



## Educational Articles

### The Art of Zen-Boom, Parts 1 & 2

By Mark Ulano

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#### Part 1

**“You can always tell the Boom Operators. Generally, they're the best-looking people on the set, as well as the smartest and, usually, the most interesting.”**

*Andy Rovins, Boom Operator*

Among the job titles in the movie credit crawl you will find the Microphone Boom Operator. Who is the Boom Operator and what is the nature of his job?

At the most basic level, the Boom Operator is the person responsible for interactive microphone placement as he floats his pole and microphone over the actors in a dynamic dialogue situation. This description, however, barely scratches the surface of what these people really do. These specialists are unsung performance artists more akin to the camera operator or focus puller in the kind of interface they must intuitively create with the on-camera talent.

As is much of the work of the sound crew, the responsibilities of the Boom Operator are ill understood even within the motion picture industry. The Sound Department is one of the few departments not hire-dependent on Camera. Every production may have different expectations of us, so there is a greyness and changability as to where we stand in the heirarchy. Maybe this has to do with the intangibility of sound as a medium or a vagueness to the general lexicon of sound. Or, maybe it is just because, technically, it is possible to defer solving the sound challenges to the post production phase. Whatever the case, eventually sound must be seamlessly incorporated into the final work and preference for the sound of the original performance is still dominant. It is within this environment that Boom Operators must work to achieve excellence, operating with stealth, dancing between the raindrops in a non-sound-centric work space among dynamic egos, many of whom are not remotely interested in the Boom Operator's professional mission.

I thought I would shed some light on these Njinskys of sound by talking to a few of them and getting some insight into their world. They tend to be a thoroughbred bunch, salty as buccaneers and serious as samurai. I have found that people in this line of work have some important qualities in common: a passionate pride in their work, finely honed team skills and well developed senses of humor. I believe that their answers can be of use to anyone attempting to understand what it takes to record quality production sound for film or tape.

## **THE PANEL**

Laurence Abrams  
Rusty Amodeo  
Eric Carr  
Patrushkha Mierzwa  
Andy Rovins  
Joel Shryack  
Jerome Vitucci

### **PAR: How would you describe the prime responsibility of your work?**

JS: Job one is to record the Actor's dialogue in a clear and natural way.

PM: In its strictest sense, the person who operates the (boom) microphone is the on-set sound department representative who designs the strategy for placement and types of microphones. Furthermore, he interfaces with the director, the assistant director, and related departments.

EC: No dialogue replacement

JV: 1. My prime objective is to focus on getting the best possible sound product, often, under difficult circumstances (physical and emotional). I try to create a comfortable and efficient working environment, within the sound department, as well as with the entire production, to achieve this goal.

AR: The prime responsibility is to conceive and execute a plan for miking the shot. This is based on observation of rehearsals, knowledge of the shot and the Director's plans for coverage of the scene, of the DP's [Director of Photography] preferences and lighting technique, of the sound mixer's philosophy of recording and observation of the environment.

RA: To place the microphone in just the right place so that the best quality sound can be recorded. This includes matching the background of the dialogue so that scenes may be cut without a drastic change in the background noise floor.

### **PAR: What should be the nature of your relationship with the Production Sound Mixer? The Director? The actors? the sound utility person? Others?**

JV: The Boom Operator is the Sound Department's eyes and ears on the set. Shot after shot he or she performs on the front-line, in the trenches of film sound production. The efficiency and timing of my decisions are very important factors in gaining the trust of the mixer you are working with. I believe that the boom Operator is to the mixer like the Camera Operator is to the Director of Photography.

Directors: "don't piss them off"

Actors: "don't piss them off"

Utility person: Well, if the shot calls for it "piss them off", but take them out for drinks later.

PM: Inside the department you are the mixer's teammate, outside of the department you are his ambassador to the set. The mixer is the head of the department and it is his reputation or contacts that have procured the work.

Director: This depends on the Director's personality and style of work, how he likes to get information, if he does, and from whom. Some directors prefer you to communicate through their assistant director.

Actors: I try not to need anything from them at first. This is to give myself time to watch them interact with others and assess their state of calm or nervousness and their comfort level with the crew. You should be memorizing actors lines and movements, always being ready for ad-libs (some actors are chronic).

