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# Noel Lee

## On Screen Interview With The Head Monster

GARY REBER

Noel Lee, fondly known as “The Head Monster,” and I met way back in 1985. At the time, I had been using Monster Cables in my audiophile listening system and in my professional recording sessions. That year Noel introduced a new line of professional interconnect cables he called Prolink®. This peaked my interest, as I have always strived for attaining sound quality that is “the best that it can be.” I was in pre-production for two concert video specials with Buddy Rich and his Band. I decided to produce and record the band at a new soundstage at the One Pass facility in the China Basin area of San Francisco, owned by Steve Michelson, who remains one of my closest friends. I phoned Noel to ask him if he would like to contribute all of the cabling for the recording project. He enthusiastically said, “Yes!” As it turned out, Noel was enthralled with Buddy Rich and was constantly wanting me to introduce him to Buddy and “hang out.” At the time, I didn’t know that Noel had been a professional drummer and lead his own group in Hawaii. I introduced Noel to Buddy, and Noel was thrilled. Two DVD releases and a special edition release of this historic studio concert are available through [www.WidescreenReview.com](http://www.WidescreenReview.com).

When Noel first went into business selling premium speaker wire, stereo retailers thought the idea was as crazy as selling bottled water. That’s because speaker wire then was as free as tap water.

Twenty-five years later, Noel has transformed Monster Cable Products, Inc. of Brisbane into one of the premier consumer electronics brands and one of San Francisco Bay Area’s largest minority-owned and private employers.

Noel has built a unique, entrepreneurial culture that goes far beyond Monster’s products. His success as an inspiration for entrepreneurs worldwide has been profiled in *USA Today*, *Success Magazine*, *Connected*, and *World Trade*. He was given the coveted Entrepreneur of the Year for Northern California by Ernst and Young and Supplier

of the Year by The Evolution Group. Noel’s leadership has earned numerous accolades. In 2005, Noel was named Business Person of the Year by the Brisbane Chamber of Commerce. Monster, the company, has also won numerous awards including HTSA’s Monster Profitable Vendor Award, several awards from PARA, including Vendor of the Quarter Century, and two Supply Chain Excellence Awards from Circuit City.

Prior to founding Monster, Noel worked as a laser-fusion design engineer at Lawrence-Livermore Laboratory until his vision and passion for music started him down a new path. As a musician and an avid audiophile who loved “gear,” Noel was driven to find new ways of improving his system’s sound without breaking the bank. By experimenting with different types and methods of winding speaker wire, he discovered that wires of different construction produced higher quality audio performance than the lamp wire commonly used.

Monster Cable (Monster®) was born in a San Francisco garage in 1978. Here Noel created his first Monster Cable with almost no money, which enthralled professional musicians, recording engineers, and music lovers alike. With an uncompromising work ethic, a “Monster Attitude,” innovative ideas, and a team of hard working “Monsters” and “Monsterettes” at his side, Noel bootstrapped the company that would be known throughout the market 25 years later as the “best” at what they do. Built from the ground up, now the Monster “brand” is one of the most recognized brands in consumer electronics.

I have for a long time wanted to do an On Screen interview with Noel. This interview took place at a cafe near his home in Hillsborough.

**Gary Reber, *Widescreen Review*:** Noel, we’ve had this close relationship now for 20 years. In fact, I started *Widescreen Review* during my tenure working on business development projects and special projects with you. The first issue I published was back in the fall of 1992. You’ve supported



the magazine since that very first issue. I want to thank you for your years of support.

Looking back, what are some of the major developments that have impacted the consumer electronics industry during this 20-year period that we’ve known each other?

**Noel Lee, The Head Monster:** Well, you’re asking me two questions. First of all, I should comment on the 20 years first.

Gary, I want to tell your readers about what you were like when you were at Monster. Nobody understood Gary Reber at Monster because you were so eclectic and so knowledgeable about so many things. I liked Gary because he was an enthusiast, he was hardcore, and he just knew a lot of stuff about a lot of things. And this was before home theatre and before video was a big deal, so Gary was ahead of his time. Gary and I established this bond because we’re both geeks at heart, and we’re both enthusiasts. I’m really glad the industry has finally found a place for Gary Reber. And you did well, I’m proud of you.

