

## **The Black and White Minstrel Show – 8mm cine film**

For what it's worth, a bit of history as to how the 8mm film came about.

I remember joining Crew 3 round about 1962, just when the B & W had won the Golden Rose of Montreux.

The BBC decided to issue a commemorative book, for sale to the audience. They wanted a photographer to shoot some stills of the show.

George Inns, the producer, said that the best people to take the photos would be his camera crew.

We were all invited to bring in our cameras - Rolleiflexes, Mamiyaflexes, Leicas, what have you.

I didn't play with stills, much, so I took in my 8mm cine camera, and happily fired away.

(Kodachrome Artificial Light, think it was 40ASA, Tommy Moncrieff, the lighting supervisor let me take a Weston reading from centre stage with the main 10K key lit).

Since I was on Sound - my job then was to run the back-up tape, trying to keep it in sync against the master version, in case of disaster - the show was live! So I was fairly free to punt with my camera during rehearsal.

Having access to the sound tapes, I made copies, and invested in a German Bauer 8mm projector that had a tape sync system, where the tape from a recorder ran round a capstan which modified the projector speed.

Having put together a short series of clips, I was running this in the Sound Control of TV Theatre (it was backstage in those days), and Adrian Stocks, the sound supervisor thought George should see it. George then asked if the boys and girls had seen it - no - so suddenly the control room was filled with TV Toppers in various stages of undress!

Being live they had never seen themselves, and my crew cred improved!

After that, George Inns gave me carte blanche to carry on with the illicit filming, and said that if I was challenged, I was doing it for him! Later, the BBC threw a cocktail party for the cast and crew in the 6th floor hospitality suite, to celebrate the Montreux win, and the fact that the show pulled in around 13 million viewers.

George wanted the little film to be shown - I got terribly cold feet - copyright on the music etc. but George had a word with Eric Robinson, orchestra director, who merely said that I could have taken it from the TV!

As if!

Liaising with the show's floor manager, Len Mitchell, I booked a TR90 tape machine, and an LSU10 speaker to be delivered to the suite, and perched my small 3ft screen on the speaker.

When Len ascertained that all was ready, without any announcement, he just doused the lights, and the opening title hit the screen.

Now, at that binge, was the Controller of BBC1, I honestly can't remember if BBC2 had started then.

After the film, he climbed on a table, and said: "That was the best example of unofficial enterprise I've yet seen!" He went on to say that it gave an idea, of what the introduction of Colour would offer the viewers - we were still a few years away from that.

So I didn't get fired, but Richard Levin, Head of TV Design, wanted to take my film to Hollywood!

There was a convention of TV scene designers, apparently. He said that they had some problems syncing the sound - well, they would without my kit, but he then asked me to carry on, but make it in 16mm. I was tempted, but thought that if it smacked of an official job, then the Film Unit would be peeved at not being involved.

I pointed this out, and Richard said that what he liked was the 'fly-on-the-wall' style, and looking at the rehearsal and seeing the crew etc.

He felt that the Film Unit would want too much set up for them.

So that never happened.

Later, I had film copies made for Stan Stennett, and later still, video tape versions for George Mitchell, who lived not far away - an extremely boozy evening - that!

I kept in touch with George Mitchell, and at a celebration party for his 80th Birthday, ran a video

version of the movie, but off Betacam, as I had transferred the film via a Sony Betacam 400 camera.

Although it had been 30 years since we were on Crew 3, knowing that Senior Cameraman Eddie Stuart had married Cherry Alston - Make-up Supervisor, I managed to track Cherry down as I was in the Film Industry by then, therefore through her, Eddie. Within half an hour, I had contacted enough people to make up a crew table for the party.

(Very sadly, Cherry died later, of cancer, not too long ago; Eddie has since remarried).

George M eventually passed away, but I am still in touch with his then wife, Dot, who had been the Head Topper for a while.

She was bitter, that for all the success that the B & W had been for the BBC, they never, ever, said "thank you" to George.

There was a retrospective programme about the show, as to why it was dropped - the race, black, thing!

(George Inns used to comment that the black fraternity should not get upset, he said that the boys were toy cupboard golliwogs, and the girls, beautiful dolls. If anyone should be offended - black v. white, it should be the white guys for the blacks dancing with their white girls!)

I have a DVD of that programme.

In closing, I would say that time on Crew Three ranks as the best part of my career - show biz, music, glamorous ladies etc. and I am dismayed at the Corporation's attitude to dispensing with TVC.

There is also a book in preparation, as a tribute to George Mitchell.

I also have a copy of the commemorative book (7/6d) which has been autographed by cast and crew.

Pat Heigham

Formerly BBC TV Tech Ops. (1962-68)