The Crew: lighting-you should know the names of the light units to be able to talk about adjustments with electricians and grips. The same is true for camera lenses. Be aware of the number of cameras being used, whether head or tail slates have been chosen and so on. It is also very helpful to have costuming knowledge to be able to discuss problematic fabrics, designs, and radio mic placements. Knowing enough about everyone's job to be able to tell when you're being bullshitted and to be able to offer suggestions.

JS: Directors, Actors, Producers, Extras, Assistant Directors, and even Production Mixers can, and will impede your efforts. So become a diplomat, eat humble pie, and get these people on your side. Nothing will happen for you if you fail in the set politics. Neither your technical prowess or memorization of the script will bridge the gap here. A key attitude in my politics was to try and understand everyone's job and enjoy their pursuit [of excellence] as well as your own.

AR: The Mixer: He's your boss, and what he wants is the right answer. It is good to work with a mixer who trusts you and grants you a certain level of autonomy.

The Director: Our basic mission is to help the Director realize his or her vision. If you relate well to a director you might get free drinks back at the hotel, or Christmas cards, or work on his next picture.

The actors: Actors are sensitive souls, even when they are raging egomaniacs. It's hard not to make friends with them, but have sex with them at your own risk.

The sound utility person: I treat the Utility person the way I would like my superiors on the set to treat me, short of the current nuttiness about sexual harassment.

EC: The mixer- I protect his mix and he covers my ass ...

RA: Mixer: Some mixers want the boomer to be their eyes, ears, AND voice on the set. If notes are to be passed on to the Director/Actor/Script Supervisor, etc., some mixers want the Boom Operator to perform this task. Others want to be the sole person who interacts with the other department heads.

Director: Obviously, the director looks to the Boom Operator on the film set as the voice of the mixer during a take. Is the plane flying over head OK or is it unusable? Hopefully, if it is bad for sound, it may have been bad for the acting of the scene as well. There is a time and place for everything, however, and knowing the right moment to get the Directors attention for a much needed communique takes patience and an acute sense of timing.

Actor: The actor's first impression of you as a boomer is the most important. If they don't feel comfortable with you placing a mic on their person, you'll have a difficult time with them for the rest of the shoot. Not to mention the fact that they'll tell other actors, the director, executive producers, and the assistant directors about their concerns with your job responsibilities. In the case of Barbara Walters on a last minute interview shoot at Jay Leno's house, the simple approach of "I need to place this mic on

you," didn't work. Barbara is a very elegant woman and entered with an entourage of people showing her wardrobe for selection. She said, "Give me the mic and I'll do it. " I responded by showing her exactly where I wanted her to place the mic, where the cable was to be run and how. She gave the mic back to me and asked me to do it. As I placed the mic on her I mentioned that working with her was like working with Nancy. She said, "Nancy who?" and I responded with "Nancy Reagan." I had previously worked with Mrs. Reagan on a Bob Hope Special. At that point I had her trust and had no problems asking her for time to readjust her microphone for the rest of the shoot. She knew that I was a professional interested in getting the best sound possible for the occasion.

**PAR: How do you prepare for your work?**

PM: It is very helpful for the Boom Operator to observe the rehearsals, although you must always be prepared to wing it.

I swear by a full workout every morning before a job, no matter what the call time. I sometimes attend technical scouts learning about the politics and personalities in the process. I chat with friends who have worked with the upcoming crew/cast, if I don't know them to get a better idea of the human dynamic. I also read the script before the first day and I offer my thoughts and concerns to the mixer.

AR: Read the script. Maintain my gear. Get enough sleep. Pay attention.

JV: Reading and memorizing the script ( although I frequently find myself doing this simultaneously with watching the first rehearsal ) , have prep discussions with the mixer, have prep discussions with the utility person, prep my equipment. Meet with production office staff to discuss deal and do my paperwork. Meet if possible certain members of the AD, Camera, Electric, Grip, Prop, and Wardrobe Depts. to resolve any issues directly related to my job function, e.g., Safety, Rigs, Costumes and radio mics etc.

LA: Get as much sleep as possible.

EC: Stoned as a race horse.

RA: First, I want a good nights sleep. Then, I walk around the house with a broom handle with a bucket on the end. Each night I add weights progressively to build up the sustaining of holding a pole above your head for long shots.

