

50 MPH: EPISODE 31

“NOW HEAR THIS”

Transcript (00:47:26)



KRIS TAPLEY

This is *50 MPH*!

[INTRO MUSIC]

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Pop quiz, hotshot!

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

There’s a bomb on a bus.

JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)

You’re deeply nuts, you know that?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)

Stay on or get off?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

If it drops below fifty...

SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)

Stay on or get off?!

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

...it blows up.

ALAN RUCK (as “Stephens”)

Oh, darn.

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

What do you do?

KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

What do you do?!

KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)

What do you do?

KRIS TAPLEY

I’m your host, Kris Tapley, and you’re listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont’s 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don’t forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let’s hit the road!

KRIS TAPLEY

Hello and welcome back as we forge ahead in the post-production phase of *Speed*. The last few weeks we have dug into the film editing, the post-production visual effects work and the film’s original score. Today we turn our gaze, or I should say our ears, to the post-production sound work, which will tie up all the various sonic elements of the film, including the score. This is typically the last phase before you have a finished film, and in the case of *Speed*, it would be an outright rush to the finish line. By now, the film has been firmly slotted for a June 10, 1994 release as James Cameron’s *True Lies* needs more time and will not make its intended date. So, Fox has a four-alarm fire on its hands if it’s going to get this film finished and ready to go out into the marketplace. We’re going to start today with sound re-recording mixer Gregg Landaker. Let me set him up a bit. First of all, when it comes to post-production sound, you have multiple what they call re-recording mixers in play. These are not production mixers, like David Macmillan, who we heard from during the production and principal photography episodes. David is out there capturing and mixing audio and most especially dialogue as they’re shooting. Re-recording mixers are taking that material in post-production, plus newly crafted and recorded material from sound editors, and really shaping the final sound mix with all those elements at their fingertips. Now, back to Gregg Landaker. Gregg is a legend in his field. In fact, all of the key personnel on *Speed*’s sound team are legends. They would end up winning both sound categories at the Oscars: Best Sound Mixing and Best Sound Effects Editing. There’s a long and evolving history of the sound categories at the Oscars and today, I think rightly – even though there are many different disciplines at play here – the entire field has been combined into a single award for Best Sound. But at the time, there were still two awards, and *Speed* won both. We’ll talk more about that at a later date, but let’s talk about Gregg. Gregg actually has four Oscars. In addition to *Speed*, he also won for *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Dunkirk*, with five other nominations besides for movies like *JFK*, *Waterworld*, *Twister*, *U-571* and *Interstellar*. He actually called it a career after that Oscar for *Dunkirk*. He was retired and Christopher Nolan lured him back for one last job, and talk about going out on top. Here is Gregg talking about the drastically abbreviated timeline for him and his team on *Speed*.

GREGG LANDAKER

We knew Ted Gagliano. He was the head of the post-production end over at 20th Century Fox movies. We had done other 20th Century Fox movies prior to that, but this one he came to us and says, "OK, Gregg, what are we going to do? I have this movie *Speed*. You know, Jan de Bont. I want you to do this movie. But here is the side to it." He says, "We've got 21 days total, all in." And I went, "Oh." And my head sunk down thinking, "How are we going to do it?" I said, "Give me the director's rough cut. Let me look at it first and I can tell you more." So, he gave me a rough cut and I watched the movie, and I went, "Oh my goodness." It was such a rush. So, after looking at it I went, "Twenty-one days." I said, "Ow, man. What I'm seeing as far as sound effects-wise in this movie, all these quick cuts," because, you know, they have to have sound on each cut. I'm thinking to myself, "How are we going to do this?" And I said, "Ted," I said, "the only way we can do this is have Steve Maslow over at Skywalker South do the dialogue." I said, "If we can get ahold of Universal, I will go over to Universal and I will do all of the key sound effects over at Universal on a dub stage." I said, "We've got to farm out the backgrounds and the Foley work." So, we had Sergio Reyes and Tenny over at Fox doing stage work over there. And I said, "This is the only way this is going to come together."