**WSR Reber:** I appreciate that. You certainly were very inspirational. We had a lot of fun together in those days, traveling around the world. And I have very fond memories of all of the music you and I experienced together during that time, and still occasionally do.

Looking back over that past 20-year period, what are some of the major developments that have impacted the consumer electronics industry that you’ve seen?

**The Head Monster:** Well, 20 years is a long time, if you look at where it was 20 years ago, and we reflect back that in those early days it was purely an audio world. In fact, as it morphed from audio to video to what is now home theatre, we’ve lost some of that romance, some of that enthusiasm that we used to have for the audio side where it related to music. Now we’ve morphed that into enthusiasm for video. But it’s not quite the same.

**WSR Reber:** Not quite the same?

**The Head Monster:** It’s not quite the same as what’s important to the consumer

today. We've got the Internet. We've got computers being part of our life. We've got less time than we used to have, and our priorities are a lot different. So, over the past 20 years, we have become a society that focuses on instant gratification. People want something that's spectacular both for audio and video, and we have to deliver these technologies in a very meaningful way.

**WSR Reber:** ...that represents value...

**The Head Monster:** High value. We have to deliver all of this here in a very high value way to the consumer. The expectation today of what one should get for their dollar is a lot higher than it was 20 years ago, but it's pushed manufacturers and the industry along for an accelerated development. What used to take five or ten years to develop now is a one- to two-year development period, and the lifespan of products is extremely short today. But the consumer is the benefactor of that.

**WSR Reber:** During the early part of those 20 years that we've known each other, what can you tell us about the importance of cables, which is the foundation of Monster Cable. In terms of the sound that people hear and the pictures that they see.

**The Head Monster:** When we started, nobody knew about cables; now everybody knows about cables. And the relevance and the importance of cables today has not diminished one iota from what it was when Monster first started. In fact, it's increased. So today, you have full surround on movies and home theatre. But you've got dialogue; you've got Foley and sound effects that the discriminating listener can hear when it sounds fake or when it sounds real. Just like, in the old days when we used to listen to audio, we listened to the sounds of pianos and saxophones, and we had all the audiophile recordings of yesterday. Today, we've got movie recreation and a sense of realism that is brought to you in the audio side of the reproduction spectrum. It has to be real. So, audio cables today are more important and more relevant than they were even when we first started. In addition to that, Gary, we've got high-resolution audio formats with music, with DVD-Audio and SA-CD, so the source material available to us today is vastly superior. You still have to have great audio cables to reproduce that realistically. But the big boom is, of course, video. Video is very high technology, the cables are very high technology, and the manufacturing processes are very tight, much tighter than they are for audio cables. If you equate a high-definition video screen to a high-definition loudspeaker, you can see the artifacts that poor cables give you and the benefits that great cables give you.

**WSR Reber:** How do Monster Cables make a performance difference?



M•Series Cables

**The Head Monster:** Monster has always been the leader in technology, in my unbiased opinion (laughter). But, Gary, as you know, we have lots of patents on technologies that are groundbreaking. So, on the audio side, Monster has always led in audiophile performance and the discriminating reproduction of sound and music as witnessed by the recording engineers, producers, and artists who use our products religiously. Also, in the video domain, we work very closely with ISF [Imaging Science Foundation] cable certification and video cable technology. In fact, today we're still the only ISF-certified cable, and we're very proud of that technology.

**WSR Reber:** You've got lots of competitors; there are a lot of cable makers and cables on the market today that weren't there 20 years ago. What do you think of your competitors and how they are approaching the market?

**The Head Monster:** I believe there's room for everybody. There are a lot of very good cables out there in addition to Monster. But the consumer makes the final choice of what they like and more people, I believe, prefer Monster, which is why we've been so vastly successful as the #1 cable line for 25 years. But, I also have to caution that cables are an easy business to get into because you can stick pins, you can build connectors, make nice packaging and outside jackets, but the technology of the cable, of course, is on the inside. So cables not only have to look good but they have to be high performance and they have to be durable and long lasting as well. Today, a lot of the cables are actually custom fabricated with custom installers with big home theatre systems, and you have to look at the quality of your installer and their ability to install the right cables and also terminate them. So, my recommendation is to make sure you talk with your dealer and installer. Ask them the right questions about the cable technologies and make sure you're getting something real. One of the other things about all of the competitors, a lot of



Monster HDMI

people compete with Monster based on advertising, and Monster generally doesn't advertise. But all of our growth and people who use our products has been word-of-mouth and that's organic. So, don't necessarily trust all the advertisers that are out there because that's the way competitors compete against us. We believe in the consumer and them recommending our product to their friends and other people.

