

## Excerpt from **Tape Editing** by Harold Lawrence

From the start, I found tape editing one of the most exciting and creative activities of my professional life. Apart from the satisfaction of "building" a cohesive performance assembled with loving care from recording session takes, the technical aspects of the work fascinated me.

But first, a bit of history. Strictly speaking, editing preceded the development of magnetic tape. It was possible to perform edits in the days of wire recording. The technology (if you can call it that) was crude and primitive compared to magnetic tape editing. After cutting the wire at the intended splice points, the two takes were joined together with a square knot, which was then held close to or in a flame hot enough to soften the wire. The tape editing expert, **Joel Tall**, reported that wire editors often used a lighted cigarette or a small spotwelder to perform the splice. But we're not done yet. The loose ends protruding from the knot were then trimmed off so that it could be smooth enough to pass through the head assembly. Even with the greatest care, wire splices still produced clicks and thumps. In *Techniques of Magnetic Recording*, Joel Tall concluded in his scholarly, understated manner that "because of this, wire [was] rarely used as an editing medium".

Editing with magnetic tape was a dramatic step forward. But in the days before the introduction of the splicing block, it was still a time-consuming, tricky procedure. After marking the precise location of the intended edit point, the two tapes, representing different takes, were placed on top of each other. Using scissors, the editor cut through both tapes at roughly a 45-degree angle. The ends were then joined with adhesive tape, after which the excess was trimmed off.

The development of the **EdiTall** tape-splicing block, with its concave, "shelved" groove, finally made it possible for editors to perform their joins more efficiently and rapidly than ever.

During the past 52 years, the tape editor's tools of the trade have hardly changed. Basically, only four items are needed—a single-edged razor blade, a roll of splicing tape, a splicing block, and a grease pencil (yellow or white will do). And if you use the Technics 1500US tape deck, you won't even need the grease pencil to mark the tape at the cutting point; the tape can be "marked" merely by pushing it against a plastic marker with your finger.

Locating the cutting point can be the most challenging aspect of tape editing. To find the right spot, the editor must rock the tape back and forth over the playback heads. Other words for this procedure are "jogging", or "scrubbing". Practice will enable the editor to identify sounds at different speeds. Even at ultra-slow speeds, he can spot a trumpet attack, an oboe entrance, timpani stroke, or almost any other instrumental or vocal sound, despite the fact that what is emerging from the loudspeakers sounds more like a growl, rush, click or hiss.

I say "almost" because it's sometimes virtually impossible to find a 'cello entrance, for instance, when it is buried in the orchestral fabric of a lyrical, slow-moving piece. This is why composers like Delius and Wagner can often be an editor's nightmare. Stravinsky and Mozart, on the other hand, pose few such problems.