KRIS TAPLEY

When he says "Tenny" there I believe he's referring to sound mixer B. Tennyson Sebastian II, by the way. Now, Gregg mentioned Steve Maslow. Save for this or that production, Steve has been right there with Gregg for the ride going way back to that first Oscar for *The Empire Strikes Back*. This gives me a chance to discuss the division of duties. Sound re-recording mixers are specialized. Typically, one will handle purely sound effects. So, all the bangs and clangs and explosions, sirens, tires squealing, that kind of thing falls under Gregg's purview. On the other side of the console, so to speak, Steve Maslow is handling the mix on dialogue and music. Usually those elements go hand-in-hand, though sometimes you'll have two different mixers dedicated to dialogue and music separately. What's interesting, with that in mind, is Gregg is certified in all three elements and on Christopher Nolan movies, he actually handled sound effects and music. That's because Nolan, he says, believes the balance between music and effects is key on his movies. We'll get to Steve Maslow and the dialogue in a moment, but we're going to let Gregg keep holding our hand through this for now.

GREGG LANDAKER

So, I said, "OK, what we'll do is we'll start finaling. After each day of finals, at 7pm, we've got to break the stage at Santa Monica. I will still have to drive back over to Universal and dub all night to get some more key effects for the next day's reel that may go up. It was like, I'm doing 24/7, it's like, "Oh my God, I'm killing myself." I was working, you know, 20 hours a day as we started this project out. And now, here comes the kicker to it, is that, because I didn't have control of what was coming off of the other stages, all of a sudden now the amount of pre-dubs.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, let me jump in. We're already getting pretty technical here and I don't know that I can produce a crash course in sound design, but as we go, as always, I'll try to let our subjects educate. Gregg is talking about pre-dubs. Here's some further detail on that.

GREGG LANDAKER

Alright, boiled-down, pre-dubs, from taking a thousand sound clips down into a manageable 5.1. So, that is a pre-dub. You're pre-dubbing sounds down. You know, key elements, like, you know, sirens will be – God, we had hundreds of tracks of different sirens and stuff like that. Now, that has to be boiled down, because you can't fit that all on the console doing the final. So, you have to pre-dub those down to what you think that movie should sound like in a 5.1 sound. And so, you have to do your key effects. You have to do your vehicles. You have to do your bus. You have to do your squad cars. You have to do your background cars. You have to do your sirens, helicopters, guns – each one has to boil itself down. Even after boiling all of it down from all the thousands of units that Steve Flick had presented to us – and by the way, he did a fantastic job – now, the problem was is that on the console itself over at Skywalker, we did – I don't remember how many pre-dubs we could handle, but what we had to start it out was I could take certain elements on the sound effects side, Stevie had all of his dialogue, all of the music taking up the other sides of the console. Now, we make a pass that way. Stevie's pretty happy with the sound of his dialogue and music, now, load that complete different new mix in. Now I have to take up the entire console with just sound effects. So, we had to make, like, two passes on each reel. It was the only way to do it because I couldn't control what was coming off of the other stages. You know, all of a sudden, they would hand me like five or six Foley pre-dubs. It's like, "Ooh, normally I work with down to two," but they wanted to make sure my hands weren't tied with certain elements. So, they went into it on the thing of saying, "Let Gregg have as much flexibility as possible," but that killed me on the end of, you know, doing the final version of it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Gregg mentioned Steve Flick there. He's talking about Stephen Hunter Flick, the supervising sound editor of *Speed*, and this is where we come to sound editing. This is a completely different discipline than sound mixing. It is the creation and recording of sound elements. And it's not just going onto a Foley stage and doing footsteps and surface crunches to match what's on screen, or going out into the field to record engines and things like that, although that's certainly part of it. It also includes things like dialogue editing, going deep into those audio tracks and manipulating them as needed. I mean, for example, you can go in and tweak an accent if the actor didn't quite nail it. But Stephen is, again, another legend. *Speed* is the only competitive Oscar he won, meaning there were other nominated films that he beat. But he did receive a special achievement Oscar for the sound editing of 1987's *RoboCop*. Again, the history of sound awards at the Oscars is robust. For a period in the '60s and '70s they handed out competitive Oscars, and then that went away for a while and they would drop these special achievement awards for films like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *The Black Stallion*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The River*. In 1986 I guess there just wasn't much of a field and so Stephen and his partner John Pospisil were recognized for *RoboCop*.

