



"Berger and Sides - apart from sounding like a classic American snack - are the Bond franchise of pro audio. They bring swagger, panache and an old-school style of doing things to a world weary of corporate megalomania and karate-chopped products."

## Phil Ward's audio musings . . .

### This month: Vue to a Kill

**Our local cinema is part of the VUE chain. At the moment it's celebrating 50 years of the James Bond movie franchise - one of my guilty pleasures - with the latest blockbuster Skyfall. I remember Ronald Reagan, in the 1980s, commenting that Bond was "an important cultural icon for our time", which tells you more about Reagan than Bond. By that time Roger Moore's character was already a ludicrous anachronism, and it's taken many years of Piers Brosnan and Daniel Craig to rescue anything of 007's flawed credibility. Yes, he still appeals to that part of every boy's development that is truly arrested, but what the hell. Sometimes you just want to blow stuff up.**

**Bond and his calamitous** retinue at least sound better than ever before. Digital cinema has completely reinvented the signal chain and relinquished compressed audio, so that the full dynamic range originally heard on the dub stage can - in the right hands - live again in the theatre. Time was when the director would sign off the print master and consign it to an unknown fate at the hands of a SPECTRE-like distribution process - compressed, crunched and striped onto a piece of film. Now the files are preserved throughout the pipeline, smuggled across borders intact and ready to face the most evil of acoustics.

**Meyer Sound has been on** a mission in this territory since it re-branded its Cinema Experience line as the EXP line of cinema products, created a "strategic taskforce" of key executives and parachuted them into the movie theatre market. One of these heroes at the time was Jim Sides, then business development director and a veteran of countless campaigns since uncorking Apogee Sound

for the first time somewhere near Napa Valley. Jim had already masterminded the conversion to EXP of European CinemaxX multiplexes in Copenhagen, Hamburg and several other towns and cities, and did even better than Sean Connery in Estonia by brokering yet more technical upgrades behind what used to be the Iron Curtain.

**That process continues, but** Jim has moved on. Vue Audiotechnik - no relation to the cinemas unless the EXP legacy gets that far, and only then through a previous marriage - is an intriguing composite of American charisma, German adroitness and Asian pragmatism. The brainchild of Sides and EAW refugee Ken Berger, Vue is offering a solid range of loudspeaker solutions: the flagship h-Class series; the workhorse a-Class series; and the contractor-friendly i-Class series - all manufactured between the US, Germany and China, with an iron grip on intellectual property exercised from the top.

**The business model unites the** founders with both branches of an established automobile audio manufacturer near Düsseldorf in Germany: Speaker Connection GmbH and Speaker Electronic GmbH, discovered by Berger while the idea for Vue was germinating and consolidated after meetings during ProLight&Sound in 2010. With mature facilities near Shanghai, the company also has hi-fi and portable PA interests, but represented a blank canvas for Vue's high-end pro audio vision. Convinced of all the usual details regarding quality control, trustworthy relationships and versatility, Vue was born.

**This summer has seen Vue** Audiotechnik on the road across the US. Harking back to the pioneering days of product demonstration out of the back of

a truck, the team rode into over 50 cities and got hands-on with hundreds of pro audio suppliers, large and small - then bought the sheriff a shot of bourbon, saddled up outside the saloon and headed out. It certainly worked: orders are coming in thick and fast.

**But Vue may be the first** manufacturer to take full advantage of its ability to apply grassroots understanding of the United States to a slowly emerging parallel in Europe. There's some way to go, but the EU does loosen many of the previously binding knots around distribution patterns and releases a wider range of potential partners into the rodeo: not just traditional, one-country exclusive distributors, but new breeds of cross-border traders with backgrounds in anything from dealership to rental and production. And that process begins now: Jim Sides is visiting Western Europe this month, lasso in hand.

**Berger and Sides - apart from** sounding like a classic American snack - are the Bond franchise of pro audio. They bring swagger, panache and an old-school style of doing things to a world weary of corporate megalomania and karate-chopped products. Yes, the Cold War is over but there's no shortage of action: somewhere in a secret, hollowed-out volcano Blofeld is still trying to brainwash the markets of the world with products that self-destruct; Sanchez is still running counterfeit microphones across the border; and Auric Goldfinger is still plotting to irradiate the world's supply of connectors by setting off an atomic bomb in Liechtenstein. If Vue Audiotechnik made a car it would be an Aston Martin, its cigarette lighter a Dunhill Broadboy Mk 2 and its gun a Walther PPK. Reagan would be proud.