

AES Melbourne Section Chairman's report 2023-2024

By Graeme Huon, Chairman

This is the Annual Chairman's report for the Audio Engineering Society (AES) Melbourne Section. AES Melbourne Section falls under the auspices of AES New York acting as an independent, not-for-profit Section.

Member meetings:

2024 has seen progress with the balance of face-to-face and online streaming for meetings. Face to face meetings offer opportunities especially for socialisation and 'off-agenda' items and so are preferred where possible, but attendances at the streamed (Zoom) meetings has been strong and growing.

In the twelve months since the last AGM, AES Melbourne has held five presentation meetings for members on topics of interest to general and new members alike, and has had one site tour. Meetings are generally open to the interested public, only being restricted to members when limits to attendance numbers apply. For Zoom enabled (Streamed) meetings, attendees do need to register beforehand. More detail on the 2023-24 meetings can be found at the end of this report and on the website AESMelbourne.org.au

Committee meetings:

Your Section Committee has met three times in the 12 months to deal with the business of running the Section and planning the upcoming meetings.

The added ability to conduct online committee meetings has also helped with travel arrangements and convenience for presenters and audiences.

We are always on the lookout for guest speakers or topics you'd like discussed, we would be pleased to hear from you.

Finances

AESMelbourne Section has seen continued rising costs for essential support services but remains in a viable position. Our thanks to Treasurer Graham Haynes for his continued efforts.

Online presence:

We have maintained our online presence with the regularly updated website, and also with simple social media LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter account feeds in particular. These are managed as low maintenance activities that hopefully offer the prospect of gaining wider attention for the website and so the Section.

Our web efforts could always benefit from members, friends or other interested parties with appropriate skills to assist in maintaining our reach in this particularly important aspect of our communication.

AES New York staff changes

During the year AES New York significantly increased its services support staff. We look forward to helpful support engagement for the Melbourne Section in particular.

Membership:

Melbourne Section membership has remained stable over the past year, being near 50 currently financial members. We also have the benefit of knowledge of 7 lifetime members of AES Melbourne now, having remained continuous members for 25 years or more.

AES Melbourne Section also remains keen to attract new members for all levels of membership.

More detailed committee information on AES Melbourne, AES New York and other Sections can be found on the AESMelbourne.org.au website. The site includes interesting summaries and video extracts on various audio topics and includes minutes of Committee meetings.

As Chairman I would like to thank the Committee for their continued effort in keeping Melbourne AES thriving, with particular thanks for Dr Rod Staples for his tireless effort on our 'legends' Series and especially to our secretary Peter Smerdon for his tireless hard work, dedication and leadership.

Graeme Huon

12 August 2024

AES Melbourne Section meetings and tours

AES Melbourne Section continues the privilege of world-class presentations and tours. This year we have received five presentations and have enjoyed one tour.

A significant theme for the year has been Game Sound, with three of the sessions covering this topic from varying perspectives.

The presentations merged both face to face and streamed approaches. Streamed sessions continue to increase AES Melbourne reach allowing local and world-renowned presenters in any time zone to participate. AES Melbourne is also grateful to SAE, Collarts and Melbourne Polytechnic for their continued support with venues and sessions.

For those interested in more detail full reports can be found on the AESMelbourne.org.au website.

August 2024 meeting

On 14th August 2024, Australian Oscar winner Ben Osmo gave a presentation on film location Sound recording. Ben has had years of wide practical experience in on-location sound capture and post production effects, taking us through the evolution of the necessary tools, techniques and ‘tricks of the trade’ needed to create world-class movies.

Ben took us on a journey progressing from simple one camera shoots able to be captured with a single microphone and recorder to complex multiple camera multi-angle shoots requiring far more complex audio capture, and improved skills in both capture and microphone hiding. Challenges described included capturing dialogue whilst the actors danced, capturing sound in extremely loud, unsilenced vehicle engines to loud music and scenes where the actors continuously moved. Specific and unique audio capture challenges with movies such as Lorenzo’s oil, Strictly Ballroom, The Phantom, Babe, Peter Pan, Charlotte’s Web, The Boys are back, The Sapphires, Happy feet, The Mad Max movies were described, including having to work on location in the humid tropical jungle for months or working in the endless sand of Namibian desert.

