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Musical post

By CHRISTINE BUNISH

The biggest challenge for Chuck Butler, music director of Philadelphia's Monster Tracks Original Music, isn't to convince spot producers that they need original music. "Most want it if they can figure out a way to do it with their budget and time schedule," he says. Instead, Butler's challenge is to "get them to look at our reel and see we can do the job as well as people in other markets. We want them to consider coming to Philadelphia when there are so many choices out there."

Monster Tracks (www.reelsondemand.com/monster_tracks) was launched by Butler, a graduate of Boston's famed Berklee College of Music, in 1987 as a division of Baker Sound Studios (www.bakersound.com). The company's principal composer, Butler studied classical piano as a child and now plays mostly piano and guitar. He has set up his music room in Baker's Studio A, where he uses Mark of the Unicorn's Digital Performer in conjunction with Digidesign Pro Tools. His spot music usually features a combination of sampled and live instruments.

Monster Tracks' credits include commercials for Mattel, Trump Marina casino in Atlantic City, Campbell's Soup, Pizza Hut, Dodge, The Philadelphia Phillies, Herr's Potato Chips, Sovereign Bank, Stuff! magazine, Men's Health magazine and Fashion Bug stores. Political advertising clients have included Senator Bob Dole, Vice President Al Gore and Vermont's Senator Patrick Leahy. "Music for political spots is probably some of



Visual Music's Seufert offers his own CD package to help fight "temp track syndrome."

my favorite stuff, some of my best work," Butler notes. "These guys don't agonize over things. They know what they want and expect you to perform quickly. They also don't mind being edgy. They want to cut through like everyone else."

While political ads may have especially fast turn-

arounds to respond to opponent's attack ads or to launch salvos of their own, it's the nature of the advertising beast that turnaround time is always quick. "If you can't handle it, you can't be in this business," Butler observes. "Music is usually the last thing that gets done in commercial production, so



Earworks' Smith in one of the facility's four Pro Tools rooms. The studio used iDub for review purposes on this HealthComm project (inset), allowing the client to view the spot with its jazzy track online.



you're right up against the air date." Fortunately, for him, "the creative side comes quickly" and he often hones in on the right riffs immediately. A versatile composer, Butler is comfortable with a lot of different styles.

"If you want to be successful in a market like Philadelphia, you have to do everything," he notes. "There was a time when I was younger when I did what I thought the client wanted. Now I try to do what I think is right, and I'm much more satisfied and happier with my work," Butler says. "I'd rather lose jobs because people don't like what I did than second guess what they might have wanted."



Monster Tracks composer Butler specializes in music for spots and enjoys the freedom political projects provide.

Butler notes that "compared to 1990, the amount of time I spend on production is down 50 percent and, listening to my work then and now, I feel I've improved immensely. My work is more complex and interesting, with more depth, yet it takes me half as long to do mostly because of the incredibly powerful tools at my disposal."

side its market. The introduction of its Internet-based iDub process has enabled Earworks to "speed up everything tremendously" for long distance clients. With iDub, customers send Earworks videotapes of the spot to be scored, Earworks makes a QuickTime movie out of it, composes the music, marries it to the QuickTime movie and sends it back over the Internet so clients can play

cial production early on, he can help decide the best and most cost-effective approach for original music.

"Most agencies want to prescore something, to have at least a temp score or rhythm track to help in the offline process," he reports. "If they have music to offline to, their cuts become integral to the music. Having our own post house creates a symbiotic relationship between in-house and agency creatives."

Bongo's Smith opened his new Bongo Post & Music in mid-June. The 4,300-square-foot facility features Avid editorial, graphics and full mixing and music rooms. The music room features a large Pro Tools system "maxed out" with third-party plug-ins, a multitude of samplers and a Yamaha 02R board with an 01V submixer linked to it. Outboard gear includes the Millennia NSEQ2 for mastering EQ inline to the board. The NSEQ2's twin topology enables engineers to switch from solid state to analog for crisp or warm sounds.

The new mixing room has been designed for 5.1 surround although Smith acknowledges a lack of spot requests for the format. "Everyone figured surround would be in every studio by now," he notes. "The transition to surround will be as important as that from mono to stereo, although it will take longer than people expected."

The eight-time Emmy Award-winner (he most