not much cheaper. A Sound Devices 744T recorder is worth £4000, so my bag could have £7000 worth of

equipment in it, which is more than the HD camera on a typical no-budget production! Of course sound people keep quiet about the cost of their equipment for security reasons.

GP: Are people generally ignorant of that fact?

EG: We're often asked by no-budget Producers about the equipment we own as a *prerequisite* to getting hired. So much for *experience*! Directors usually have no idea how much professional sound equipment costs and many admit that they are sound technophobes which, when translated, means either "*I've got enough on my plate without thinking about sound*" or "*I don't understand how to use sound in my film*" – which is another good reason for hiring a *Director of Audiography*.

GP: So in your experience, independent filmmakers are more than happy to pay £50 a day for a five-grand camera but if you come and ask the same for *sound* equipment then they look at you incredulously? Is that what you've come up against?

EG: No, because our terms & conditions spell out what we charge, so they either agree to pay or not.

GP: Do some people actually say no to the hire fee for your equipment?

EG: Yes, but I haven't had too many problems for the reasons I've just given. Whether you pay to hire a sound recordist's *equipment* or you pay for their *labour*, you *should* pay professionals something otherwise how are they supposed to make a living? To add insult to injury, some no-budget productions hire equipment from a hire-facility instead of hiring it from the sound recordist. Producers need to think this through. It's *always* cheaper to hire the sound recordists own equipment and let's face it, they deserve the money since they're *supporting* your production by working for far less money than their Union rate. The bottom line is that it's not sustainable to expect people to work for nothing. If you're paying people nothing *and* those people can't get any other paid work, all that'll happen is the experienced people are driven out of the industry; this has already happened to some professional sound recordists. What you're left with is a glut of inexperienced people barely worth hiring for their skills. No-budget productions seem to have little choice but to employ these people because of the *equipment* they own rather than for their *skills* and *experience*; unfortunately that's how the art of *blagging* is slowly killing the golden goose.

GP: It's a double-edged sword because if you're very new, starting out and want to make a short film but you've only got £1000, and you want *good* sound but it'll cost you £600 for a six day shoot, then that's all you budget gone practically, isn't it?

EG: Yes but isn't it misguided to think you can make a film for £1000? Wouldn't it be better to ask "*how much is this film going to cost?*" and then try to raise *that* amount money?

GP: So what would you say to someone who is trying to start out with a tiny, tiny budget?

EG: It depends on what they hope to achieve. If it's a short film for their personal show-reel then fair enough; but if it's a *business* venture then first of all I'd ask them to answer the question "*are you a producer or a director?*" If they're a director then I'd say "*find yourself a producer*". If they're a producer then I'd say "*find yourself a great story and a great director*". If they say they're both producer *and* director then I'd say "*you're making a mistake – the two roles are incompatible*". One role is about financing, resourcing and distributing the film, the other is about telling a great story

and shooting it; trying to do both at the same time means you won't have enough time to do either role justice. Chances are your film won't stand a chance.

GP: Don't you think you can be both a Producer and a Director?

EG: Not at the same time. It's *possible* to wear one hat at different times but they're fundamentally conflicting roles. If you've got £5000 to make a film and you put your Directors hat on, who's stopping you from blowing all the money on just the principal photography?

GP: ... and leave nothing for the marketing and distribution?

EG: Exactly. Unless you're very knowledgeable, experienced and well-disciplined in doing these jobs then you're probably going to make wrong decisions and blow the producing, directing or both. On the other hand a separate producer can politely tell the director (because they have the financial muscle to do so) *not* to slip the schedule again by spending all day on just *two* setups of *twenty* takes each when the schedule required *five* setups. What's more, the First AD can monitor the situation and report progress to the producer, which is a *vital* feedback loop in controlling the project timescale and budget. If you take the producer's role seriously then the first thing you'll do is find a really great, marketable script – which sadly means it's probably not *yours*. To find and pay for that script then you'll need money – to buy the option and sign some contracts. Then you'll need the talent to make the film. Every film needs *people* and *resources* and even if you can blag those, you *won't* be able to blag marketing and distribution. So when you finally reach your credit card limit, you'll *still* need a dedicated Producer to find funding for your film *and* pay those people who helped you make it.

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