**PAR: What do you need to know about lighting and lenses?**

LA: I would like to expand the scope of this question because I think that booming, and sound in general, requires a broad understanding and awareness of virtually all the elements that go into production. And in this, I think we are unique amongst our brothers and sisters on the crew. Typically, wardrobe doesn't care or need to understand what the grips do, and electrical doesn't need to be involved in what the script supervisor does. But we need to know the lighting and we need to understand how lights are controlled so we can communicate our needs about cutting or controlling lights that produce shadows. We need to know the lenses and we need to understand what the camera operator is doing so we can adjust our movements as the camera dollies, zooms, pans and tilts. We need to tune into the director and into the specifics of the actors' performance so we know the blocking and know when the

timing or the dialogue is changing. We need to know how the script supervisor assigns numbers to scenes as much as how to communicate with wardrobe over issues that involve placement of radio microphones on the actors. We need to work with the prop and set dressing departments to solve noise-making problems and create opportunities for planting microphones in the set. Even the location manager will hear from us while we work out issues that involve unwanted sounds from the building or location where we are shooting. I believe that when they are doing their job well, the Sound Department becomes far more involved with and knows far more about all the other jobs on the set than any of them know about ours.

JV: You need to know where the light is coming from, who or what is it lighting? Does the light(s) cause problems with shadows or reflections that I can't resolve? Will they prevent me from getting good sound? What do I need to do to get it adjusted so that I can do a good job, e.g., Request flags or cutters, speak to the DP or Gaffer. It is worth making a few of your colleagues uncomfortable, for the moment, in order to solve the problem, than for all of us [the sound department] to be in the hot seat at dailies. Knowing what lenses are seeing, and how their imaginary frame lines change with every move of the camera, and the actors. I don't have the advantage of keeping my eye up to the eyepiece, while the shot is taking place. Although I will occasionally use a small video monitor, during the take. Also, being instinctual is helpful.

AR: Your freedom of movement is limited by the lighting, so a knowledge of the basic physics of light and shadows as well the characteristics of point source and diffusion are essential.

**PAR: What is your philosophy of microphone placement?**

PM: To create a "natural" interpretation of the dialogue and effects present at the time of shooting while minimizing noise factors.

JV: The magic of microphone placement is consistently finding your microphone's sweetest sounding spot in the most unobtrusive manner. In other words, if you (as any part of the production) have no awareness of my presence (and you loved dailies) I have succeeded.

AR: There's no one right answer. I like to mike in a nearly vertical position because it's allows the easiest adjustments for head turns and other movements of the actors. It also permits smooth cueing to the other actors with a minimum of change in the background. But this can all vary with the lighting, the actor's physicality, the physical limitations of the set, the noise of the location, and the frequency response patterns of the mike.

Plant mikes work where you can find a natural-sounding place.

Lavs are best in mid-sternum, but this can also be a function of the wardrobe and the actor's predilection for talking to his feet or somebody behind him.

RA: There are many tricks to the trade. If you have an actor who frequently whips his head around, play the mic in front without too much movement to keep the sound of the dialogue consistent, and therefore the background consistent as well. This technique was especially useful on *Designing Women* when I boomed Meeshack Taylor. His head whips were never in the same place twice so I needed to play a middle field position so as not to miss any dialogue.

Check with wardrobe in advance of the scene, or the day for that matter, to look at the clothing actors

are wearing to determine type of material (problems with silk), pockets for hiding transmitters, pre-cut holes for running of mic wires or antennas, hard soled shoes for padding heavy hoofers. If the scene is between two actors and one is louder than the other, place the mic closer to the low level person and aim at the higher level person when they talk, thus evening out the overall level. An old rule of thumb is while booming a person that is on-mic, look at the other actors for they will telegraph with body gestures just before they are about to speak. This is especially helpful while booming Soap Operas since many times, at the end of the day when time is a factor, NO rehearsal of the scene takes place. Usually, at the network Soap Operas, scripts are not used by the boomers. At the end of the day, you find yourself rehearsing on tape, so the body gestures really help to make sure there isn't an off-mic situation. Sometimes, the booth buys the one and only take made for that scene.

**PAR: What are the tools of your trade? What equipment do you prefer and why?**

JS: It is not necessary to get picky about brand names and pick up patterns, all professional microphones have good quality, like all hammers will hammer, it's the carpenter who puts the touch to it. The subtleties of technical details will come with experience.

EC: Boom poles and common sense.

