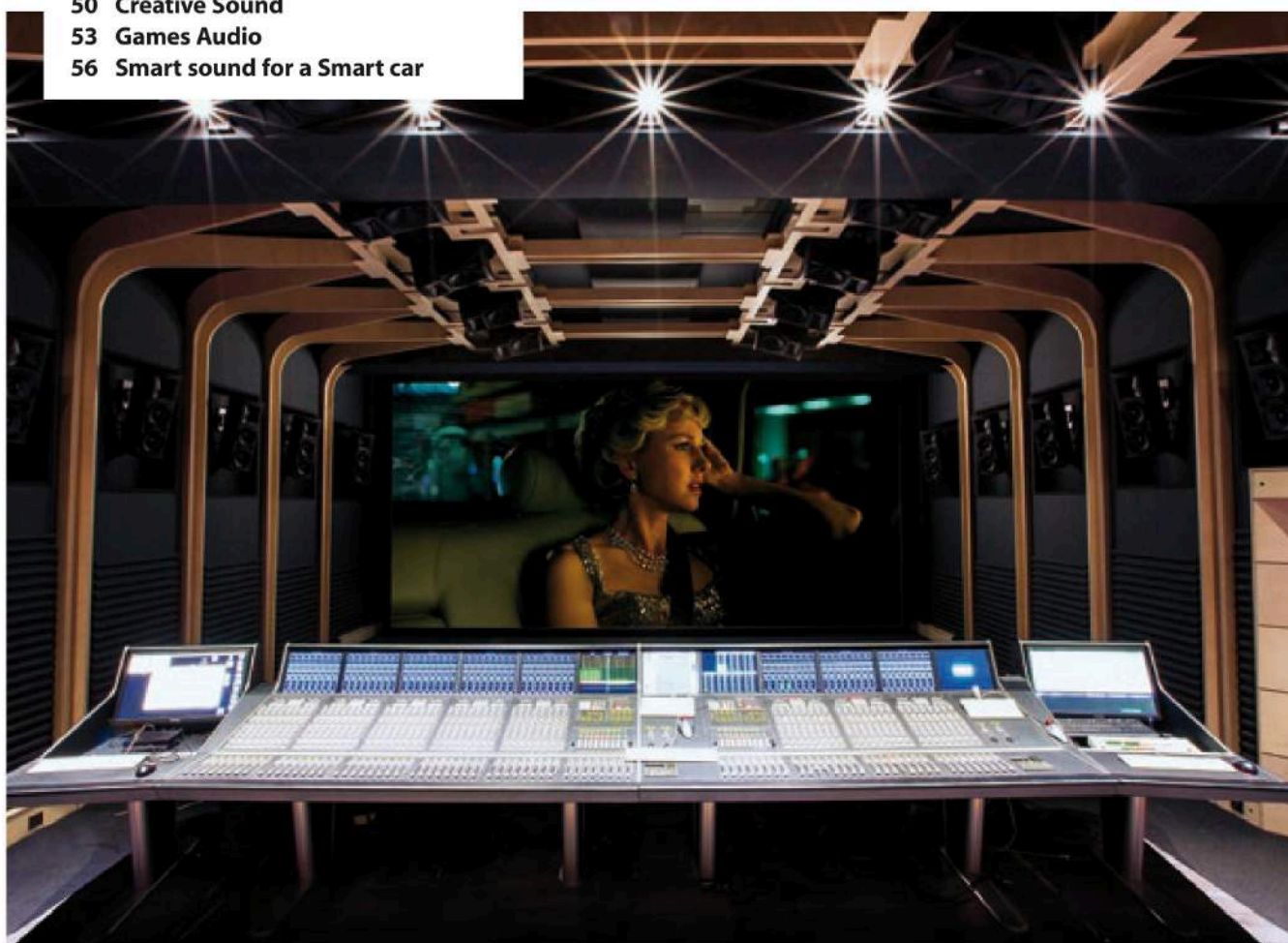


AUDIO FOR BROADCAST,
POST, RECORDING AND
MULTIMEDIA PRODUCTION

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Atmos main auditorium with Harrison console.

Creative Sound

Paris has a new complex of post studios that, among other things, houses a Harrison MPC5 console in an Atmos mix theatre.

