

LOCATION SOUND RECORDING

HOW I PREPARE FOR MY SHOOT

by **Cheerag Cama**, *Freelance Audio Engineer*

Whenver I am about to start working on a new film project, there are a few things that I always do.

The first is of course to read the script. This gives me an idea of what the movie is all about. And as I read through the script, my mind starts working on how I plan to approach the shoot. If possible, go on a recce and visit the locations where the Director is planning to shoot.

Having read the script, I know roughly how many wireless lapel mics I will need and I always try to keep some extra wireless lapels since you don't know when you may need to mic up extra people. Generally, six wireless lapel mics and two shotgun mics form the basic kit.

I prefer to have my wireless system from one brand and not mix and match different brands. So for example, if I'm going Lectrosonics, then I want all my bodypack wireless TX to be Lectrosonics. If I'm going to use Audio Limited, then I prefer to have all my TX from Audio Limited. I also prefer having the same lapel mics. For example, if it's Cos11, then I want all my TX to have Cos11's. If it's DPA, then I want all my TX to have DPA mics. Preferably the same model. This gives me the same tone even if I mix my TX on a talent from one day to another. So having the same brand of wireless as well as having extra TX and RX on a shoot is certainly beneficial, but sometimes, it's just not possible due to budget. I also always carry some extra lapel

microphones, like extra Cos11's and a couple of Countryman B6's. Having your extra mics in different colours (like beige or white) can sometimes be a great help.

As far as wireless lapels go, it's also very important to have the right accessories. Small windjammers, mounting clips, concealers, Rycote tapes, stickies, undercovers, overcovers, foams, Hide-a-mic mount, belts for ankle, thigh, waist, chest etc...all of these are as important as having a good TX and RX system. Mounting a lapel correctly on a talent is an art by itself, and something that one can perfect as the years go by. Sometimes, a different placement by 2 mm is all it takes to get good sound from a badly placed mic.

For my boom mics, I nowadays use two booms consistently on my shoots. So I prefer having two proper boommen and use both of them simultaneously, all the time. I also prefer having the same two boom mics, so I'm always using two MKH 50's or two Neumann KMR 81's or KMR 82's. Having two booms gives you far better coverage on any shot. Two PlugOn TX's are also very much needed on shoots nowadays.

I also like having some mics to rig up, like for example, car scenes, etc. For such instances, I like having a couple of Sanken cub mics with me.

An MS stereo mic can also be very handy, especially when shooting with crowds, or shooting in a crowded market place, a cafe, or shooting with trains or traffic in the background, etc.

Frequency coordination on set is very important. Lectrosonics and Audio Limited receivers do have the facility

to do a RF sweep and tell you what frequencies are free of interference. But by using relatively inexpensive hardware and software, one can come up with a far better frequency coordination plan to use on set.

The Sound Devices 664 with a CL6 fader pack is my recorder of choice. It's bulky compared to a Sound Devices Scorpio, but I like having twelve full size faders. And 12 tracks are sufficient for 99% of the work I do. It is suitable for cart as well as bag work.

But even the best of recorders can sometimes crash on you. As a backup, I also always carry a backup recorder like the MixPre 10T. So if you have your main recorder failing on set, you can quickly switch over to your backup recorder.

I also find out who the DOP is, what cameras they are planning to use and how many cameras will be rolling simultaneously. In most cases, we have two cameras on set and depending on the working style of the Director and the DOP, the shoot could end up being a traditional single camera shoot, or a two camera setup for most shots. So if there are going to be two cameras on set, I will need to have three TC boxes, (one for my recorder and one on each camera). Depending on what cameras are being used, one needs to have the right kind of TC cable and audio cable. The TC cable is to feed TimeCode from the generator to the camera and depending on the camera, it could be a BNC connector, or a 5 pin Lemo connector, or a 4 pin Lemo connector. And depending on the cameras, the audio IN connector could be two 3-pin XLR connectors, or a 5 pin XLR, or even a six pin Lemo connector. Knowing what type of TC input connector and audio input connectors are on the cameras can help you to be prepared when the shoot begins.

I also have a list of expendables and helpful items, like double sided tape, floor mats, yoga mats, 3M micropore tape, gaffer tape, paper tape, WD40, DustOff, extra CF and SD cards, card reader etc... which I keep handy on set.

My current gripe is that I don't get the video wirelessly to my cart and I'm hoping to rectify this by asking for a



Cheerag's go-to equipment

Bodypack and Receivers

- Lectrosonics
- Audio Ltd.

Lapels

- Sanken Cos-11
- DPA
- Countryman B6

Boom Mics

- Sennheiser MKH 50
- NEUMANN KMR 81 / 82

Other Mics

- Sanken CUB mics

Recorders

- Sound Devices 664
- CL6 Fader Pack
- Sound MixPre 10T
- Tentacle Sync TRACK E
- Zoom F3
- Zoom H2n

wireless video feed from the camera dept on my next shoot.

My second gripe is that I can't get my MS stereo mic signal to my recorder wirelessly. I often use an MS stereo mic on the set if I feel that I can get something usable from it. But getting the signal wirelessly to my recorder is proving to be a challenge.

I would also love to have two Tentacle Track E recorders and a Zoom F3 recorder as my 'GET OUT OF JAIL' card. These units could be very handy in certain cases.

I sometimes record a safety two track on a MixPre or a Zoom H2n. Why? Because I've had days when the main recorder did not roll, or the card got corrupted. Having a two track backup recording of your LR mix on a completely different recorder can save you from complete disaster.

(Continued on page 47)

Cheerag Cama is a seasoned freelance audio engineer, who set his foot in the world of pro audio in 1986, and till date, he has performed audio engineering for several recording studios, television multi-camera shoots, feature films, ad films, corporate films, documentaries, and more. Cheerag has also worked as production sound mixer for major Bollywood films such as *Kaabil*, *Chehre*, *Pushpa: The Rise*, *Genius*, and many more. Apart from that, Cama has served as the Head of Audio Department on numerous shows, such as *Koffee With Karan*, *Comedy Nights With Kapil*, *The Kapil Sharma Show*, and *Satyamev Jayate*. In his guest column, Cheerag shares his insight on how he, as an audio engineer, prepares for a hassle-free shoot day.