

AUDIOMEDIA

PROFESSIONAL AUDIO IN PRODUCTION

CineLab SoundMix

Premier Post
In Moscow



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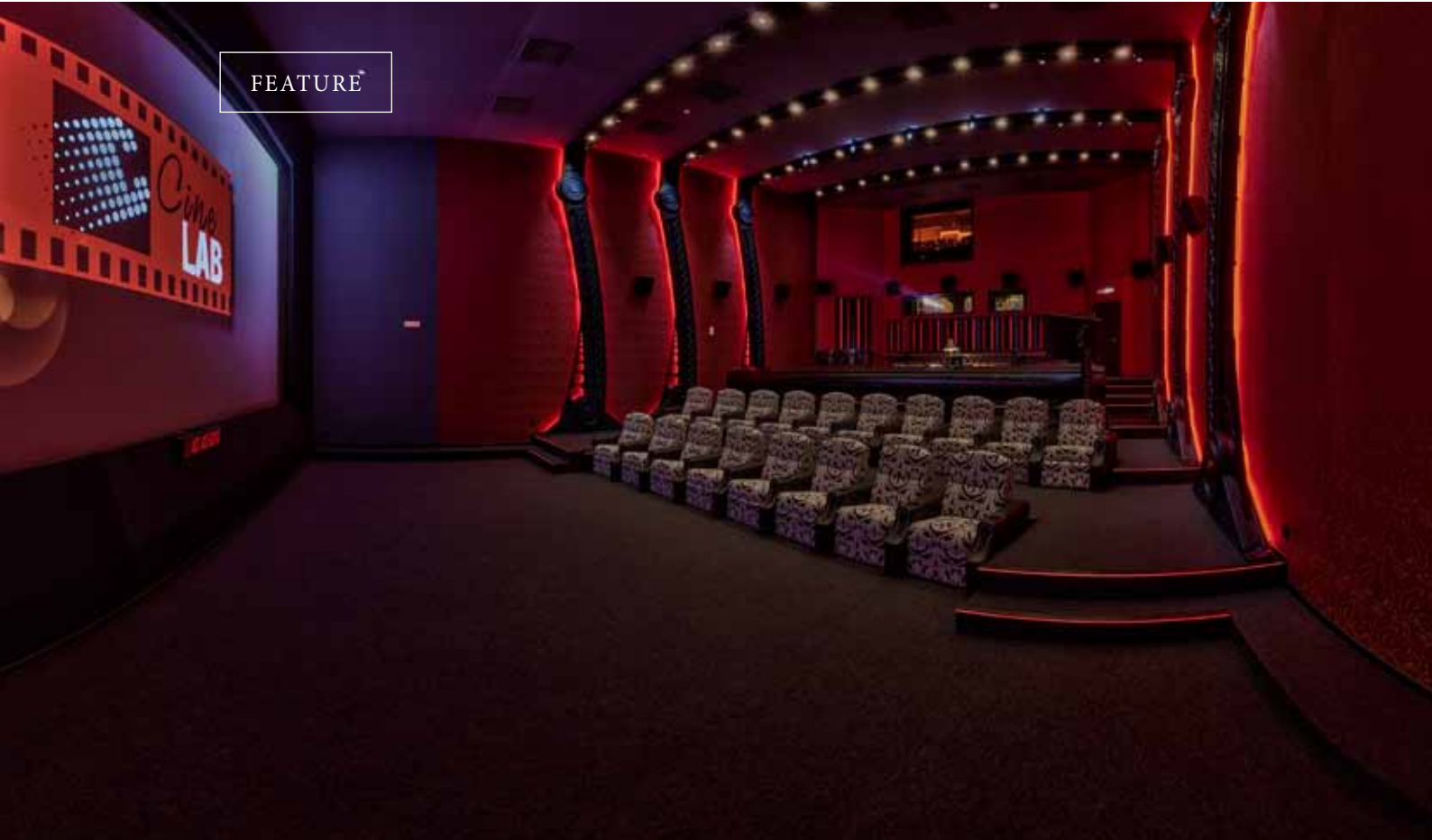
Soundcraft Si Expression

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A Very Grand Design

CineLab SoundMix, Moscow

CineLab is a very impressive audio post production facility. Whatever way you look at it, builds like this are rare and deserve celebration. Paul Mac goes on a tour of this latest Russian marvel...

We should be absolutely clear from the start that CineLab SoundMix is a dedicated audio post production facility. Why do we have to make that clear? Well, because the basic room list goes on a little longer than sound people are used to. Also, the kit, the build, the quality of finish, and the quality of the staff, are all very special. Indeed, White Mark Limited, the acoustic and architectural consultancy entrusted with this project is no stranger to large projects, but David Bell, White Mark's Managing Director, says SoundMix has certainly been its biggest project to date. And it has to be said from the start that the results are pretty spectacular.

