Methods for Sharing Stereo and Multichannel Recordings among Planetariums

Presented by:
Leslie Gaston

Assistant Professor of Recording Arts
Leslie.Gaston@cudenver.edu

University of Colorado at Denver
Denver, Colorado  USA
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Areas of concern:

• Acoustics
• Production
• Delivery
• Equipment
• Seating Arrangements

...plus a survey of over 100 Planetariums worldwide.

Leslie Gaston • leslie.gaston@cudenver.edu
What is a planetarium?

Planetariums (or planetaria) provide information to the general public about astronomy and the night sky. Planetariums have domed ceilings, and project images of stars…

Star ball at
Seymour
Planetarium in
Massachusetts
...or of moving images.

Gates Planetarium in Colorado.
How immersive is your VISUAL experience?

Number of Respondents

1 = Not immersive, 10 = very immersive

How immersive is your AURAL experience?

Number of Respondents

1 = Not immersive, 10 = very immersive
Audio in Planetariums

“Star Shows” with a single announcer

Prerecorded shows

Live music

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Audio in Planetariums

**Prerecorded shows** are produced at one planetarium, and shared with others, *despite a lack of standardization of speaker placement and seating arrangements.*
Gates Planetarium Speaker
Arrangement: 16 loudspeakers
Gates’ “Back Speaker” measured at two positions

Gates does not use any loudspeaker correction
Survey Question #17. Do you use any loudspeaker correction or equalization?

47.9% (45) answered yes.
52.1% (49) answered no.

six survey respondents skipped this question
Not suprisingly… when asked, “Are you satisfied with the audio in your Planetarium?” Forty-six percent (46%) of the 103 surveyed are not satisfied with the audio in their venue.
Based on these findings, **loudspeaker correction** should be considered the first step towards achieving the goal of transferability of content between planetariums.
Work with Trinnov Optimizer

\[ RT60 = 0.25 \, \text{s} \]
Work with Trinnov Optimizer: phase, impulse and frequency response
Informal Listening Tests:

“Solo’ed” right channel reproduced from multiple loudspeakers.

Without correction: multiple locations perceived based on precedence effect, based on listener position.

With correction: single location perceived, independent of listener position.

Gates Informal Listening Session
• No loudspeakers behind listeners,
• Viewers turn their heads and bodies to see images (impacting HRTF’s),
• All speakers are above, except for forward speakers.
Informal Listening Tests:

“Black Holes” and “Sonic Vision” shows at Chabot

**Without correction:** missing instruments, bass problems, indistinct narration, distortion (in layman’s terms)

**With correction:** “more compelling” narration, less dominant bass, increase of clarity in “missing” instruments.

*Formal listening tests to follow…*
Production:

Loudspeaker Remapping

“Traditional 5.1” is remapped to the 16 loudspeakers in the dome.

Spatialization can be done with Trinnov Optimizer, Lake Huron 3D system, and potentially Max/MSP (such as the Vector Based Amplitude Panner by Ville Pulkki)

what to do with traditional center channel content…
…given different Seating Arrangements

Chabot: narration = “voice of God”

Gates: front narration channel
Live shows in “spatialized 5.1”
Live production

Prerecorded shows
Stems:

As in feature-length films, some planetariums replace the main dialog track with another language, so they need a mix separated into “stems”, with the dialog on one set of tracks (mono or stereo) and the music and effects on another (mono, stereo, cube, 5.1, etc.). Not only does this allow replacement of the dialog track, it allows the show to be remixed to create a more intelligible mix.

Track Layout:

In addition to the “usual” 5.1 channels of Left, Right, Center, Left Surround, Right Surround, and LFE, show producers sometimes use a “top” channel.

Formats such as 6.1 and 7.1 are not as common, but are being used. A variety of channel orders were given in the survey, which could be another item to consider for standardization.
There is a widespread sentiment among planetarium operators that some sort of standardization should be implemented to promote ease of sharing (92.5% in favor) and audio quality (91.1% in favor).

Recommendations:

• Standards: the IPS has **none** for audio.
• Loudspeaker correction for complex, domed systems.
• Standards for speaker placement
• Creating “audio fingerprints” for venues, and “mastering houses”
• Experiments with height recording, B-Format, amplitude-based panning…?
Thank you

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