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DAVID GOGGIN

ALL-STAR EDUCATORS: Pictured outside Capitol Studios in Hollywood are the METAlliance founders (l-r): Chuck Ainlay, Ed Cherney, Frank Filipetti, George Massenburg, Phil Ramone, Elliot Scheiner and Al Schmitt, with attendees of the first METAlliance Academy. The students came from across the country and as far away as Japan for the two-day master-class event. See story on page 10.

With 'THE Guys' at METAlliance Event

by Alex Oana

Frequent contributor to PSN's sister publication, Pro Audio Review, Alex Oana, attended the METAlliance "In Session..." event in late March and offers the following first-person perspective.

"He's the guy," is the simple phrase that says, "He's an expert in his field. He's the one you should call." Well, Chuck Ainlay, Ed Cherney, Frank Filipetti, George Massenburg, Phil Ramone, Elliot Scheiner and Al Schmitt are each THE guy, having produced and/or engineered some of the most significant popular recordings of the last 50 years. In 2005, they collectively became the METAlliance (Music Engineering and Technology Alliance). A heckuva team, a yawn of a name and one hell of a mission: To define and secure the highest audio standards.

For 26 lucky attendees it was the chance of a lifetime to be one-on-one with seven of the finest living engineers and producers in the world for an entire weekend at Capitol Studios, Hollywood. Aptly titled "In Session with THE Guys," this was META's grand event, perhaps never again to be repeated with all seven members for logistical reasons alone, a fundraiser and awareness raiser designed to propel their mission through the year. Independent engineers, high school theater techs, chief engineers, seasoned pros and even a sports broadcast mixer from Osaka paid \$2,500 each to attend.

Leaning against the meter bridge of the Neve 8068 in Capitol Studio B, Cherney began, "It used to be we all learned by sitting behind some great engineers as assistants in great studios. That opportunity doesn't exist anymore." To see these legends do their thing in four studios in two days was a bit

like studying magic spells from the professors at Hogwarts.

Cherney and Ainlay led a contemporary rock/pop tracking session in Capitol Studio B, imparting their experience on session prep, mic technique, arranging the instruments in the room, signal path, levels, engineer conduct, setting the vibe and the importance of readiness. "The Rolling Stones aren't going to call out, 'We're ready for take one now. Please roll the tape.' The moment they walk onto the studio floor, you better be ready. Always be recording. Your number-one job is to capture what the musicians do."

In Studio A, recording a jazz/soul ensemble, Schmidt emphasized the same point when he related, "I can't tell you how many times the first take was *the* take. Hundreds and hundreds of times." He also lived up to his reputation of using no EQ; just one for the kick this time.

A nexus for great engineers, great music and a super nice guy, Ramone exuded the people skills responsible for creating the cocoons in which scores of artists birthed an unequally large portion of American popular music.

Scheiner's role (as when he mixed Steely Dan's *Aja*) was to deceive by generating masterful results so effortlessly. He was in Capitol's Studio C soloing tracks, processing and mixing analog from multitrack masters on a large-format Neve console.

Longtime digital mixing practitioner Filipetti and recent in-the-box convert Massenburg led a session focused on mixing in non-traditional studio environments. "Analog has evolved and has been perfected over 50-plus years," Filipetti opined. "We are at the dawn of mixing in-the-box. We're here to prove, in

a very inexpensive space, with very affordable gear, you are going to be able to do much of what you can do in the big studios downstairs." The jovial, contrarian genius Massenburg prepared attendees for what he hopes is the inevitable market-driven demand for high quality, explaining in the near future, when bandwidth allows, quality will not be limited by file size or data rate. "There will be an opportunity for you coming if you have the content."

The fee contributed by attendees will be spent, according to METAlliance managing partner, Jim Pace, on educating through similar regional events, outreach through "col-

leges and universities, seminars, lectures, conferences and AES shows." Pace's conference-opening remark, "If people know the difference between a box and a bottle of wine; if people are willing to pay \$3.75 for a good cup of coffee, maybe they'll pay for high-quality recording," serves as a ringing catchphrase of hope for the future of audio.

Visit metalliance.com and watch these pages for an upcoming event near you. You might just get to sit behind the board with one of the greats, too.

More of Alex's experiences at the METAlliance event will appear in the May 2010 Pro Audio Review.