KRIS TAPLEY

Anyway, Stephen was previously nominated for *Poltergeist*, *Die Hard* and *Total Recall*, and he worked on everything from *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Point Break*, *Batman Returns*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Apollo 13*, *Twister*, *Starship Troopers*, Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* and *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Stephen is an incredibly smart and insightful dude. Both of his parents were musicians, so that becomes a big part of how he communicates thoughts and ideas. He's an instructor at USC's School of Cinematic Arts and must just be a heady experience for those kids. When you talk to him, the references are all over the place, from Robert Frost to Aristotle's cave to Charlie Parker and Bach. He'll start talking about when he learned judo later in life and will compare the extravagance of that to the comparable simplicity of karate to make a point about sound design for film. We first started talking by email a few years ago and he went out to the many sound editors on his team for *Speed* and came back with a dissertation on their work that was nothing if not illuminating, but extremely difficult to boil down for a podcast. I say all of that just to set this man up for you. So, let's meet *Speed*'s supervising sound editor Stephen Hunter Flick.

STEPHEN HUNTER FLICK

I think every modern director and writer, picture editor, DP, filmmaker, in their heart of hearts, believes they're part of a modern art movement. And as a sound designer, if I don't understand what they're trying to say in terms of story, how can I tell their stories? Because I'm in the same situation as a composer. I'm sure you talked to Mark Mancina, and Mark's great. I'm sure he has clients that tell him what to do, and the thing is, you can't listen to your clients. You have to listen to what they mean and not what they say, and then you have to find the story inside the work that resonates with the audience. And often, when I work with directors who are actually fairly accomplished musicians, some of the worst scores I've heard is when they Mickey Mouse the composer and niggling small, stupid changes, and it comes out, "Huh?" And basically, how a composer thinks is significantly different than how an instrumentalist thinks. So, if you have this dramatist leading the storytelling, who has no language skills to actually tell a composer what to do, it's really the same with me. There's no way for them to talk in a language of sound effects and sound, other than perhaps louder, softer, "Oh, I want clarinets. I wanted to do, you know, a Middle Eastern double-reed instrument. Oh, we'll have a piano, a harpsichord or, oh, a celeste." Right, magic, a celeste. Tinker bells. You know, high-pitch bells. So, clients can talk in basic language, but pretty much, they're unable to give you any specific direction because composers and sound designers speak a learned language. So, when I get hired on a piece, and maybe the composer gets hired before I do, most of the time, they generally haven't shown me the script. I'm supposed to sit down based upon a cut and understand what these filmmakers are trying to say and what they mean, whether or not they have said it. Whether or not they have accomplished their stated or unstated goal. So, I have to understand what they're trying to do and then figure out what the film actually does, and then help the film become itself. So, analytical listening is part of the heritage of musicians and heritage of sound designers. So, if I don't understand the history of storytelling as currently applied to motion pictures, how can I do my work? You know, show up cut a door close, go home?

So, all this is kind of, like, highfalutin and Flick's elevating his craft, but it's really the truth.

KRIS TAPLEY

I mean, I told you. Now, before we circle back to our re-recording mixers, we should probably talk about the gathering of the material they'll be working with, or more to the point, that Gregg Landaker will be working with on the sound effects side, so let's stick with Stephen for a bit.

STEPHEN HUNTER FLICK

I think *Speed* is the first modern edited picture. If you look at the truck chase on *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, it's slightly evolved from George Stevens-style shoot. This, this, this. The interior and exterior scenes are all really well defined, but they're not quite simultaneous. *Speed* has an operational field of simultaneous events, and the job of the sound design is to bind it together. You know when Joe Morton shows up on that tractor trailer? He's talking to Keanu. Keanu's on the tread of the bus and it cuts from Joe, medium shot Joe, Keanu in the doorway, Keanu, maybe a close-up. The people on the bus. But the scene is composed of this new kind of space. It's not just in the bus, out of the bus. It's all at once, so that the job of the sound designer is to bind all these different acoustical locations that have different qualities in their sound, because the inside of the bus does not sound like the outside of the bus. The wheels of the bus don't sound like the front of the bus. Joe Morton's trailer has a chig-chig-chig-chig-chig-chig-chig-chig-chig – a chatter and a flex. So, the job is to bind them all together so the story has a throughput.

KRIS TAPLEY

We're still in the realm of theory here, so let's move out into the field. Going through that dissertation I mentioned, Stephen had noted for me – through one of his sound effects recordists, Eric Potter – that the team went out to Temecula Airport to get a lot of fresh bus material.