PM: My favorite boompole, wired inside, a loose-fitting pair of head phones so I can shrug off/on the ear closest to the camera. I loved my Sony DRM5s into oblivion for that reason, but they stopped making them years ago. I like comfortable, loose, but not too loose, clothing with pockets, often in black to avoid reflections. I prefer sweats and tennis shoes with quiet and good thick soles. There is a lot of walking/running/running backwards involved.

AR: My tools include headphones, mikes, Fisher booms, wireless mikes, fishpoles, connectors, gadgets, Leatherman tools, Velcro.

As far as equipment is concerned, I believe that the main difference in microphone selection is actually a function of ease of operation. If you can watch a movie and tell what mike was used there's a problem. That being said, I prefer Schoeps mikes because they are still the most transparent mikes made. I like Fisher booms because they are a great tool. It helps keep up the awareness that you are performing highly skilled work.

JV: The tools of my trade, aside from the obvious, are a high end Espresso machine and CD Player. Everything else belongs to the Mixer. I prefer to have a large heated and air conditioned trailer.

*In the second part of our ode to the boomers we will look into the politics of the film set, the technical and physical requirements, the Fisher Boom, radio mics and advice to those who might want to pursue boom operating as a career.*

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## **Part 2**

*In part one we met our panel and discussed their views on the responsibilities and philosophies of the Boom Operators. We looked into the relationships that boomers have with other key players during the making of movies and television, and we left off with their recommendations for preparation and tools.*

### **How does one become a Boom Operator?**

One might assume that learning this craft begins in film school and yet many film students won't even take on the job of boom person during student productions, as if doing so would be demeaning. Thus boom operating has remained an esoteric craft learned by the ancient process of apprenticeship combined with modern-day trial and error. This and other phases of film sound are often defined as menial or "merely technical" and interpreted as "not creative". This is an unfortunate misconception since all creative work is technical. Musicians must learn the technique of their instruments, Painters, the technique of color and texture, photographers- light, dark and photochemistry. Sound people are no different. Assimilation of technique can be the doorway through which fine craft transcends itself, regardless of the medium. Movies are hand-made and boom operating is the proof.

That being said, the world of movie making is clearly one driven by commerce and in that world, the highest practitioners of the boom arts can earn triple or quadruple the salary of a tenured college professor. This is not some charitable accident. The economic responsibilities of Boom Operators are substantial. They are charged with safely capturing the spontaneous performances of some of the highest paid humans around. The per minute cost of downtime for retakes on \$20,000,000 talent is astronomical. The Boom Operators must try to get it the first time, every time. This does not downplay the essential partnership with ADR (looping) and all the other stages of post production sound. It just emphasizes the value placed by many filmmakers and actors on capturing the original performance.

### **PAR: Talk to us about the politics of the film set?**

AR: It starts with knowing when to keep you mouth shut. The rest you figure out unless you are socially challenged.

JV: As far as the politics are concerned, using the skills that you already use in day to day life is a good start, especially if you have been surviving successfully. Film politics have a thousand-faces, and change from project to project. Some days are a pleasure. On other days you are dodging bullets, as the hierarchy's behavior rears it's ugly head, and the ego-satisfaction level supersedes the creative and practical process on every level. Even with all that, the "patient will not die". I and we will all survive.

JS: ...Remember, you are equal to all the people working with you, but you are not equal in respect to the process of the film. The filmmaking process has it's hierarchies. They are spontaneously dictated hourly by the realities of this huge undertaking. Be it a cranky actor, noisy special EFX, or losing the light, learn your spot in this context as opposed to making it a people power list.

PM: Everyone needs to understand the particular hierarchy and film politics going on in the company you are working for. These are not necessarily the same thing. Diplomacy is a must, but so is knowing when you can be ballsy and have it work in your favor.

**PAR: How physically demanding is this work.**

PM: Extremely. One of the least understood aspects of our work is that the Boom Operator must be fully functional in order to take a job in this free-lance world. Most others can have broken limbs, backaches, be pregnant, have allergies, with stuffy, congested heads. The Boom Operator is a performance artist like the actors, without the leeway of having outtakes. Many directors are concerned if a steadicam operator has his weight-balanced rig on, ready to work, but I've never heard anyone in my 70 features ever say, "let's go, everyone, the boom is up". Sometimes, it seems like we are invisible.

