



U.S.C. student film unit director of "Manne And Jazz" Jack Oswald (left), author of this article and now a Captain in the U.S. Air Force, checks details of scene with film's star, jazzman Shelly Manne, between takes in a recording studio.

It started out to be Cinema Verité, but ended up as a well-made documentary that taught the student film-makers much about off-the-cuff production with new portable equipment

# HOW USC CINEMA STUDENTS FILMED "MANNE AND JAZZ"

By JACK H. OSWALD

Until recently there has been great reluctance, on the part of some film-makers, to shoot a documentary motion picture using sync-sound. And with good reason; it has been, in many cases, nearly impossible to do so without taking a van load of equipment along.

If you have the patience to learn how to shoot sync footage without all this encumbrance, then it's time to make a film like "Manne and Jazz," a documentary film with and about Shelly Manne which I recently photographed and directed.

Shelly, as all jazz buffs are aware, is one of the world's leading percus-

sionists, continual winner of various jazz musician polls and an artist who truly represents the top echelon of American jazz drummers.

Getting things under way on such a film, as a directed research project, six cinema students—four graduate and two seniors—at the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles, initiated a project last summer which led to what we think is a rather good 25-minute film. Our primary goal was to gain more experience in film production. More than that, we had the desire to enlarge upon some of the knowledge and skills we'd recently picked up. We also hoped to experi-

*cinema verité* documentary technique with a few original ideas and try out a style that approached the without being restricted by economic considerations.

We were especially fortunate when the USC Cinema Department bought a new Eclair NPR 16mm camera. A most impressive piece of film making equipment, the new Eclair has proved to be everything a documentary film-maker could desire, and actually much more.

Our crew evolved a film concerning the perpetuation of jazz in Los Angeles. Los Angeles used to be a creative center for jazz, but recently this form

of music seemed to have nearly vanished from the city. Shelly Manne was one of the few people who were doing anything about it. Manne, a very full-time jazz and studio musician, is the owner and operator of the "Manne-Hole," one of the country's leading jazz clubs.

It also turned out that Shelly and his wife were avid horse lovers and spent much of their free time raising and showing their five prize winners.

Before we started shooting we spent a number of hours as a crew looking at various films and talking over the ideas we had. We wanted to give ourselves the creative freedom of allowing the film to take whatever direction it might, utilizing a free documentary approach. At the same time, however, we wanted to be sure we were all thinking in the same terms. This is especially important when you are shooting from a very rough treatment or outline rather than from a full script.

Our crew had worked together for several months on two or three shorter films and even though we were all students, I feel we worked most seriously and approached our film in a professional manner. Most of all, we enjoyed working together and didn't mind expending the approximately fifteen-hundred man-hours that would be necessary for the completion of "Manne and Jazz."

#### **Verite' vs. Practical Control**

Working with Shelly's complete cooperation we proceeded to launch into production of the film and found every step as rewarding as we'd expected. I suppose our original intent was to make a free-wheeling *verite'* type of film, but to be honest, we found that we would have to forfeit some of this freedom in order to maintain any "quasi-control" over our footage. Without such control we were headed for trouble. As Frank Wrigley, production manager and one of our editors, put it, "Cinema Verite' might well end up *Cinema Vague*."

We had to fit our shooting into Shelly's already very full schedule, and at the same time depend upon the cooperation of others for filming clearance. This meant shooting to an "on-again off-again" production schedule. We had about 10 actual shooting days during an overall period of nearly a month. We shot 8,700 feet of 16mm raw stock using everything from outdated Tri-X to Kodak's new XT. If I had it to do over, I'd shoot the entire

film on Double-X.

About 85 to 90 percent of our footage was exposed with the Eclair. The remainder was covered primarily with a 16mm Arriflex. The Arri served as a second camera when we found it necessary and at one time, for the horse show sequence, we added a Bell and Howell 70DR to provide three-camera coverage.

When we filmed at the horse show and fair grounds, we used walkie-talkies in an attempt to coordinate the activities of the scattered crew. With these we hoped to be better organized and more efficient with our multi-camera coverage. The considerable amount of interference from the many gas engines and portable generators in the location made the walkie-talkies worthless, however.

An interesting sidelight, by the way, was that we shot one interview sequence with an Auricon Super-12 camera. The footage was fine, technically, but the coverage was so stiff and rigid due to the single fixed camera position, that it looked as if we had planted the camera in the room. Consequently, that entire sequence was later discarded. It just didn't match the realism and informality of the free style that we were able to get with the Eclair.