STEPHEN HUNTER FLICK

We got the studio to fund recording expeditions. In 1978, when Dolby came around – and I know this is, like, 20 years later – but there were no modern sound effects libraries. So, we had to record everything. On *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, we recorded everything. Ben was the supervisor, Ben Burt, and Richard Anderson and I and Mangini, we all went out and recorded the entire movie for three weeks. We did the truck chase on Mulholland in the unpaved part north of the 405, back when you could actually record vehicles in Los Angeles and you didn't have the acoustic dissonance of the modern world. And because we just needed better stories. Otherwise, it would be, like, universal dog bark number one, door close number one, castle thunder from 1933 to '39 *Frankenstein*. And they all have their place. So, if we're going to do new and exciting, we had to have a palette of color, a palette of bus.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, again, I have far too much detail on what this recording expedition entailed, but for example, the engine of the bus is in the back, right? They found they could record the engine closely by removing a back panel in the bus interior. As Eric Potter put it, he could rig a stereo pair at a reasonable distance from the engine for a detailed but natural sound. As they were doing this, the interior of the bus became a windstorm of engine dirt, diesel exhaust and dust from the tarmac, because you've basically got a door to the engine open the entire time. They gathered sounds for orange cones being run over, smashing through a wooden barrier, things like that. Potter had a 1969 VW bus that he was going to do some body work on, so he just used that to crash into things and collect those sounds. They would also, by the way, have to go out and get recordings of the LAPD's NOTAR helicopter, meaning "no tail rotor," the helicopter you see Joe Morton flying around in throughout the movie. Because it was brand new and they had no recordings yet. Again, like Stephen said, you're putting together a palette.

STEPHEN HUNTER FLICK

Jan wanted a believability, but not with the neurosis of a Paul Verhoeven, who disbelieved any animated things on his film. One of the things that Paul emphasized on *RoboCop* was he believed in stories about people and the truthfulness of their relationships. Paul did not believe in the truthfulness of artificial appliances, like *RoboCop* or animated – he didn't believe it. It didn't have any truth. So, everything I did for Paul, I needed to believe it as the thing itself. You remember in *Total Recall* where Arnold has the implant up his nose? Yeah, I did it and it was so graphic that Paul said, "It's too much." I basically used a spring clamp on a 35-millimeter spindle on an editing bench, right? "Zzzzziiit!" He had to believe it. It had to tell a real-world acoustical truth, and that was an influence in my work. So, that all carried into *Die Hard*, which carried into *Speed*. So, everything we did, as a team and a crew, it had to have the acoustical truth of the story.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, to be honest, the most delicious sonic sequence in *Speed*, to me, is the elevator sequence. It's just what I think of when I think of sound on this movie. So, here's a little bit on that.

STEPHEN HUNTER FLICK

There was an elevator sequence in *Die Hard* and we had done some cable recording for *Die Hard*, and it wasn't enough. So, I got Ezra to go down and record the elevators with me, and then he was able to get access to the set where they had all those cables and play them, like big bass. And ultimately, those were all good, but the stuff that resonated was he went to his garage and took an axe handle and beat on the springs of the garage door. And then when you slow it down, it's got that, "poooom," right?

KRIS TAPLEY

He's talking about Ezra Dweck there, by the way, credited as an additional sound re-recording mixer on the film and apparently a recordist as well. OK, here's some talk about the subway sequence at the end of the movie.

STEPHEN HUNTER FLICK

I think we went into LA and recorded the subway, just the standard trains, because other than the crash and a kind of speeding up at the end of the sequence, it was pretty much a standard, seamless rail experience. But I also used BART, which, the BART in San Francisco has a bigger sound in some ways. So, you know, it's all a composite. The crash was done by Foley and some auto wrecking recording that Ezra did. You know, you go in and you buy a junker and you get them to raise it on a forklift 30 feet and they drop it for you.