There are four main mix rooms, two ADR studios, seven editorial rooms, a dedicated Foley studio, and the 'Universal' studio (more like a music facility for soundtrack recording and mixing), and much more.

The studio is located on the North West outskirts of Moscow, Russia. It's a beautiful city, so there's lots of potential outside the studio walls, as well as inside.

I was given an extensive tour of the facility by the Managing Director of SoundMix, Vadim Nerukhov; the Managing Director of White Mark Limited, David Bell, and the CEO of CineLab, Denis Glinsky.

The Tour

SoundMix has four main mix rooms. The first three are equipped with Pro Tools and Avid System 5 surfaces. The two largest, M1 and M2, have 96-fader System 5 frames and can mix over 600 channels each. M3 has a 48-fader System 5 surface with 184 channels to mix.

"First of all, it's service... Service, service, service... And quality of service... And people – the people who provide this service and who provide the 'conversation' with the clients..."

Denis Glinsky,
CineLab CEO

All three rooms have recently gained Dolby Premier certification. M4 is more of a pre-mix suite and has an Avid Icon surface installed with 5.1 monitoring.

M1 has both 35mm and DCP projection, while M2 has DCP (35mm via telecine). Both now have colour-grading facilities in too.

All the mix rooms are an impressive size, especially M1 and M2, which both have generous (and luxurious) seating provision in front of the mix position, complete with bass-shakers. The decor is based around a deep

SoundMix now has its Premier License for all main mix rooms.





CineLab SoundMix M4, Pre-mix room – ICON control.

a folded glass design that avoids a potentially damaging specular reflection from what would normally be a large flat surface.

What's particularly striking about the ADR studios (and other rooms around the complex) is that space, while plentiful, is not wasted. The room feels comfortable, not cramped.

Foley-Fantastic

SoundMix also has its own dedicated Foley facility. It's a large space and incorporates a range of design features that may well make it one of the most sophisticated purpose-built Foley rooms anywhere. This is one of the last areas of SoundMix to be finished and was still under construction when I visited. It is also the only studio area in CineLab not built on an isolated foundation slab, simply because this was the best way to achieve the noise specs and acoustic performance required of the Foley room.

White Mark undertook an extensive study of Foley facility requirements as part of the >

red that apparently caused initial concerns when suggested, but has since proven itself. The rooms are comfortable, attractive, but also very functional and professional.

There are two ADR studios at SoundMix, both are a good size with large isolation booths, Pro Tools systems, and Euphonix Artist Series controllers. The two are orientated differently so the studio can cater for those who prefer the talent to be either to the side or in direct

line-of-sight. Monitoring is 5.1 and a range of pre-amps are available in each studio, including Summit Audio, Grace Design, and TL Audio.

According to David Bell, White Mark's aim in the ADR studios was to make the control room/booth arrangement "As intimate as possible whilst acknowledging that in Russia, and a lot in America, they like to do it with a separate control room." There are large windows between the two, incorporating

of the most sophisticated purpose-built Foley rooms anywhere. This is one of the last areas of SoundMix to be finished and was still under construction when I visited. It is also the only studio area in CineLab not built on an isolated foundation slab, simply because this was the best way to achieve the noise specs and acoustic performance required of the Foley room.

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CINELAB – THE BIG PICTURE

CineLab started around eleven years ago as a private company with four major investors. At that time, Denis Glinksky was running a sales company dealing in production lighting, and supplying, amongst others, CineLab Rental – the first company in the group. He was made aware early on that CineLab had ambitions to 'build a film studio' and that it already had the resources and real estate to do great things.

Eventually, Glinksky closed his own company and joined CineLab. "It was my dream to build a studio," he says. "It became more and more real... Now we have ten companies in our group, and SoundMix is the diamond."

Step by step the CineLab created companies to cover a variety of film production services. Each time, Glinksky used his determination and thorough approach, along with the faith of CineLab's investors, to claim a significant and credible stake in each area.

They opened CineLab Color – the laboratory. Then they started CineLab Digital, which specialises in color correction and picture post production. After that came CineLab Logistic (print distribution, etc) and the purchase of a telecine boutique in downtown Moscow, now CineLab Lounge. Other companies are CineLab 35/16 (camera rental), CineLab VFX, CineLab DataDelivery (satellite data delivery to cinemas), and CineLab Production (film production management and administration). CineLab production can take advantage of the network of CineLab services to help deliver on its clients' creative ambitions, and so highlights the breadth of expertise and

quality that the group has achieved.