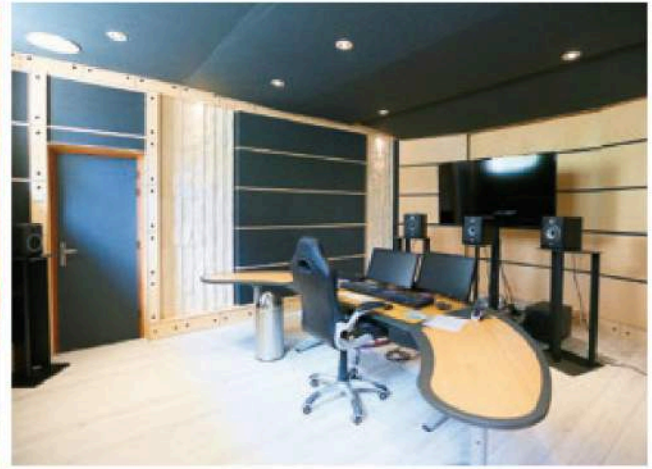
GISELE CLARK reports on the genesis of the facility.

Independent film postproduction facility Creative Sound in Paris has installed a large format Harrison MPC5 console as the centrepiece of a 1000sqm complex of auditoria in the centre of the French capital. The main 470m² auditorium, which houses the Harrison console, has been designed for Dolby's Atmos. Facility director Cristinel Sirli's dream has been to become a major player in the cinema industry and to sound engineer for film. After preliminary studies in film operation in his native Romania, he came to France and learnt audio for himself working in various television postproduction studios. Cristinel remembers this TV period as a very educational one and it's where he learnt to work fast because the time was always short with tight schedules.

Within a few years of freelance working, Cristinel had clientele who were willing to follow him so he decided to open his own studio. Founded in 2000, the Creative Sound Company began its activities in mixing for TV series and documentaries. However, it is the new generation of Romanian filmmakers that will allow Creative Sound to prevail in the big league: In 2007, Cristian Mungiu and Cristian Nemescu won respectively the Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or with 4 mois, 3 semaines, 2 jours and the prize un Certain Regard with California dreamin', both mixed by Cristinel on the facility's SSL Avant+ console.

However, the facility's auditorium was too small to get the appropriate Dolby certification, which is why they were on the lookout for new facilities. The former cinema Le Grand Pavois became available and Cristinel went up against rival interest from a restaurant and the local Casino supermarket and triumphed. After dismantling the premises, four auditoria emerged including one with a dual-operator 56-fader SSL C-300.





Unfortunately, as a victim of success, the site showed its limitations pretty quickly — one large auditorium for mixing film cannot deal with unexpected changes in schedules and the recording area needed more volume plus they required a proper Foley room. Cristinel searched for other premises nearby and eventually found a gem of a site that was still in the 15th arrondissement of Paris — 1000m² without bearing beams or walls, a 5m ceiling, and daylight too. Located on the ground floor of a building from 1972, the premises originally served as parking lot for limousines and then became the sales operation and storage area for a company specialising in stamps for philatelic enthusiasts. The space was larger than he wanted and that did not help the financing but despite the crisis in the world of film and broadcast Cristinel managed to convince banks to fund the project. He explains: 'I got the support of banks and the proper management of Creative Sound because I have an obsession with cost control and I do everything to avoid unnecessary spending, especially at the leadership,' he explains. 'I am the manager of Creative Sound but I make my living by mixing with a salary of a sound mixer. Word of mouth works better than sales managers at the head of the company!'

On the advice of long-time friend Philippe Guérinet from Solid State Logic Cristinel appointed Michel Deluc to handle the acoustics at the new site. While Michel had not built film auditoria before he has designed many sound studios to the great satisfaction of his customers. The resulting quality is seen not only in the main Atmos auditorium, but also in the smaller rooms that are between 16 and 40m². They met in 2012 and Michel also advised Cristinel on the selection of the companies involved on site for the build, but no architect was used. Cristinel drew multiple versions of the plans before reaching his final version in January 2013. 'I know the needs of my clients in terms of circulation spaces and relaxation areas,' he explains. 'By visiting the premises, I visualised almost immediately the best way to use the space, what volumes to be allocated to auditoriums because I am primarily a sound mixer! Architects do not have that field experience and do not listen to my requests ...'

Cristinel is well known in the French film business as someone who is straight-talking and wants to work in the traditional manner — on an audio console. His view on this crucial matter remains unchanged over time. 'As long as I can pay for a real audio console, I would choose it for both artistic and practical reasons every time. For me, even today, I just can't mix with a mouse,' he says. With this in mind he set off in search of his Holy Grail and visited several of the most famous auditorium mix facilities in the United States (which included Skywalker Sound, Sony Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Warner, Todd-AO, Wildfire, etc.) This endurance exercise drew Cristinel's attention to Harrison consoles. He was seduced by the ergonomics of 'real console' products by the firm from Nashville with 'real channels' in the tradition of classic consoles. Together with Terry Nelson, the distributor for Harrison in Switzerland and France, he went to Munich to a studio that has been equipped with an MPC4 for almost ten years (Harrison's previous generation film console) and to Istanbul to look at the Trion series — more recent but designed for music recording and mixing applications. He was impressed by the robust quality and testimony from users who praised the fact that they never needed the service department even after several years of use; his decision was made.