KRIS TAPLEY

You could talk about the ins and outs of sound recording for film all day long. And I haven't even touched on stuff in the weeds, like using the bonk of a poster tube slowed way down as part of the sound you hear when Jack Traven and Harry Temple's police car comes flying onto the scene at the beginning of the movie. There's just too much detail to cover it all. But before I dip out of Stephen's world here, I do want to read for you something he wrote in that collection of material he sent me, and I think it speaks to something here that's interesting. He's talking about the subway sequence here. He says, quote: "One short area I do remember is a shot where the camera is positioned between two cars and is pointing up at the ceiling. We see the lights of the tunnel flash by overhead. I wanted something different, but powerful, to break the mood and shift the listener's perception, so I created a short but huge pass-by 'whoosh'. In 1993, it wasn't possible to pan one track through four speakers in Pro Tools, so I assigned each of four channels to individual speakers. Channel one went to the left. Channel two went to the right. Channel three went to surround right and channel four went to surround left. I then stair-stepped the sound from channel one to two to three then to four and started the process over. During the three or four seconds the shot lasted, the sound whipped around the room in a circle. It didn't directly relate to what you saw on the screen but it didn't matter. It tweaked your senses. It was glorious." Now, let's get back to Gregg Landaker talking about working with Jan de Bont on this process. Remember, Jan is a creature of production. In his career as a DP, he never would have had any need to interact with post-production sound personnel, and according to Gregg, he left this clearly seasoned team to their devices.

GREGG LANDAKER

What he would do, he would always sit down off of Steve's right shoulder and off of my left shoulder, and he would watch our faders move. Because back then we had moving faders, which was kind of new to the industry back then. So, he would watch the faders move around, like, "Oh, that's very cool." He loved it!

KRIS TAPLEY

It's time to finally bring Gregg's partner, Steve Maslow, into the fold here. Remember, Steve was mixing the dialogue and music on the film. Here he is.

STEVE MASLOW

Jan sat – when I'm saying sat next to me, his shoulder was against my shoulder while we mixed. And I remember, when I would make a move, the fader would move up and

down, and then I'd go to the next fader to make a move, and Jan would look at the faders and start to touch them. So, as soon as you touch a fader, it overwrites what you just did. I went, "Oh, shit." He appeared to be fascinated with the automated fader moves. So, what I eventually had to do, because he would destroy that move for me by touching the fader, after I made a move on a particular fader, I would put that fader in read only, so even though he grabbed it and kind of touched it, it wouldn't overwrite my automated mix. I didn't want to say, "Jan!" I didn't want to dress him down in front of everybody, and that's not my style, so I worked around it by just putting it in read only so he wouldn't destroy anything.

GREGG LANDAKER

A lot of directors come in and they don't really know what this final crew is doing. Because you can't have a guy that goes under a set of headphones and goes over to a keyboard nowadays with Pro Tools and starts clicking away, and then all of a sudden it's like, the director is going, "Uh, I'm paying a dollar every six seconds to have a guy under the cans do something on a computer over there? No, no, no, no, no, no." It was like, we always said – like Stevie and I always said – "Keep the image alive on the screen. Rock and roll over that scene." And explain to them, "OK, what I'm doing now – OK, hear that tire screech that goes over that piece of radio dialogue? What I'm going to do, Jan de Bont, I'm going to try to carve that out just a little bit so you hear a little bit of that radio, so now we key in on the next shot. It's the guy back into the car with the radios and all the, you know, squawking back and forth." He got an education with us as far as manipulating sound instead of just plastering it up there. We weren't dealing in the digital era back then. We were still analog, more or less, so the challenges of putting a 20-pound bag of potatoes in a 5-pound sack worth was a challenge. How do we get all of this sound that we now are generating on this stage down to where we can make a two-track back out of that, or a 5.1? So, the challenges of that, I mean, it was really harnessing the energy. Keeping the energy up but not beating you over the head. Allowing you to breathe when you need to breathe, and those were tricks that we learned over the years. A lot of people get very bombastic with their soundtracks and they think that just because they can make it loud it should be loud. Well, there are certain elements to it where you can soften a scene with a lot of material so it becomes watchable. You know, there are certain times that you want people to back away from the screen, the sound pressure, to kind of cringe a little bit. Gun shots, if you blink, or you're at the right SPL level, and then there's areas where you need to back off and have the people to sit down and watch and listen to a movie and enjoy the movie. So, it's a balance. Stevie and I, we put out a lot of product together, and those were some of the tricks that we learned over the years, and I think those tricks were learned because we learned from babies, as far as magnetic film, and that was the only thing we had. We only had X amount of playback machines in a room. Not like the digital era where you can load up a set of Pro Tools. You can put a thousand here and a thousand on the other one and a thousand on the – you can load them up like crazy and then just pipe out 5.1s to the console. Where back then, you had the more diligent of, "What is my key sound here? What is going to be the most impactful thing for that particular shot?" And that was the challenge with *Speed*, because John's cutting is, like, what is the most impactful for that less than 30 seconds on the screen? What is the next section? What's

the next section? And not blend it in to where it's just like, "Oh my God, this is just a bunch of mush."