Ben then moved on to the challenges of audio for full CGI productions such as Peter Rabbit. Other notable works include Alien: Covenant, Friday on my Mind, and three thousand years of longing, where the now mature CGI techniques were needed to ‘paint out’ placed and lavalier microphones. Relevant movie extracts are available on the AESMelbourne.org.au website.

November 2023 meeting

On 13th November 2022, David Lauritsen presented at the Melbourne Polytechnic Fairfield Campus on the topic of ‘On game sound design’, including course curriculum development directions. David holds a Bachelor of Audio Engineering and a Masters Degree in Creative Industries Studies. He has extensive experience in game sound design including most recently with Big Ant Studios. David pointed out that with audio engineering the source material comes to the engineer whereas in sound design the source material comes from the designer.

David used the example of a recent game he helped produce to demonstrate the challenges with game sound design and in particular the multiple perspectives and sound timings required for each game player and so multiple players simultaneously. David then summarised the training, skills and experience needed to succeed in the game audio field.

Thanks also to Daniel Bodnarcuk and his team at the Melbourne Polytechnic Fairfield Campus for providing both the venue and the technical facilities for recording and streaming the event.

February 2024 Tour

On 5th February AES Melbourne was privileged to be given a tour of the State Theatre in Melbourne conducted by Nick Walker, the Arts Centre Manager of Sound and Vision, and facilitated in part by Committee member Rod Brown. This tour just preceded a multi-year renovation of the site and so we look forward to a return visit to see the new State Theatre in a few years.

This venue extends well below street level (8 floors), and so has good RF shielding reducing wireless system interference and has found use for a wide variety of performances including heavy rock concerts because of its noise containment properties. The venue is large and so has multiple requirements of Audio capture and reproduction, and for on-site communications. We were treated to a brief summary of site history then given a comprehensive tour of the facilities. As the venue was about to be comprehensively renovated, some of its advantages and in particular weaknesses were pointed out. Lessons for all.

February 2024 meeting

On 26th February, Stephan Schutz gave a presentation on Game Audio Assets – collection, production and management. Stephan was trained at secondary and tertiary level as an instrumental musician but saw the opportunity to move into Audio production and to eventually create the world leading library of sounds for Audio-visual production support. Stephan described the challenges in collecting, cataloguing and archiving ‘sounds for every occasion’. As examples, library sounds of a firearm used to be simple but now need files for each type of firearm, loading, unloading and near-, and far-field discharge recordings. Choice of recording equipment was described with emphasis on practical experiences where capable but less expensive equipment could be used to advantage. Few would risk bolting an expensive microphone underneath a skateboard, and a test pilot could carry a small, high SPL capable recorder in his pocket as examples.

Stephan went on to describe post-processing and layering of sounds for special effects. These included high sample rate capture then slowed to give the desired effect. Stephan also warned on the risks of storage medium degradation and risks associated with all storage media including redundant NAS, having once experienced a simultaneous drives failure. The session was streamed. (Thanks go to Collarts Collingwood).

April 2024 meeting

On 8th April 2024, Nick Harrison presented on Game Audio software and Workflows. The meeting was a combination face-to face and streamed session (Thanks go to Collarts Collingwood).

Nick outlined games platforms (eg. Unity, Unreal) and the use of native or middleware extensions such as FMOD and Wwise). Nick took the audience through examples of preparing audio inclusions for gamer programs, also showing effective use of AI Large Language Model (LLM Claude) tools to assist coding ‘while we watched’. The relevant workflows were also described. The session was streamed. (Thanks go to Collarts Collingwood).

June 2024 meeting

On 17th June 2024, Dr Anton Hasell gave a presentation on the Specialist Bell Design Process. Anton is a world-recognised creator of Art Installations incorporating sound. He first

came to our attention when he was involved in the Bell installation at Birrarong Marr, Melbourne. These tuned bells were also designed to tailor the harmonic overtone frequencies and amplitudes. Anton gave a presentation explaining just how this was done using Finite Element Analysis software to form the shapes and profiles. Being able to profile the bell overtones in this way was a world first. Anton also described the challenge of creating smaller bells with a low perceptual strike tone by tailoring of the overtones – his ‘difference tone’ bells. These were necessary for the ‘Long Now’ clock project in Texas USA. Anton works with a wide range of materials including bronze alloys, stainless steel and Titanium.