JV: It is extremely demanding and often painful, maybe even extremely painful. Holding a pole above your head for 12-16 hours per day, in some countries of the world, is punishment for criminal behavior. Oh, please can I be a Boom Operator? Certainly not everybody's choice of employment. Remember to read my new book soon to be released, "Zen Boomism and the Art of Pain" or "How To Keep The Divine Pole From Floating Away".

LA: Boom Operating is, indeed, physically demanding work. The fatigue that results is not simply concentrated in the arms and shoulders, as one might guess. Holding the pole over one's head for long takes, over and over, does of course take it's toll on the upper body. But I find that a Boom Operator experiences an overall fatigue resulting from a variety circumstances. In many cases, you find yourself wedged into a tight corner between hot lights and C-stands, or folded like a pretzel while hiding under a desk or in the back seat of a car, or perched precariously atop a 12-foot ladder reaching over across the wall of a set. Add to that the long hours and, of course, the ultimate enemy of the Boom Operator... sore feet... and sometimes it adds up to a pretty long day.

**PAR: How do you deal with situations that are potentially dangerous to your body?**

JV: Be smart, avoid them if you can, get hazard pay if you can't avoid them. No shot is worth it.

LA: Fantasy and "suspension of disbelief" are terms often associated with the creative process of conveying a story through film. This, indeed, is the magic of filmmaking. "It's only a movie... no one really gets hurt." Unfortunately, I think that during production on the set there is an element of false reality that somehow believes that, there too, no one can really get hurt. We often find ourselves doing things that I believe are truly unsafe, but for some reason, we do them anyway. Is it because we think that it's only a movie and no one really gets hurt? Is it simply because no one wants to appear the sissy? For whatever the reason, it happens frequently and the Boom Operator is often placed in a less than ideal situation. I think that accidents that have occurred in recent years have instilled a somewhat greater safety consciousness on the set, but it is nowhere near where it should be.

PM: I work with fitness specialists or physical therapists looking for better ways to do something or special exercises to strengthen specific muscles.

For FX shots- Having seen people be seriously harmed or die, I am not shy about planting a mic or asking the mixer to call it MOS [filmed without sound recording]. In EFX smoke situations I've met very few special effects people who have the level of knowledge I'm comfortable with. By now I own several masks and goggles for various vapors. This is a much-neglected work hazard in our business. Also, for driving scenes with actors at the wheel-I stay v-e-r-y far away.

AR: Try not to piss off the drivers, grips, or wardrobe people (they carry scissors). Avoid working on music videos. Practice common sense.

**PAR: Can you talk about the craft of using the Fisher Microphone Boom?**

LA: When not forced into using a fishpole (for reasons generally having to do with space limitations,) the Fisher Boom is a far superior method of controlling microphone placement. (Note the possible exception of the CueMaster... for details, see Steve "Rabbit" Schuneman, the only person I know who admits to liking this unwieldy thing. In spite of my skepticism, however, it is a superb alternative when operated by someone who knows how to use it well.) The Fisher's long reach and multi-axis cueing controls allow a great deal of flexibility and when the goal is to keep the microphone in front of the actor, that kind of cueing control is essential. But in the evolution of the filmmaking process, some changes have taken place in recent years that have effectively robbed the Boom Operator of this effective tool. Cameras have gotten smaller and lighter, film speeds have improved requiring fewer lights, and the lighting equipment has gotten smaller... all these things have contributed to a smaller and leaner production package and the crews move faster as a result. It is perhaps for those reasons that in some venues, and commercials are a prime example, the Fisher Boom looks to some crew members like an unnecessary old-style relic that takes up too much space on the grip truck and gets in everybody's way on the set. The producer will want a specific reason as to why they should pay the extra money, albeit very little, and the grips will want to know why it can't be done with a fishpole, not that they have any right to ask. And the simple answer that "this piece of equipment will allow the microphone to be placed more accurately" will simply not suffice. There is no excuse for this, but you'll almost never see a Fisher Boom on a commercial and you frequently won't see it in other situations that would have benefited greatly from it's use.

PM: It is a dying skill in feature, MOW, many TV series. The Fisher Boom takes the weight off the body of the boom operator and an assistant pushes it as needed. The skill in learning the pulley system and hand controls is really minimal. In some situations the retractibility offers advantages; once a boom operator with a fishpole selects a length of pole, it is set for the entire shot, but the Fisher retracts during the shot and essentially can go around lights. Its good for marking territory, too.