The sheer entrepreneurial spirit of the company, its investors, and Glinksky himself was aptly demonstrated in the creation of Color, the company's film laboratory. Initially Glinksky couldn't find the right person to start up the lab, so decided to do it himself. For half a year he was tutored, part time, by a professor from the Moscow Film Institute, then with a basic plan in-hand got the laboratory built. Initially, there was no business – a more established competitor had it all and customers were not keen on changing. However, knowing the conservative nature of the film industries, Glinksky did not waver. The lab spent half a year just doing tests (and paying for salaries, rent, film stock, and chemicals) until a client came to them with a "difficult situation". CineLab come through for them, and the laboratory was established.

"Our supervisor understands the cinema business very well and is a very clever man. He is not a cowboy, and has not tried to get next day results. We always have half a year... even a whole year, to run each facility properly."

By that measure SoundMix has done incredibly well. When I visited it wasn't even officially opened but had been working on projects for almost half a year already. A good thing too. It's probably the biggest post production sound complex in the country, and the question of whether there is enough business to be had, must be asked.

Glinksky responds with a refreshing outlook: "I always think it depends on quality of service, not how big the market is. If you have loyal clients, you have a market. Some of our clients were also small 11 years ago and we've grown

together. When we became quite a big company, big production companies also worked with us – I hope with pleasure.

"When we started to build SoundMix I explained to our shareholders that this part of the business should be our face, and requires substantial investment. It will close a ring of services... They need to see all the figures from all the companies and how they change now the group includes SoundMix... Because this has a big plus to the other companies."

Yes, you heard correctly. Glinksky sees the value and success of this individual facility partly defined by additional value it brings to other companies in the group, not simply by isolated financial performance. He also sees the value in a loyal and long-term satisfied client base to isolate

the group from the fickle nature of the film industry's fortunes. "Of course we would like to be the best – this is normal. We have never aimed to be a monopoly in different businesses. That is stupid. We try to be the best.

"First of all, it's service... Service, service, service... And quality of service... And people – the people who provide this service and who provide the 'conversation' with the clients... It is clients, and your relationship with your clients. If you have satisfied clients then you will be successful."

Glinksky always has his eye on the next stage for CineLab. However, he makes it a condition that each new endeavour has to be handed over to the right person before he will move onto the next project. That man is Vadim Nerukhov, Managing Director of CineLab SoundMix.



CEO Denis Glinksky (left) and Managing Director Vadim Nerukhov (right).

design and consultation process of the CineLab space, in particular attending sessions with acclaimed Foley Artist and Sound Designer Nicolas Becker.

One thing that emerged was a variety of preferences when it came to 'control rooms

MARK OF EXCELLENCE

White Mark Limited is an acoustic and technical design company working in the audio and video post-production, television, film, and music recording industries worldwide. It specialises in production facilities for the film and television industry, music recording facilities, performance spaces, and educational facilities for the media industry. It has designed and supervised the construction of over 150 audio production suites and video facilities in London alone, with many more completed projects around the world. It won TEC awards in 2003 and 2008 for the Red Bull project in Santa Monica, and Hit Factory Studio Six in New York, respectively.

White Mark's most significant recently completed commissions have been the technical facilities for the new NBC Universal Headquarters, and the complete architectural and technical design responsibility for the new broadcast headquarters for ARD, the German national public broadcaster – both in London – plus facilities for Hogarth Worldwide in Romania, Singapore, Mexico, and New York.

To date the company has worked on five completed studios built to Dolby Premier Specification and has further such projects at various stages of design.

White Mark's Managing Director is David Bell, Chartered Engineer, who recently appeared as an expert witness in the UK Parliamentary enquiry into Crossrail (a transport project proposed for London) and its effects on the Soho region and the studios therein, culminating in the winning of commercial guarantees for the clients in the House of Lords.

Derek Buckingham is the Architectural Director of White Mark, and Alan Cundell is a Director, with responsibility for project management, finance, and overseeing the technical aspects of all White Mark projects.

or not'. In the end, the CineLab facility was designed so either request could be satisfied with a movable system, including an analogue SSL console.

For acoustics, there was still more variety in opinions. In many instances a dead space was required for either free-field emulation or to allow post processing. However, there was also a good case for engineering real-world early reflections with some basic adjustable acoustics even if the reverb tail was added later on. In one area of the Foley room there is a motorised rotary element in the ceiling that has variable reflectivity/absorption, plus both light and heavy curtains for further control of early reflections.

Floor traps were the subject of much debate, but essentially the aim was to position a variety of floor elements so that common floor progressions (floor types that often follow each other) were close together, including those close to specific Foley room areas; for example, appropriate floor elements near the permanent kitchen and bathroom areas.

There are a lot more specific mechanisms and ergonomic considerations going into the Foley area than we have space to cover here – tuneable flooring, for example, inspired by an accidental use of square nails, but now refined with a turning-screw system. Suffice to say that when it is completed, the Foley area will be the envy of studios all-over and will may well move the art and science of Foley spaces forward, to the benefit of all.