STEVE MASLOW

I remember I had a unique problem with the dialogue because every angle had a different gear whine to it, so it would be from Sandra, "[high pitch gear sound]," and over to Keanu, "[low pitch gear sound]," so it was hard to join the dialogue to make it appear that it was all shot at the same time. It became fairly obvious. So, a lot of the dialogue had to be looped because of the gear whine, you know, in the dialogue. And, you know, this was before Pro Tools, so you got what you got. I didn't have a lot of really cool – it was top of the line for '94 but it's nothing like it is today where you get these noise suppression plugins on Pro Tools. It's just amazing how well you can get rid of background noise. So, some of the scenes that had transmission that weren't looped necessitated Gregg to get a little more bus and transmission whine to cover those cuts. Some of the harder stuff I remember was the group walla. Because most of the time, you know, the group walla was difficult. They wanted to not make it sound so sterile, so, they had to make more than, "Ooh, aah, gee, look out!" You know, there's only so much you can do as a passenger on a bus that's driving 50 miles an hour. So, I remember that was really hard to get to work in terms of suspense, because unless the character was involved with something, getting up and saying things, if they sat there and not to have anything happen was a little sterile. So, there was a lot of walla that was not audible, but at least you had a sense of it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Some of you might be asking yourself, "What's walla?" Walla is a sound effect meant to imitate the sort of murmur and chatter of background crowd noise. I guess you can see how that would be an unusual issue on a movie like *Speed*. Anyway, since we're back in the realm of dialogue here, I'd love to bring one more voice into the, uh, mix, so to speak. This is Elliott Koretz, one of the dialogue editors on *Speed*. That name might ring a bell because I believe Katie Walsh and I talked about him briefly back in the Los Angeles movies episode several weeks ago, because Elliott was the supervising sound editor of Michael Mann's *Collateral*, which we discussed at the time. Anyway, we keep talking about how this was before Pro Tools. Pro Tools is a digital audio workstation used for creating and mixing and mastering sound, and indeed, this was before it was status quo in the industry, but it had been around for a few years and it was used for certain applications on *Speed*, including sound editing. They just weren't really using it for mixing yet. I find it interesting because it marks yet another example of the film being a bit of a hybrid, a quality we of course talked about at length in the visual effects episode two weeks ago. So, here is Elliott Koretz on that, and this is a chunk, so settle in for a history lesson in post-production dialogue editing.

ELLIOTT KORETZ

It was a fascinating time in my little world of sound and post-production, because it was the confluence of analog and digital, and we were just all moving over to a digital world, but not completely yet. It was the bleeding edge, as people like to say, and we were still trying to figure out how to do it all. And the studio actually threw us some curves

regarding that. In the '90s, we were transitioning to an all-digital post. That's what studios wanted to do for a lot of reasons. And sonically, it was a huge change, because we needed to kind of agree on the hardware and software we were going to use, because there were a lot of competing companies vying to provide digital workstations, both for picture and for sound, and I was very fortunate that I started extremely early on the one that ended up being the chosen workstation, Pro Tools. And so, myself and some others had been already working in Pro Tools and getting familiar with what it could do into that era when *Speed* started. However, there's a lot of aspects to the sound job that we do. There's dialogue, music, sound effects, backgrounds, Foley, and the traditional way dialogue had been done since we switched from an optical film track, probably – I don't know exactly when that switch happened. Maybe in the '60s, into maybe the 1970s, we switched from an optical film track where it was a 35-millimeter film with, like, these little squiggly lines on the side, to magnetic film sound, where along the side of the picture, there was a stripe that kind of looked like an old cassette tape stripe, and that's where the sound was. And the traditional way dialogue had been done up to now is, you know, when they shoot the movie, there's many, many, many takes of each scene. And we would print two takes of every scene of the movie, which is hundreds of thousands of feet of 35-millimeter magnetic stripe film. And then the dialogue editors would physically cut it to match what the picture editor had done, but to make it in a smoother, more cohesive, intelligible way. That was all going away, because ultimately, with digital Pro Tools, it's a non-destructive medium and there's no physical cutting and if you make a mistake, you can say, "Undo," and go back and fix it. With the magnetic stripe film, if you're working on it as an editor and you just don't like what you did or something goes wrong, it's ruined and you throw it away. And so, that's why they would make two copies of every take, so you had a backup piece in case you needed to try working on that bit of dialogue. Again, what I mean by working is smoothing it from – within a conversation, say, the director and picture editor chose different angles. First there's a close-up of you, then there's a close-up of me, then there's a two-shot, and each angle would have its inherent sound that goes with it. Maybe every time we looked at you, there was cars in the background that were really noisy. When we flipped the shot to me, it was less noisy because there's nothing behind me. So, the dialogue editor would be working to try to smooth things out with all the different ways we do it, physically manipulating the 35-millimeter film. That was all going away and by the time we started on *Speed*, dialogue was being edited on Pro Tools electronically, like the sound effects and backgrounds and music. However – and I don't really know why – 20th Century Fox printed every single take of dialogue twice for the movie *Speed*. So, they came to us and said, "We've got hundreds of thousands of feet of film sitting here. We want you to cut it the old-fashioned way." So, that was probably the last major movie I worked on where we cut the dialogue the old-fashioned way.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, to sum all that up, Elliott and the team had to edit the dialogue – again, edit, not mix – on film because for whatever reason, the studio printed all that material and I don't know, maybe it was just an aspect of change slowly making its way through. But in the digital realm, here's Elliott detailing how his Pro Tools experience would come into play on the film.

