

Happy Birthday, WSM,
and
WELCOME

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From All of Us
at

WAYSIDE RECORD COMPANY

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The Unsung Heroes

Among the stars of the Nashville sound are such luminaries as Selby Coffeen, Charlie Bragg, Glen Snoddy, Jim Williamson, Mike Figlio, Ed Hudson, Lacy O'Neil, Charlie Bradley and Tom Sparkman. Then there are others you've never heard of such as Jim Malloy, Chuck Seitz, Bill Vandervort and Al Pachucki.

They've been at thousands of record sessions and made thousands of records. Yet you rarely see their names in print.

These are the mixers, the stereo-men, the back-ups, the maintenance men, the studio bookers—all part of that unsung department known in the recording business as engineering.

Ask any recording artist, ask any producer, and he'll tell you no modern recording could possibly be done without these geniuses of balance and blending.

"My music background helps," Coffeen says, "but there's more to it than that."

You probe a little and discover that this Columbia "mixer" not only was a serious student of music for 15 years, but was concertmaster for the Ford Symphony in Detroit, then worked dance bands, holds a degree in music, and finally turned to engineering "where the money is."

A mixer is an engineer who takes all of the instruments and voices from the recording studios and blends them into that perfect—or near perfect—sound.

"It's a little like baking a cake," Coffeen will tell you. "Not too much flour nor too much sugar; just the right ingredients to come out with the tasteful product."

Malloy also will tell you that overall balance is the important thing, and he should know. While engineering in Hollywood for RCA Victor he found that balance on sessions for such artists as Henry Mancini, Nelson

Riddle, Sammy Davis Jr., Tami Yuro, and Marty Page. In Nashville he has recorded Elvis Presley, Eddy Arnold, Paul Anka, Perry Como, Al Hirt, Johnny Tillotson and Roy Orbison, among others.

"There is no difference in the balance here in Nashville," Malloy said, "just in the sound." The sound, he explained, is primarily in the rhythm section.

"On the West Coast, every single note is read, every arrangement is pre-planned," he added. "Here in Nashville it's mostly head arrangements, or at least improvising of pre-arrangements. But no matter how they do it, balance has to be achieved."

Malloy obviously achieves it. He has won seven separate sound awards.

He and his fellow engineers all are members of NABET, and consequently draw a healthy scale for their work.

"I had some serious reservations five years ago when I left WSM," said O'Neill, Columbia mixer. "None of us knew how long the work might last." Now there is so much work that 11 engineers there can hardly keep up with the demand.

O'Neill was one of many sound engineers at the Nashville recording studios who got their "basic training" at WSM. Most of them worked under Aaron Shelton and Carl Jenkins, who had developed the first commercial recording studio in Nashville: Castle Recording.

Charlie Bragg, Glen Snoddy, Tom Sparkman and O'Neill are the one-time WSM engineers who subsequently moved to Columbia. Others are scattered at various recording studios around the city. A few others have moved to studios on the West Coast.

Columbia has instituted a policy this year of awarding gold records for mixers who engineer a session, the product of which eventually sells a million records.