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Destiny Sound helps make the music at Montreux

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

DURING THE MONTREUX-DETROIT Kool Jazz Festival, there's one man who knows what everything's supposed to sound like, even before the concerts begin.

That man is Bill Platt, manager and head engineer for Destiny Sound, the concert-sound division of Arnold Williams Music Inc., in Canton.

Destiny Sound is putting together the sound systems for all the concerts at Montreux-Detroit IV, just as it has in the previous three years of the jazz festival.

"My main job is for people not to notice us," Platt said, in his low-key manner. When people think the sound is good, they aren't concerned with what's happening to produce it, he explained.

"OUR PORTRAYAL is to make the group sound the way it wants to sound. You need a lot of sophisticated equipment to overcome the acoustics problems of most buildings," Platt said.

In the headquarters of Destiny Sound, adjoining the music store, he described the first year of handling sound for Montreux-Detroit. "It was real exciting and we had some great artists. We had a lot of new experiences we had to learn about."

One of the biggest problems can be bad weather at any of the outdoor concerts, which are generally the free ones. Rain in the morning can delay setting up equipment, and if it rains during a concert, then equipment has to be covered and the concert moved to an indoor site.

"This year there will be a tarp over the amphitheater at Hart Plaza, and the equipment will be protected more," Platt said. Rain sites include the ballroom of the Veterans Memorial Building and the pit area at Hart Plaza. Extra equipment will be installed this year at the rain sites.

If a concert has to be moved, an artist may be cut short occasionally, and the concert continue with the next group. "We try to get all the artists on," Platt said.

Besides handling the sound system, Destiny Sound also provides equipment

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— Bill Platt
manager, Destiny Sound

personally requested by each artist for their performance. Because pianos are hard to move, groups usually ask that they be made available for the concert.

Platt flipped through a sheet of individual contract riders. Tito Puente, the Latin jazz ensemble, wants an acoustic and an electric piano for Montreux-Detroit. "Most jazz groups and big bands want both," he said. "They like to use electric instruments of the new age."

For pianist Oscar Peterson, "We have a special Bosendorfer grand piano." This piano, rented from another music store in Detroit, has an extra half-octave of keys on it. Most other artists request a seven- or nine-foot Steinway grand piano.

Other equipment desired includes drums and guitar and bass amps, to be plugged into the musician's own guitar. Only if the star is a drummer, such as Tito Puente, will he bring his own drums.

PERCUSSION instruments such as vibraphones, congas and timbals are provided by Destiny Sound. "They bring small things themselves. We call them 'toys,'" he said. "We also supply music stands."

Three hours before each performance, a sound check is done. All the instruments are tested out with the group, and the level of the microphones and everyone on stage is checked. This procedure usually takes an hour.

"The sound engineer will be at the sound check, and generally the artist will talk to the mixer, telling him what he's going to do and how he wants it portrayed," Platt said.

At the sound check, markings are

placed on the floor, so that if another group plays in between, the equipment can be put back where the first artist wants it when the group returns.

"Some big groups bring a sound engineer, but mostly we do the sound mixing," Platt said. Twelve to 32 microphones are provided, and every instrument generally has its own mike.

FOR SOME OF the more acoustic groups and big bands, two trumpets might share a mike. Quieter instruments, such as saxophone and flute, might have a mike on each one.

"It all goes to a big mixing console, where the sound mixer or engineer tries to portray what the group is trying to do," he said.

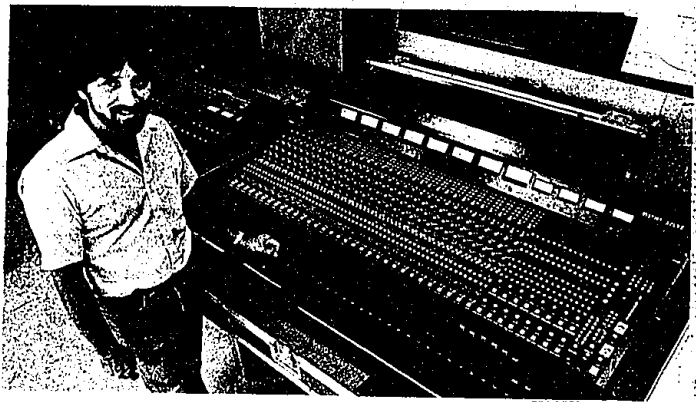
Platt, who is an engineer, sometimes will mix a concert for another event. But at Montreux, where concerts take place at eight locations at once, he manages all the other engineers.

Arnold Williams himself may go down and tune pianos, Platt said. However, Destiny Sound provides two piano tuners who work full-time at all the jazz festival sites.

Platt said, "It takes 45 minutes to an hour to tune a piano. We must have about 14 different pianos down there."

THE SOUND MIXER at the console tries to sit back where the audience is, preferably in the center of the crowd. Sometimes the festival site is so crowded the mixer must sit on the side.

Destiny Sound also has been doing sound for the Detroit-Windsor International Freedom Festival for the last three years and for the Grand Prix, its two years. "We also do many shows at Ford Auditorium, Cobo Hall, Masonic



Bill Platt of Destiny Sound stands in front of a \$33,000 sound console. Destiny Sound handles sound systems and provides mikes, pianos, per-

cussion instruments and other equipment for many metropolitan-area musical events including the Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival.

Temple and the Music Hall," Platt said. For two years, it did the mixing for Renaissance Live! held outdoors at the Westin Hotel. "We do shows inside with local groups now," he said.

Thirty-five persons are working on Montreux from Destiny Sound, eight full-time and the rest hired part-time for the summer.

"There are so many events, they work four days a week," he said. "We are doing a lot of shows. We do fairs, city events. We did work with Quincy Jones and Stevie Wonder last year."

HE SAID some equipment has been rented to Meadow Brook Music Festival. "The mixing consoles that bigger groups want they don't have."

Platt said he has always been a musician. He started on trumpet and attended summer camp at Interlochen. He studied engineering at Schoolcraft Community College and began doing

sound for a company developing products for the music industry.

"I got so busy I didn't finish college," he said. He has gone on the road with Emerson, Lake and Palmer, the Rolling Stones, Grand Funk Railroad and Bob Seger. For a while, he had his own group, Flyin' Easy, which played jazz and pop at the Renaissance Center.

On a plane trip, he met a man who

recognized him from his work at Montreux-Detroit and hired him to do the sound for the Port Jazz Festival, then a 16-year-old festival held in mid-July, in Finland. "It's similar to Montreux. It's a six-day festival with many locations," said Platt, who has worked at the event for the last two years.

He didn't take a team with him. "I just went alone. I do all the advance work by mail."

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