

# The show must go on

**Following the unfortunate cancellation of last year's APRS Exhibition, its resurrection as Recording Technology '99 falls upon the broad shoulders of veteran industry insider Phil Dudderidge; Focusrite Chairman by day, Exhibition Chairman by day and night!**

*Aside from your ongoing status as Chairman of Focusrite, this year you are additionally serving as Exhibition Chairman for the forthcoming Recording Technology '99 show (to be hosted by the APRS at the Business Design Centre, Islington on 26 and 27 June 1999). How did this posting transpire, and was it an unexpected bonus on your part?*

"Not at all. I stood for election to the board of APRS last September. My stated intention was to focus on the issue of the Exhibition for the benefit of the Suppliers Group, which is the membership that constitutes manufacturers and distributors of professional audio products."

*As Exhibition Chairman, do you plan to serve your term with a different game plan to your predecessors?*

"It's an ad-hoc situation; the Exhibition Steering Committee is an ad-hoc group of exhibitors that will be assembled in the next 30 days or so from those parties that are interested in getting involved and helping to shape the Exhibition. I'm taking a leadership role at the moment in order to get the ball rolling, but we really want exhibitors' involvement in steering the direction of the Exhibition."

*The show's advance press blurb states, in part, 'The Exhibition is being completely reinvented to address today's market.' Can you elaborate on this bold mission statement opener?*

"We have to identify who the intended visitors are, and what they should gain by coming to the show. Then we have to look at the actual exhibitors, and essentially match the two. Visitors are people involved in the recording process of audio for profit — principally music, but it goes beyond music to audio in post production — as individuals, small businesses or major studios; be they post production or music recording studios. So, as well as listed recording studios, including the Studio Accord members of APRS and non-members (the various studios listed in *Showcase*, for example), we would expect to see people from the film studios at Twickenham and Shepperton alongside the Soho fraternity. And not just the owners

and managers, but, more importantly, the operators, the recording engineers and assistants who work in these facilities. I think it's terribly important that they be involved in the show; a lot of them are freelancers and need to know about new products coming onto the market. There's nothing like an exhibition to get people talking to the developers and manufacturers of these products. It's what keeps the whole industry moving forward.

"Past shows have always been on weekdays and that has precluded a large proportion of these practitioners from attending; they're just too busy. Weekdays are such a precious time for both highly-paid professionals who work in the major studios and post production facilities, and self-employed people working in project studios around the country, who sometimes have day jobs — second sources of income, as it were. A weekend makes it so much easier for people to attend an exhibition. This has been proved time and time again at everything from AES shows in the States and Europe, to IBC shows and the Frankfurt Musikmesse; all these shows have their public days at the weekend and are very heavily subscribed."

*One of your goals is an attendance figure of 10,000 audio professionals, all of whom are users and buyers of the products on offer. How does this figure compare with those of previous shows, and what measures are you implementing to ensure this goal is a realistic one?*

"Historically, APRS shows have attracted five to six thousand people over a three-day event. I think that, by broadening the appeal of the show and making it more accessible by having it at the weekend, it's going to be far more realistic to achieve the figure indicated. It will, of course, depend on the Exhibition having sufficient numbers of leading brand exhibitors to make the show of interest and appeal to visitors. It's a chicken-and-egg situation: if we've only got a handful of exhibitors then we're not going to get that number of interested people, but if we achieve the sort of exhibitor numbers I'd like to see — in excess of one hundred, as in the past — then I think people will come."



*So-called 'Charter Exhibitors' — those who apply for space early — will qualify for a rebate based on their pro-rata share of the distributable profit of the show. What other changes are you in the process of implementing and why?*

"The APRS is the members' organisation. Exhibitors should think of it in terms of their show; not somebody else selling them space; it's the exhibitors promoting their own show. This is the attitude I want people to adopt, whereas in the past, with some people, there's been a lack of identity with the promoter. They may have been APRS members, but didn't feel that they had any say or control, and they were being sold something that they may or may not have felt was appropriate to them. That applies to me as a business manager; in the last two years I haven't felt that the APRS was offering Focusrite a show that was going to be effective for us. The APRS has become an umbrella body for a number of different vertical groups — be it studios, post production studios, suppliers, duplicators or record producers. It's evolved and is continuing to evolve as a worthwhile organisation that brings together these various parts of what is one industry, in my view. The people who operate within this industry move from sector to sector. I think an exhibition that addresses all those different sectors is appropriate because a lot of manufacturers and distributors have product ranges addressing those different vertical markets."

*I understand that you are keen for the APRS exhibition to recognise the importance and buying power of the small businesses and private individuals that represent a high proportion of the show's customers. Surely this changing trend has been obvious for quite some time?*

"It certainly has been for me and it's a battle I've been fighting from the outside for a few years now. It gives me no pleasure to say this, but I think I've been proved right by the demise of the show in its old format; in 1998 APRS was not able to get sufficient support for its proposed event and therefore cancelled it. In '97 the Vision & Audio show was, in the view of some of those who exhibited, not a great success. More to the point, a lot of people, including myself, chose not to exhibit because we didn't believe in the format. The attempt to merge the audio recording and professional video and post production markets was not a particularly successful marriage."

*Looking ahead, what are your hopes for future APRS exhibitions — beyond your Exhibition Chairman tenure?*

"Clearly this is a critical year for APRS as an exhibition promoter. If we get it right this year we will be able to build upon it, learning from this year's event what exhibitors think we did right; what we could have done better, and how we should develop it in future years. Exhibitions improve through evolution; staying in touch with the needs and expectations of both exhibitors and visitors." □

*Phil Dudderidge spoke with Jonathan Miller.*