'I knew the Dolby Atmos was about to happen and I wanted my new console to integrate the Atmos control without the need for external plug-ins,' he says. 'Philippe Guérinet and his colleagues from SSL were honest enough to tell me that they could not offer this feature immediately. At AMS-Neve, I was told that the DFC was already integrating it, which is true, but I wanted a newer generation console ... so when I went to Harrison in Nashville, I saw that the Dolby Atmos RMU processors were communicating well with the MPC5. There was a real exchange between the two brands. And when you see the perfect integration of Canadian synchroniser ION Soundmaster within the control surface, you cannot imagine that these two machines were not coming from the same manufacturer!'

'Regarding the question of after sales service, the solution that was proposed to me was radical and reassuring: Harrison delivered me every module in the console in two units so that I can replace any of them in a few minutes in the case of a failure,' he continues. 'Everything looks oversped on the Harrison MPC5. In the Linux-based system, the manufacturer has decided to allocate a computer to each 8 fader-tray, plus one computer per operator (the Creative Sound console is a dual-operator one).'

Apart from the offices and public spaces, the studios are destined to have ten acoustically treated rooms dedicated to sound work. The largest, which is already operational, is 110m² and serves as the auditorium for Foley sound effects and dubbing. It is equipped with an SSL C10HD. The monitors are JBL Cinema Series speakers powered by Crown amplifiers as in the other rooms, as well as in the Le Grand Pavois studios.

The twin 100m² mixing theatres are located on the other side of the long main corridor. The first has been operational since January 2014 and provides mixing in Dolby Atmos with 45 speakers (16 of them in the ceiling). It houses the first MPC5 Harrison console delivered, with 1024 inputs, 80 faders and 64 physical channels, with full integration of Dolby Atmos processing. Two master sections allow operation by two engineers in dual operator mode. With its two producer desks mounted on each side at an angle of 10 degrees, the total console surface is 5.75m long.



Terry Nelson, Cristinel Sirli, Gary Thielman (MD of Harrison).

The second auditorium, which was still under construction during my visit, will host an SSL C300 with 72 faders and will be used for 7.1 but is prewired for Atmos. Two 20m² rooms will be dedicated to TV mixing, one of them housing a small recording area for voice. On the other side of the patio, the smallest TV auditorium (16m²) will make a nice sound installation with a cabin for voiceover applications.

Two future picture calibration rooms are planned, both with 5.1 JBL Cinema Series monitoring, the larger with a screen wider than 6m and a 4K Barco video projector, the smaller with a 4m screen and 2K projection. The system dedicated to the calibration will depend on the partner who will invest in the place or even the choice of technicians, some of who may bring their own equipment. Several people and groups of people have expressed an interest in being involved.

The acoustic design is motivated by quality and the need to meet the requirements of flexibility. For example, when a calibration theatre isn't being used for picture work it can be used as a studio for premix or editing work. This ability to adapt and respond to potential customer demands is at the core of Cristinel's facility design. If a director doesn't want to leave the Atmos mixing room for the calibration of the image, he doesn't have to — given that he's got the budget for it.

The goal, especially in difficult economic times, is to welcome all types of client in need of sound services, whether that's for television, film or music production. One plan is to rent a room for shorter or longer periods to a film composer, a cinema sound editor, a mastering engineer, who will benefit from an acoustically reliable environment and the synergy of being in the building with the big auditoria for the finalisation of a project.

From his experience with the Grand Pavois, Cristinel understood the importance of anticipating the specific demands of freelance engineers. Should the choice of mic preamps not meet a client's taste, it is easy to patch in their favourite preamp in a few minutes and that goes for analogue or digital as all cabling is in place.

Since its opening, the studio has produced the soundtrack of *Entity*, a French short film in Dolby Atmos by Andrew Desmond and Jean-Philippe Ferré (presented in Paris during the Week of Sound), the French version of the latest film with Meryl Streep and Julia Roberts *A Summer in Osage County* by John Wells, the sound effects for *Dans la Cour* by Pierre Salvadori and *Bon Rétablissement* by Jean Becker; the postsync of *Fonzy* by Isabelle Dorval, the smell of *Us* by Larry Clark and *Addicts* by Tonie Marshall; the postsynch, sound effects and mixing of *Gemma Boveri* directed by Anne Fontaine, and that's only the beginning.

I'll leave the last comment to famous mixer Thierry Lebon who was at the studio with other visitors: 'It's nice to see an independent taking up the profession. In these times of gloom, it is an example that we would like to see followed by others!'

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