Music Makers

The 'Universal Studio' is a self contained facility inside SoundMix that is based on a more traditional music studio model with a large orchestral live area (with Steinway D-274), two isolation booths (one high, one low absorption), plus a control room with a 48-fader System 5 console, Pro Tools, and a bespoke 5.1 Exigy monitoring system. Obviously its uses are many, but soundtracks spring to mind immediately, as well as the usefulness of a good-sized recording space for things like crowd recordings and so on. In this latter example, a generous provision of heavy curtaining should provide much of the absorption necessary to make this practical.

However, as a live room it was also felt that a more finely adjustable acoustic might also be a nice thing. This starts with a control system, even for the curtains, so that specific areas of the room can be deadened. This is in conjunction with slatted ceiling elements that can be rotated, revealing absorbent material behind, as well as other portable elements.

Settings for the variable acoustics can be saved and recalled. Vadim Nerukhov suggested that this system might be more used for post production duties than with straight music recording sessions, but the fact that it is available at all is completely in line with the CineLab aim of making every space as flexible as possible, and trying to cater for as many different clients as possible without compromise.

As well as these main facilities, there are a variety of other spaces around CineLab, including sound effect/sound design suites, artist/client lounges, a central machine room, transfer suite, and so on.

A Very Grand Design

The building itself was originally a large communal cold-store, and work to strip out that old internal structure began in early 2009. White Mark Limited was appointed around that time, eventually with responsibility for all audio production areas in the building. After a consultation period, including a visit to Les Auditoriums de Joinville in France as part of an investigation into large-scale Foley provision, more visits to the site by White Mark's David Bell and Derek Buckingham, and a tour of London post production facilities by the CineLab team, the layout of the production rooms was agreed by February 2010. In the meantime, work on the building had continued, including a raised roof height, the removal of upper floor pillars, and casting of the fixed isolation structures.

The floating shell structures were started in September 2010, and presented a few challenges of their own. David Bell: "We couldn't put the crane on the mounts because it was too heavy, and we had to take the crane out of the building before the roof was finished so the mounts wouldn't get cold and be frozen. We had to build the frame on the ground with the crane; take the crane to pieces and take it out, finish the roof, then come in, lift the whole frame with jacks, put all the mounts [Christie & Grey] underneath, and then put it down again."

Also, the isolation shells combined with the cold Moscow winter presented a problem – the temperature of the air gap could potentially cause problems with condensation and ice build-up, so the whole building had to have an external insulation layer to ensure this wouldn't be a problem.

By August 2011 the facility was ready for reverb time checks and treatment adjustments to meet the Dolby Premier license criteria. There were also initial client visits for feedback on the facility. Initial Dolby licensing was agreed in December 2011 (Premier licensing was more recent) and clients have been using CineLab


A CineLab SoundMix ADR Suite, with Artist Series Pro Tools control.



SoundMix since then, even though the facility will not be fully complete and officially opened for a couple of months yet.

Core Competence

CineLab SoundMix is impressive – from the moment you reach the front door it is obvious that the objective from the start was to create an exceptional audio post production facility, without compromise. The building, the structures, the interiors,

the equipment, and the staff all have a part to play in the whole, but perhaps the most important contributors to future success will be the key pillars of service, relationships, and excellence that have been etched into the very foundations of CineLab itself. 

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CENTRAL SERVICES

IT Infrastructure around CineLab SoundMix is based on a centralised hard disk storage system, sophisticated KVM switching and control, and SSL MADI-X8 MADI routing systems, amongst other things. Every workstation in the facility works from the same storage array via iSCSI technology, which is the Ardis Technologies DDP (Dynamic Drive Pool) system, with SSD devices for audio and magnetic disks for video. This essentially means that multiple workstations are accessing and playing a session from the same logical disk space. All of the console DSP, outboard, and matrix switching for the four 'M' studios and several of the others are stored in one room. The outboard routing is done via the MADI matrix so that every room can have whatever outboard it requires at that time, easily patch with the SSL Logiivity browser-based control software. Another MADI matrix is used to connect all of the Dolby equipment – encoders and processors – for patching around the facility.

The Universal Studio is connected to the rest of the facility with a variety of exchange lines, including AES and MADI. This allows other control rooms around the facility to use the large live room when necessary, without disturbing the Universal Studio control room.

A large KVM switching system allows any terminal in any studio access to any workstation.

It's also worth mentioning that CineLab SoundMix is, at the time of writing, the only film sound company in Russia to have been granted the CDSA certificate for high standards in anti-piracy and content protection – an endorsement that could be very important to a wide client base.

CineLab SoundMix M1 mix room - Premier Licensed, Atmos-ready.