Nearly everything that was filmed with the Eclair was shot in sync, even when the sound was to serve merely as background and we knew it wouldn't be the primary sound on the final track. We used the Kudelski Nagra 1/4-inch tape recorder with sync pulse supplied by the Eclair. This camera and recorder were good film-making partners as they roamed together through Los Angeles and San Diego county. We moved easily in and out of places where filming would have been impossible with conventional, more bulky equipment. There was no reason not to shoot in sync, since this placed no added burden on the cameraman or recordist in our filming situations.

#### **Sound Problems**

We were forced to solve some problems, however, that we had never faced before at the University. Only a few hundred feet had been shot with the new Eclair before we started production. Consequently there were some doubts about shooting, transferring and syncing up dailies. Fortunately, in the University atmosphere, there is plenty of room for experimenting and after

overcoming some of the intitial barriers things went quite smoothly.

Once we got over the growing pains of learning new styles in film production, we finally settled on a standard approach which I think merits mention. We shot 400-foot loads in the Eclair and tried to match each load with a five-inch reel of recording tape. All our transferring was done at USC by our sound crew. As the film went in to our lab we would transfer the accompanying sound in the same order as it came out of the recorder. When the work print came back we viewed it without sound and made the decision whether to sync up the footage or not. In more than three-quarters of the cases we went ahead and synced up the footage. This silent pre-viewing sped up the process, though, and gave us a quick look at dailies as we went along.

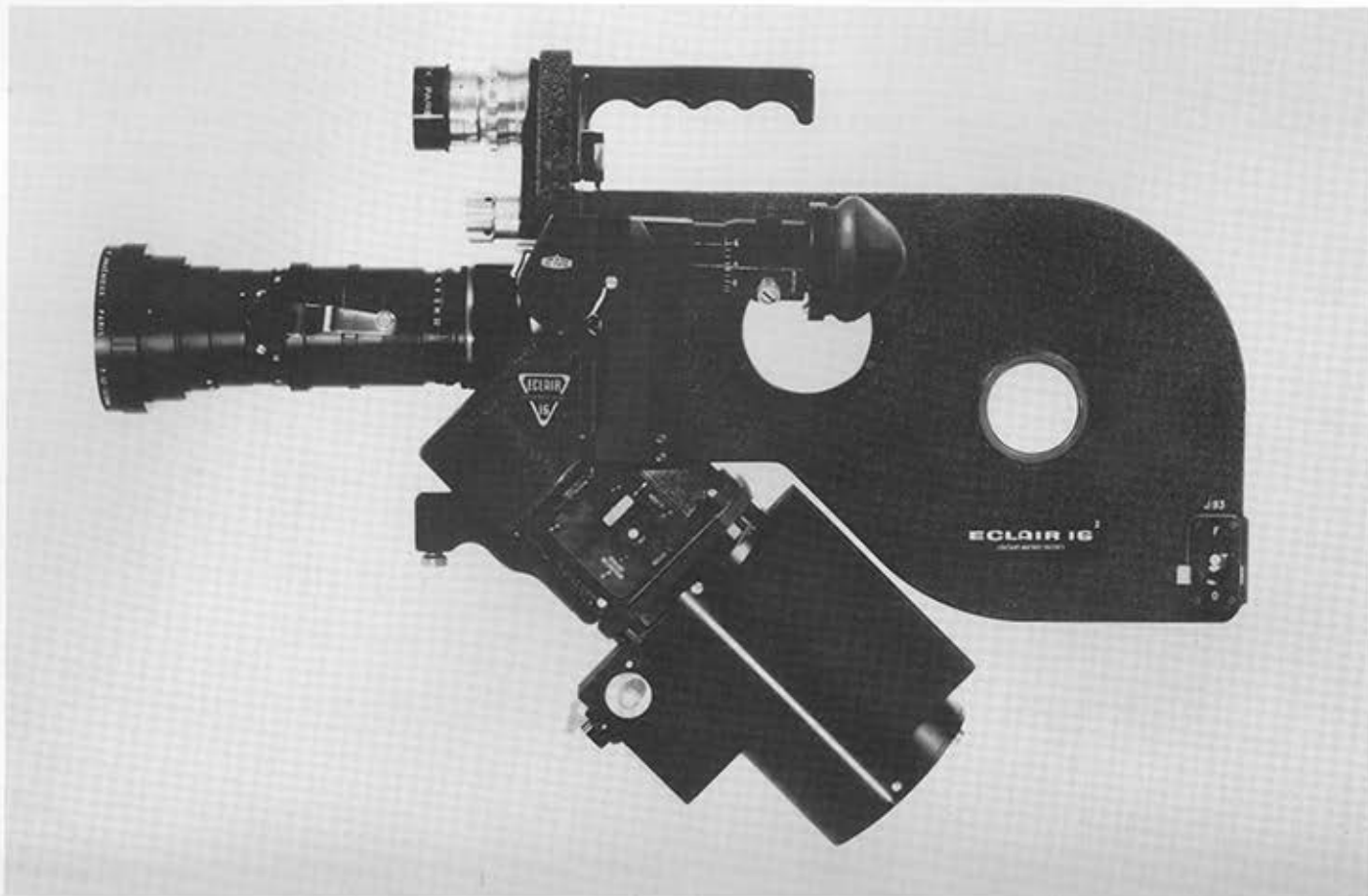
Nowhere during production did we use a conventional clap-stick for sync and seldom did we do more than roll-slate the film. (At one time, we tried a test with a clap-stick during shooting at Shelly's house in order to double check our sync. This was necessary because we had discovered that the sync frame as described by Eclair was not accurate.) Shooting without clap-sticks in sync is quite a challenge in itself, by the way. You always feel like something is missing.