JV: I don't have enough time to elaborate thoroughly, however the Fisher Boom is a wonderful toy, and I love to use it. Unfortunately, most of today's features, and even commercials, don't provide enough opportunities for their use. Locations, logistics, politics and budgets are often prohibitive factors.

AR: A little bit of instruction helps, but most technique comes through practice. Unfortunately it's become a lost art in single camera. One important trick is finding the right position for the boom, and then picking the right time to park it there.

RA: There are two ways to set-up the cueing (left-right motion) of the mic. If the arm is set-up so that one must rest the cue lever on top of the hand between the thumb and the first finger and push UP to cue, then this is considered "film style". If one rests the hand on top of the cue lever and must push DOWN to cue, then this is considered "tape style." Everyone has their own preferences. With the introduction of the articulator back in the early 1980's, a Boom Operator adds another possible hand cramping dimension to the boom. This device, originally produced for operators in England in the late 1970's, allows the mic to move in a vertical fashion. This helps in following actors up a flight of stairs, and also for booming children next to tall adults. There are now four different size arms available: 16', 20', 23', and 26'. In addition, some operators incorporate an offset to get an extra foot out of the arm, but careful attention is in order for balancing the arm to avoid tipping the tri-ped dolly over. On sitcoms, the Fisher Boom may be operated from the Floor or from the Greenbeds, called because of their color (also called "Parallels" because of the parallel position to the set. When operating from the Floor, usually on videotape shows, the arms typically 23 to 26 feet to extend beyond the camera operators. The origination of the boom arms on the 'greens' came from the Lucy show when Cameron McCulloch suggested relocation of the arms for better audience viewing. Good three dimensional depth perception is a must when operating from the Greenbeds. Film shows typically use boom arms on the Greenbeds. Most videotape shows, Soap Operas, Live Interview, and like use the booms on the Floor since lights are usually hung on dead-hung pipe and no Greenbeds exist.

**PAR: What do you need to know about radio microphones?**

JV: Radio mics are our friends. Don't be afraid of them. They are just another tool, but quite a powerful tool. I love being part of a wireless sound department.  
[MU note: This includes full time wireless boom] Free to fly, free to fly. Remember you are the microphone placement engineer. Optimum placement for the body mic is still very important, avoiding clothing noise, and not burying them. Give them air. Understanding the actors' needs is critical in making your body micing days comfortable. Being Stealth is what you have to be. Don't Futz with the mics or the actors too much. Get it right on the first try. Many an actor or actress doesn't like them because they are uncomfortable. On some occasions they feel that their privacy is at stake. Sometimes they are right.

PM: We have to put them on anyone wearing anything, and have them sound true and quiet. We need to know how to monitor the signal and power of the transmitter and receiver, also how the mixer configures his cart and antenna(e).

AR: Feng shui. Knowledge of electronics and RF transmission physics help.

JS: Don't hate radio mics, they are your friend. I always thought the easiest rig was best. Avoid complicated gobs of tape, moleskin, etc., in the end, extra added material will usually give you extra added noise. The best exception to that rule is a kind of putty, made as a weatherseal for windows, it will bond the mic to fabric, and dampen induced noises from the fabric and the cable. Your choice to use radio mics will sometimes depend more on the Production Mixer than the Boom Operator. The Mixer has to blend the darn things, and some are all thumbs on the faders. Cater the micing complexity to the Mixer's ability to blend all the plants, radio mics, etc. Remember, if they can't mix it, they will probably think you are just an idiot, rather than oh my, my mixing chops are weak!

**PAR: What makes a Boom Operator good?**

JV: Great Boom Operators Are Born, Not Made!

PM: Being amicable, intuitive, knowledgeable about other departments, having a work-together attitude. Humor and a sharp wit don't hurt. You also need stamina and a good temper.

AR: Paying attention, experience. A good Boom Operator is regarded as someone who reliably gets quality sound with a minimum of disruption for the production.

EC: Focus, intuitive reasoning and prior preparation.