ELLIOTT KORETZ

Because this was Pro Tools and digital was kind of an emerging way and method of working, the workflow hadn't really been fully established. So, you know, the process goes, when the picture's about done shooting, usually they'll turn over a rough cut to the sound team. We start working on it. We go over it with the director and the picture editor and maybe some producers and we start our work. And as we're going along, there may be temp mixes where we kind of put it together in a version that the studio could see it. And the mix stage, where the mixing of film would occur, would have some support from us sound guys. We would be there, and the old way would be we would come to the stage with boxes and boxes of little 35-millimeter rolls. It would be like a fix-it kit. We bring all these little elements. "Oh, here's some extra punches. Here's some skids. Here's things we think we need." Because inevitably, when we're mixing the movie, the director or maybe the picture editor might say, "You know, I never really liked that gunshot," or, "Gee, can we have another skid here?" Or whatever comes to their mind. So, we would have this little kind of fix-it-all repair kit of all these boxes of 35-millimeter film handy. Well, that was going to change on this movie and what happened was, I ended up, after I was done with my dialogue responsibilities, being the Pro Tools editor for the mix stage and I was working alongside Gregg Landaker. So, I come on stage with this Pro Tools equipment. He didn't even know what it was. You know, "What is all this shit?" You know, "What is this stuff?" And I explained to him what it was and what I could do. And he's a quick learner and as soon as he saw, it was Pandora's Box, in a fashion, in that he could do anything. "Elliott, what about this? What about that? What about this?" And what we did – and Steve Flick, as well, was a part of this equation – but Gregg, on the fly, realized he had this amazing new utility belt, this toolkit, available, where having a Pro Tools system on stage with a giant library of digital sound meant I could cut elements as needed, pretty much. And he would look at a scene and say, "You know, if we had a rev to cross from this cut to that cut of the bus, it'd be really cool." Or this or that. And so, we coordinated and collaborated on really sweetening – it was already a great soundtrack, but having the Pro Tools system, which he had never seen before, was just an incredible help to the final sound of the movie.

KRIS TAPLEY

And one more from Elliott here, his recollection of the come-to-Jesus moment when it was clear that *Speed* was suddenly on the fast track to release.

ELLIOTT KORETZ

In the post-production world, this is, like, legendary or whatever. There was a meeting where, you know, Cameron's movie was not going to make its release date and all the people at Fox got together with us and had a meeting and said, "Cameron's movie is not going to make it. We need something to fill the slot. You guys have to get done dramatic," months earlier than we thought we had. And he said, "The bank is open." Which was the famous quote. So, it was literally, whatever it took for us to get that movie done quickly, and so, we had a super sped-up post. We were mixing on five different stages at the same time. Greg and Steve were the primary mixers, but we had support mixers all over town pre-dubbing, because it was an immense amount of

material that needed to be pre-dubbed down into smaller, more manageable chunks. It was pretty crazy.