#### **Syncing Without Slates**

USC's Eclair, a brand new model, is equipped with the automatic clapper. With the sync cables wired properly, it can be used with the Nagra recorder so that you can roll the tape continuously and start and stop the camera freely without ruining any of the sound because of beeps or tones on the tape.

Most Eclair users seem to be wiring their sync cable to use the bloop tone in the Nagra to slate their scenes audibly. This makes it much easier to sync up but it ruins the sound near the camera start and we couldn't take that chance. This would have been especially difficult in shooting both interview and music sequences, because we would not be able to intercut or use the sound for voice-over without retakes or losing sync.

The USC sound department headed by Dan Wiegand and Ken Miura rigged a system which allowed us to transfer through the Nagra SLP resolver. The PIP output was used to provide a keying system for activating



a 14 KC tone from an audio oscillator. This tone was added to the normal audio material whenever the SLP registered a sync take.

Dailies were placed in sync by running the magnetic film stock through a moviola at a slow speed, which caused the 14 KC signal to drop to a very audible squeal. This permitted our editors to find the start and stop of each take. Anything that was a sync take had this squeal on it.

This tone didn't interfere with the program material because when we mixed our tracks a low pass filter was used which cut off at 10 KC.

The above method is very time consuming, though, and the sound department has since revised the transfer system. The new method is far more workable and much faster.

A second head has been installed on one of the film recorders about 40 frames ahead of the present head. A second signal, also keyed by the PIP output of the SLP is fed to this new head which records over the sprocket holes, well out of the program area. It is a lower, very audible frequency. When the resolver registers "sync on," the tone goes off. The editor simply runs the track through the moviola

and where the camera is running there is no second track.

(My only suggestion to refine this system further would be the replacement of the original head with a double track head of some type, so that both the program information and the sync tone would be side by side, frame for frame, thus eliminating the necessity of pull-up.)

The new transfer system accomplished four worthwhile changes: first, the tone is off when the camera is running, which is most of the time; secondly, the program information is not covered by the high-frequency squeal that tends to drive you out of your mind after three or four hours of viewing dailies; third, the time saved in syncing up dailies is tremendous because the moviola can be run at full speed and the tone easily heard; and finally there is no need to worry whether the 14KC tone will be filtered properly in the mix.

But, that was neither here nor there. We struggled with the first system, discovering, as we did so, the disadvantages which it presented. A more imposing problem was our difficulty in coming up with a reliable index to establish a sync point using the Eclair

automatic bloopers.

After running some 35,000 feet of film with the USC equipment, on this and other productions, I am sure that our current system is correct. Our findings revealed that the first frame of the transferred sync-pulse on magnetic film stock matches the fifth fully fogged frame towards the head of the print. I know this sounds somewhat confusing and it disagrees with Eclair's instructions, but it gives us perfect sync all of the time. If you have any doubts, the answer is to run a test yourself with a clap-stick, as we did, and establish your own system.

#### **Flexibility in Production**

We also made a few more discoveries while using the Eclair and Nagra team. I shot our film using only one Eclair magazine (selling for roughly 300 dollars each). Subsequent to our shooting, and preceding production of another film, the University bought a second magazine and the use of two magazines makes the operation far more efficient. Now the crews can more or less shoot on a continuous basis reloading one magazine while the other is being used.

A second battery provides good insurance if you plan to shoot more than



two or three thousand feet during a day. Reliable constant voltage is very important to both the camera motor and the sync generator, and no matter how good the battery, or its manufacturer's claims, it can sometimes fail.

We operated with neither a shotgun mike nor a multiple mike mixing unit for the Nagra. Both have now been added at the University and it makes a world of difference in solving production problems.

