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Bigger, Longer and Uncut: Miller & Kreisel Professional

Monitors Lend Weight to South Park

By: Tim Boyle

Oh my God! They killed Kenny!

Anyone who has watched South Park, or witnessed the recent stir of excitement and controversy stemming from the release of the film, will recognize this trademark phrase. *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* is the theatrical length release based on the irreverent Comedy Network animated television series that chronicles the misadventures of Stan, Kyle, Eric and Kenny — a quartet of sailor-mouthed elementary school students in the modern Mayberry of South Park, Colorado.

The film is basically a musical — albeit a somewhat colorful one. As such, the songs that each of the main characters sing, as well as the film score, set the moods and drive the pace of much of the film. As Score Mixer, I recorded and mixed the entire score, as well as one track for the Atlantic Records soundtrack. My involvement with the film came about following a call from noted film composer Marc Shaiman. Marc composed music for a plethora of well-known films, including *City Slickers*, both *Adams Family* films and *Patch Adams* (for which he was nominated for an Oscar). He and I worked together previously on

the *Adams Family* films, and when Dennis Sands, his regular mixer, was unavailable, I came on board. Coincidentally, I had also previously worked with Adam Berry, who composes the music for the *South Park* series, so coming into the project, I had a solid grasp of the concept of *South Park* and the style with which Marc works.

The majority of the score was recorded at a frantic pace in Los Angeles, CA, at Stage M on the Paramount lot and at the Newman Scoring Stage at Fox studios. Mixing was done at Signet Sound. The film's songs were actually recorded and mixed twice; first for the Atlantic Records soundtrack release, and again for what is actually heard in the film. This was due to production changes that occurred as the film was edited — tracks were often edited or changed musically or lyrically. I actually finished mixing the score only two weeks before the theatrical release.

While all of the facilities I used possess cutting edge recording equipment, I employed a Miller & Kreisel Professional 5.1 monitoring system of my own throughout the recording and mixing process. Specifically, I employed M&K Professional MPS-2510s for the left, center, right and surround channels, with two MPS-5310 subwoofers and an LFE Bass Management system. The MPS-2510 is a compact THX pm³-approved monitor that features multiple tweeters and woofers. There is also a user-selectable vertical directivity switch that optimizes sound for both small and large control room environments. With the varying control room sizes at all three facilities, this feature was used extensively.

The system was a crucial asset throughout the entire project, as the score was recorded at one location and mixed at another because of various personnel and facility scheduling conflicts. A high performance system was also essential because of the varying acoustic characteristics between these different facilities. The Newman stage at Fox, for example, is far bigger than Paramount's Stage M. Room size dramatically impacts how what is recorded will sound. Additionally, deceptively subtle aspects like varying floor compositions were a big factor. The Fox floor is flat and wood, while the Paramount facility's floor is a rippled, grooved parquet. Though often overlooked, the floor probably creates 60% of the acoustic treatment of what is being recorded, particularly with regard to the low-end frequencies. The M&K Pro system, aided by the LFE Bass Management system, allowed me to accurately hear and judge the differences in the various recordings and make necessary changes accordingly.

Another factor was equipment variances. The Fox control room is outfitted with an SSL console, while the Paramount room utilizes a Neve VR board. What is recorded and played back on one board often sounded markedly different when played through another. Having a system that can accurately transmit the differences between material recorded on varying equipment was key, and the M&K Pro system accomplished this remarkably well.

For *South Park*, over 100 musicians were employed, in addition to 12 vocalists, who sang backups to the main vocals, supplied series co-creators, Tray Parker and Matt Stone. The versatility of the M&K Pro system is apparent as it accurately plays back orchestral, jazz and rock genres with equal ease. The musical styles in *Bigger, Longer and Uncut* vary widely and the M&K Pro system captured the depth and subtle nuances of each track with clarity and power.

Finally, because I recorded and mixed the film in four different rooms, at three different facilities, the physical demands on the M&Ks were great. I was impressed with the rugged construction and easy set up and tear down of the system.

5.1 has forever changed the way movies are being recorded, mixed and heard. Having an accurate and reliable system that was easily transported between various locations was instrumental in producing a successful soundtrack.

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