

Sound man a key to Hollywood

By **Tori Richards**
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The cowboys of Hollywood's Golden Era hold a special place in the heart of John Stransky.

As one of the movies' early sound men, Leisure World's Stransky knew John Wayne, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, Trigger, Gene Autry and Tom Mix.

"Tom Mix's horse was actually six horses," Stransky said. "He had one to do every trick. One ran, one jumped, one untied ropes, one opened doors...he took six horses everywhere."

Stransky moved to Hollywood in 1923 and got a degree in electrical engineering at USC. He became a test engineer for a theater equipment supplier. That led to a job with Monogram, where he was soundman to the early western stars.

He worked 100 hours a week at the old Hal Roach studios. "I loved my job," Stransky said, adding that the stars were a delight to work with, unlike many actors today.

He worked on many serials and then, in 1945 he was loaned to RCA where he began working with classical recordings. Some of the many greats for whom he mixed sound were Vladimir Horowitz, Igor Stravinsky, Leopold Stokowski, Aaron Copland,

Mario Lanza, Jascha Heifetz and Artur Rubenstein.

Stransky recalled a time when Lanza tore a \$20 bill in half, gave him part of it, and promised him the other half as a tip if the recording was mixed to Lanza's liking. "I was embarrassed, I never got tipped. And that was a lot of money back then," Stransky said. "Lanza wanted lots of reverberation (echo), like he was in a big auditorium. I said no problem."

Needless to say, the recording was done perfectly, but Lanza did not deliver the other half of the bill. Stransky waited awhile and went to the bank to get \$10. A few months passed and when Lanza came back for another session, he handed Stransky the other

half of the torn bill.

Stransky moved to Universal Studios and began doing dubbing, scoring and rerecording. He was nominated for an Emmy in 1970 for "My Sweet Charlie." He mostly worked on television series, such as the Virginian, McHale's Navy, Dragnet, Emergency, Marcus Welby and Ironside.

He took the original soundtrack and added music and sound effects. The dialogue had to be replaced if the scene was shot outside, gunshots and big explosions also had to be redone. "The shots couldn't be very loud (outside) because it would scare

the horses.

"Sometimes we'd have as many as 30 different soundtracks running at the same time," Stransky said.

His wife Ruth, whom he'd married in 1932, didn't like his job too well, since it took too much time. "She put up with it graciously," Stransky said. But she liked some of the fringe benefits, such as parties, movie premiers and the Academy Awards. "It was fascinating, I was lucky to do something I enjoyed my whole life," Stransky said.

"I was at the premier of the "Sands of Iwo Jima" and all these people were standing in line to get John Wayne's autograph. As a joke, I got in the line, and when I got up there, he said, 'Oh no, not you, too!'"

The Stranskys moved to Leisure World in 1978 and have been busy traveling (to 90 foreign countries) and in a variety of community affairs. John meets with inmates at the Joplin Youth Center, belongs to the Saddleback Kiwanis, Camera Club (from which he has half a dozen awards), gives lectures to high school and grammar school children, is a volunteer photographer at La Brea Tarpits and taught a class in sound recording at Saddleback Community College.

Ruth has been a teacher, social service worker and a member of the Grand Jury.

Recently, five men who worked under Stransky paid him a visit. It was the first time in 17 years they had all been together. Out of the group, only one still works. They now all stay in touch, in fact, one of them was telephoned during this interview, just to verify some of the facts.



John Stransky