### **The Director-Cameraman Relationship**

Most important to me, as director and cameraman were a couple of items which evolved from the experience both technically and philosophically.

From a technical standpoint, as I mentioned previously, I discovered that we were able to shoot in many places with the Eclair that would never be able to accommodate larger, more cumbersome blimped cameras. The Eclair takes up much less space, can be hand-held very easily even with a relatively long lens (we used the Angenieux 12mm-120mm). I do not advocate shooting everything hand-held, but I found that I got better results by hand-holding than by using the tripod; especially for this type of off-the-cuff documentary filming.

To be honest, I started shooting with the camera on a tripod. We were filming some sequences in the "Manne-Hole," Shelly's jazz center in Hollywood, and the tripod took up too much space, called attention to us and limited me in the kind and number of shots I could get. I wanted to be able to roam freely and get scenes of whatever was happening, making on-the-spot decisions.

The relatively noise-free operation of the Eclair NPR allowed me to shoot during record recording sessions in studios, where silence was important. I could pick up shots of Shelly without him even knowing and without disturbing others in the room. This was even more important during one sequence shot in a control room during a recording session where noise would have hampered their entire operation.

Once people realized we were "quiet film makers" there was a much closer rapport established which resulted in greater freedom for us. This was true even when we were shooting without sound. There was no noise to cope with and we went about our filming unnoticed.

The other thing, on the philosophic side, set me thinking about the procedures the cameraman and director must follow in trying to capture some type of reality in documentary filmmaking. Through a combination of insistence and coincidence I did both and I'm most happy that I did.

I had a most capable associate director in Howard Myrick. He handled various problems during shooting and helped keep an objective eye open in screening the footage. Bill Vitarelli and Bob Dalva served as second cameramen alternately and as assistants to me from time to time. We'd discuss what we wanted before shooting. This freed me of exposure and lighting problems and they could pick up cut-aways and other pre-planned shots when we needed them. Peggy Wallace did most of the sound work and, once again, through working things out in advance, we knew what we were after in terms of quality and atmosphere.

We worked fast, and, I'm sure, a bit sloppily once in a while. Usually we used no more than three or four crew members at a time. In many locations, there just wasn't space for any more and I didn't want to confuse the situation by providing a mob scene of our own. Interiors were generally shot with available light using a clip-on photoflood or an occasional quartz-iodine tube to boost the level for exposure.

Things happening in this type of film happen fast, and usually only once. While they were happening before my eyes, I had to make the decision whether or when to start and stop the camera. If we didn't get a shot, it was my fault (and frequently we didn't). On the other hand there wasn't time to set things up and impose on those within the camera frame. The director-cameraman combination also made it easy to work with Shelly and I couldn't have asked for a better working relationship.

### **Editing**

In putting the film together I supervised the editing (done by three editors) and tried to let them have a relatively free hand within the structure of basic ideas Howard Myrick and I had lined out. Many people (probably including our three editors) would argue that three people can't work harmoniously in cutting the same film. It will work; it *did*—and with so much footage involved, this "triple

editor" system increased our efficiency by at least 200%. Besides, we were in a learning situation, which is most important to remember. In a commercial situation, I'm sure I'd prefer to work primarily with one editor and his assistant.

### **Kinesthetic Shooting**

In one sequence we wanted to capture a feeling of the atmosphere of Shelly's club, the Manne-Hole. Instead of using live action to create this effect, we chose to utilize a kinesthetic technique. Still pictures were shot and the sequence was planned and shot on the animation stand. I also did the opening and closing credits and a teaser in a similar manner and I think it adds something to the overall impact of the film.

### **After It's Over**

I've steered clear of the usual question: how much did the film cost? And for an obvious reason. There is little relationship between doing a film of this kind in a university situation, without paying the crew (and at an expense well below outside costs) and making the same film commercially. There was little equipment charge, except for a few rental accessories, and lab costs in the University are somewhat less than those charged by most of the Hollywood labs. The greatest accomplishment was that we were able to make a professional quality film without getting involved in excessive costs.

Our results aren't all roses. We made mistakes, but fortunately we were able to make them while trying out ideas of our own. And, in a non-commercial experimental situation we ended up with an 800-foot black and white sound film completed during approximately seven weeks of production. Herb Kosower of the USC cinema staff was our faculty advisor and allowed us a great deal of freedom. At the same time, however, he kept a finger on the pulse of our progress.

We really made a modern film using the most modern revolutionary equipment and methods available. It represents a truly devoted effort executed by, I think, a highly competent group of student film-makers. And it illustrates well the broad experience a university like USC can provide. I only wish we could start all over again with the background we now have! ■