LA: There are many qualities needed to be a good Boom Operator, but it's surprising to many people that one seemingly obvious characteristic is actually NOT required. Many people think you need to be real strong to hold a fishpole over your head for long periods of time. Yes, it's hard. But, no, it's not all strength. I've seen small Boom Operators hold a pole steady for seemingly endless scenes, take after take. And yet, in situations where an extra Boom Operator was needed, I've seen a very buff production assistant or craft services person pressed into service and I've watched them grit their teeth together and arch their backs in pain only moments into what I thought was a not-very-demanding scene. It becomes apparent that there is truly an art to holding the pole. When asked to explain, however, I am at a loss for words. Don't lock your arms? Use the forward arm for support and control the pole with the back arm? Don't freeze into one single position, stay relaxed, and shift your weight occasionally during the take? Easier said than done and I think there's probably a lot more to it than that. In the end, I think it's like many of the jobs that are performed on a film set: no one can tell you how to do it... it's something you learn over time... you have to just get the "feel" for it.

**PAR: What is worst cardinal sin a Boom Operator can make?**

PM: Projecting less than a cohesive department to outsiders.

LA: Talking too much. (Especially if you are telling the actor how to do the scene.)

AR: Not paying attention.

EC: Imagining a shot could be "easy".

JV: Don't fart on set, and definitely don't hit on the actors. ( especially the leading ones). No matter how many times they ask you, "How do you that" , or "Ooooooh, you must have strong arms", forget about it.

**PAR: What advice would you give to someone interested in a career as a Boom Operator?**

JS: Booming is a great job, you get to see the whole project being made right before your eyes, you hear it better than anybody else, and people always come up to you and say, Boy your arms must be strong!

EC: Don't.

PM: Assess whether you are good at multi-tasking, being able to constantly split your focus, being able to think ahead, being able to visualize multiple solutions for any particular task, work out, work out, workout. A kick boxer apprenticed with me and didn't have enough stamina! "Failure cannot cope with persistence."

JV: Assist a good Boom Operator for a substantial period of time. Be sure that a Boom Operator is what you want to be. You may be doing it for a long time. Booming, could be but, is not necessarily a pre-requisite to becoming a-mixer..

AR: There are too many of us as it is. Apprentice as a utility persona and pay attention.

**PAR: What has been the most rewarding situation you have ever experienced in your work?**

PM: Hearing my husband, the mixer, rave about me to someone we didn't know well. Also, the time I choreographed a master so well with the camera operator that everyone saw shadows throughout the take, but none were in frame!

JV: Booming a fast paced, 5 minute, 360' steadicam shot with Larry McConkey, in the 1 1/2 O' Brazilian Rain Forest, on " At Play In The Fields Of The Lord", would be one my most rewarding experiences. I felt a tremendous amount of exhilaration after successfully completing several takes. Starting with a 100ft. Dolly move and continuing to boom a five page scene with the late Ms. Lillian Gish, on "Huckleberry Finn" was spiritual. She practically never had to refer to her script. She was in her 90's at the time. Standing on a scaffold 10-12ft. in the air booming Jason Robards 1 1/2 minute take of Eugene O'Neils " Iceman Cometh" was something else. I wasn't sure if I was crying from the pain or the performance. Being hired again, again, and again.

AR: I boomed on Driving Miss Daisy, which went on to win Best Picture. It was a great experience working on such quality material, with actors like Morgan Freeman and Jessica Tandy, and a director, Bruce Beresford, who really cared about sound and respected our needs. On a tough 41 day shoot the only looping was for performance by some of the actors in smaller parts.

EC: Watching my mixer pick up his Emmy's

RA: Carefully planning several plant mics and boom positions to work in such a way that all production dialogue is usable. On "East Of Eden" (a Movie-Of-The-Week for ABC Television) we recorded Foley in real time to get all the sounds for the scene. The mixer was Bud Alper and the Boom Operator was Gene Ashbrook. I was a Sound Utility person at the time. The Scene started out with a large open field of livestock. Timothy Bottoms emerged from the forest, screaming and waving his jacket over his head, towards his brother, played by Bruce Boxleitner. I ran, just out of camera frame, approximately 100 yards slightly in front of Timothy with a Sennheiser 815 handheld shotgun mic. Gene's fishpole was over Bruce. The camera was on a 50mm on a Titan crane starting at a high point and then lowering to include the two brothers when they embraced. At that moment, because of the wide angle, we could not get our mics close, so Gene and I hugged each-other, with my mic in hand to mimic the patting of the back. When the two actors ran off towards the short wood fence in the distance (unrehearsed), we Foley footstepped their feet which included the jump over the fence. When the scene was completed, we received applause from the crew for our performance...very rewarding indeed. [MU note: do not attempt this at home]