

## Audio: Grand Central's Carole Humphrey talks talent, creativity & technology

By: Carole Humphrey



I got my first start in the Soho sound industry over 30 years ago, working at Studio G, where the Cadbury's Smash Martians were invented. In that time I have seen great leaps forward in the technology that the sound industry has at its disposal. There has also been a massive change in perception among the creative industry at large. While there is still an education process to go through, so many more directors, creatives and producers are really waking up to the power of sound. You can see it in the shift from using the term 'sound engineer' to 'sound designer'.

Creating excellence in sound is like baking a cake. You take the ingredients, blend them together and — with more than a little skill — you create something that is very different to the sum of its parts. The trick is not to 'over egg' it — the final result should represent a delicate balance between each of its composite elements.

I'm a firm believer in talent, creativity and tech being the key ingredients to good sound design. I'm going to discuss the importance of each one in turn and the way they can combine to create something truly iconic.

### Talent

To get the talent part of the equation right, I think it's best to grow your own. One of the most enjoyable parts of my job is helping the next generation of sound designers to realize their potential. At Grand Central (GC), we offer an on-the-job training program that gives you all the skills you need — without university degree as a prerequisite — to get to the very top of the industry, on a six figure salary.

I won't pretend it's easy — because it's definitely not — but the results speak for themselves: seven of our nine sound designers have been with us over 10 years (moving up through the ranks here), one is celebrating his ninth anniversary with us this year and one is just starting out in his career, having just been promoted, following over two years working in transfer.

In fact, I was absolutely astonished earlier this year to receive thank you shout-outs in the BAFTA and Academy Awards acceptance speeches of Whiplash sound editor Ben Wilkins — someone who came to me many years ago for work experience and ended up learning the ropes over a number of years.

### Creativity

If you consider the way in which creativity breeds the very best in sound design, my advice is to look past the technology and think of the environment you are creating. Too many sound studios feature all the latest kit but they are just soulless places. Too often the owners can fall into the trap of buying for themselves, rather than the agencies and clients who give them business.

This is something that business partner Ivor Taylor and myself have always been vehemently against. We are committed to investing in the right kit for our clients' needs (more on that later) but much more important to us is the way we make them feel.



studio.

Our aim is to provide a relaxed and inspiring environment that helps them to get the most out of their sessions. This year, we are opening The Lofts, two new studios on the top floor of our facility. Not only will they both feature cutting-edge equipment, but they will look drastically different from your typical dark man-cave of a Soho sound studio.

We have spent time investing in high-quality fixtures and fittings, have paid close attention to sight lines and layout, and have worked with Melbourne-based designer Derek Samuel to ensure that when you walk inside you feel as though you are stepping into one of London's premier destinations — more akin to a private members' club or top-end hotel than a sound



## Technology

To give you the insight on tech, each studio in our business is designed to the highest acoustic and technical standards. All are ProTools HD, four are equipped with AMS Neve DFC Gemini mixing consoles and are also certified Dolby 5.1.

The remaining studios are currently being upgraded to S6 control surfaces and The Lofts' studios will have DFCs and a game changing new monitoring installation from Exigy.

Studio 5 and Studio 8, meanwhile, are certified for both Dolby 5.1 and 7.1. Studio 5 has D-Cinema projection and Dolby 3D projection. Later in the year, Dolby Atmos will also be installed in Studio 5.



My view on technology is that it is only as good as the people using it. I have long championed spending money on mixing desks, but this comes in partnership with spending time investing in

our junior talent so that all our sound designers have the skills to mix and record properly.

We were the first facility in Soho to move from analog to being totally digital, and here in 2015, we are soon going to be one of the first facilities in the industry to invest in the revolutionary Dolby Atmos, having last year, been the first facility to mix a spot in Dolby Atmos. We are prepared to make that leap with pioneering technology when we feel it is right for our clients, but we are never slaves to it and we know that with innovation can come glitches. Ultimately it's about having the right people behind it who know how to use it to best effect.

*Carole Humphrey is the Co-Founder/Managing Director of Grand Central in London (<http://www.grand-central-studios.com>).*