KRIS TAPLEY

Regarding those support mixers, there's one other element I haven't touched on yet, and I'll get into it more when we talk at length about the Oscars in a few weeks. But there was a third mixer who shared that Academy Award for mixing with Gregg and Steve, and that is Bob Beemer. Bob is the four-time Oscar-winning mixer of films like *Gladiator*, *Ray* and *Dreamgirls*, in addition to *Speed*, and he was also nominated for *Cliffhanger*, *Independence Day* and *Road to Perdition*. This is a part of the overall sound story with *Speed*, so I do want to address it, but again, I'll drill down further later. For now, here's Gregg.

GREGG LANDAKER

Bob Beemer never had any touch on the final product. He was over in Universal doing pre-dubs at night. When I would come – he would start during the day and then I would overlap him. After I finished up my day at Skywalker, I'd come over and meet up with him over at Universal. He was doing hard effects and I would come in, screen different hard effects and I would make changes on what he had done, and then both of us would dig in and try to get more product done during that evening before I had to break and go back home to take an eight-hour turnaround and get back to Skywalker the next day. Now, how Bob Beemer ended up on the Academy Awards, that is a whole other story in itself. That was one of those things that – he had done so much work with me over there doing the key elements that I just wrote him down as, you know, part of one of the mixers on the show, not thinking the show, a year later, was going to go to the Academy Awards. I was just doing it because, you know, this kid's busting his tail seven days a week just as hard as I am!

KRIS TAPLEY

Suffice it to say, that would cause a mini-scandal in the world of the Academy Awards. But let's put a pin in it for now. Back to Gregg as we start to wind down this week.

GREGG LANDAKER

This is the most excitement for the director, because everything else has been a jigsaw puzzle. Actors rehearsing, cuts, picture editing room, scene trying to make this cut, OK, score, yeah, I'm going to London, the philharmonic, OK, score, score, score, score, score – this is the very first time that, on that 60-foot screen in front of them right now on our dub stage, this is making your movie. This is their final vision, and they're very fascinated with that. Some directors get very much of a stickler of what they want to hear and not hear, and others entrust you explicitly. We were very, very pleased, the way the movie turned out. You know, I don't think that we would have done anything different to that movie than what you see and hear on that screen, all these years later. And here's the kicker: We actually got it done on the 21st day. We were done with the film. Twentieth Century Fox was happy as all get-out. The downside to it is that months later they would come to us and say, "OK, you've got 21 days." "What do you mean I

got 21 days?” “Well, you did it on *Speed!*” I said, “We had every stage in town working on it!”

KRIS TAPLEY

And once more, I'll leave you with this from Stephen Hunter Flick.

STEPHEN HUNTER FLICK

I'm really happy with how it turned out. I think it has to do with my mature skills as a manager of creative people, because there was no way I could do all the work myself. And I was competent enough, I could do all the work myself, and I would have loved to have done it myself, but considering the turnaround – I think they said, “Oh, we're pushing it up six weeks.” That's what they did with *Die Hard*. If you want to know how difficult *Speed* was, I left exhausted. On *Starship Troopers*, I had conversations that I don't remember with editors because of the stress level. That was so difficult that every time I hit Sony, I toss my cookies in the parking lot. Three steps out of the car, I toss them. And, you know, if you repeat that, people won't understand how really difficult it is to do this level of filmmaking.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

KRIS TAPLEY

Next week on *50 MPH...*

KRIS TAPLEY

We come to the cherry on top, *Speed's* original motion picture soundtrack.

RALPH SALL

The idea of making a record that will exist in the marketplace and get on MTV and help market the movie, none of those things exist as they used to.

KRIS TAPLEY

And we talk to the legend himself, Billy Idol, and guitarist Steve Stevens about their title track.

BILLY IDOL

So, we wrote a kind of, a basically a classic Billy Idol song that almost has a like a Rebel Yell structure, you know, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, middle bit, drop down, you know?

STEVE STEVENS

I had come from working with Vince Neil for a while, and all of my guitars were tuned down a whole step. And I just kind of left it that way, and ordinarily we never do that with Billy Idol.

KRIS TAPLEY

We even dig into the music video for “Speed” with one of its directors.

ANDY DELANEY

We were, like, “OK, we’ll do it, but we need to try and recreate a punk club in London in 1977,” and they were, like, “Yeah, but what’s that got to do with the film?” And we were, like, “Yeah, don’t worry about that. We’ll figure something out.”

KRIS TAPLEY

All of that and more next week right here on *50 MPH!*

KRIS TAPLEY

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I’m @kristapley. That’s Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website 50MPHpodcast.com. If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We’ll see you next time.