**WSR Reber:** Monster Cable over the years has diversified in their cable line. You have a cable priced at just about every level of affordability for the end user. You even have cables specifically designed for custom installation. How do you distinguish between your different cables?

**The Head Monster:** Thank goodness that the world is still cable and not wireless. That's kept us in good stead with technology. The marketplace has really demanded that we make less expensive cables. I believe that the cables we originally came up with the highest technology are still the highest technology today. As we scale it down, because DVD players have come down in price, displays have come down in price, so we've got cables that cost more than the TVs, and certainly we've got cables that cost more than DVD players. We've taken and scaled that technology very successfully, so as you go down in price, you still get extremely high value. So a \$40 interconnect cable, like an Interlink 400, has a whole lot more technology than perhaps other cables that cost \$100 or \$200. The Interlink 400 is scaled-down from our whole brand new THX® Ultra line, which is a brand new cable that has extremely high technology. There's lineage and there's derivative scaled-down technologies from the very top to the very bottom.

**WSR Reber:** You also have a complete line of non-packaged, non-retail-oriented but custom installer cables that were designed for custom installers. How did that come about?

**The Head Monster:** Let's make that a separate question.



Monster THX®-Certified

Custom install and custom home theatres is a huge business for the enthusiast today because unlike the audiophiles of yesterday, people don't want to see their cables or their gear, and if you're going to buy anything to put in your home, your spouse needs to approve it, too, because she doesn't want to see that stuff either. So, when you bury your cables in your walls and you run it long distances from one room to another, the quality of the cable becomes extremely important because you're not dealing with 1 meter of cable or 2 meters of cable, but dealing with 50 feet and hundreds of feet. So the quality of the cable becomes more critically important than if you had just run short lengths to connect your components together. The irony is that because they don't see the cable, consumers tend to pick the cheapest possible cable to run inside their walls, which is a shame. So I hope all your readers, Gary, will all scrutinize the quality of the cable used for custom installation. We're the only company that I think makes our highest technology cables, the M-Series, available in the CL3 custom install rating. So, you can run our very best cables at extremely long lengths.

**WSR Reber:** In recent years, you've developed a line of cables that is now called Monster THX and that have been certified by the Home THX program. How did that all come about and why?

**The Head Monster:** THX recently has engaged in much more active certification of the quality of home audio than years before. They changed hands, but under the Lucas management, there was merely a certification program. The new push for THX is really being serious about delivering more quality certified products into the marketplace. So, when they came to us and we worked out a certification program to deliver THX quality-certified products to the mass marketplace, that benefits them and it benefits



Monster Power Backbone

all your readers and consumers. So when you see our new Monster THX Ultra cables, those represent Monster's highest technology, certified under the rigorous conditions that THX applies to them, which not only includes the cable performance but the connector integrity and cable labeling, and to make things easy for the consumer, you get an extremely high quality product. THX backs that completely with their certification program, which helps everybody get exposed to higher quality cables for home theatre.

**WSR Reber:** Is Monster still the developer in this effort, coming up with the technologies and the designs and the mechanical specifications for the connectors and the cables with THX recognizing that quality and certifying it? Or are you jointly developing new performance parameters for cables and connectors?

**The Head Monster:** I would say it's a little bit of both. But through joint development we've made our cables better through understanding what's important to proper home theatre reproduction and also looking at what THX wants for consumers and a certified home theatre, which is to bring that theatre sound home. In fact, they've extended their certification to include video as well, so that's why today there's only two certified THX cable brands and we're, by far, the biggest.

**WSR Reber:** Now, going back over the seven year-period, when I was working in business development at Monster Cable with you, the first product diversification that I can remember was audiophile audio cartridges and system setup accessories. But now, in recent years, you've developed power conditioners. We'll go into some other diversifications later, but first let's talk about why you decided to develop this whole line of Monster Power products?

**The Head Monster:** Well, Gary, it's absolutely amazing that we've done power,

which began for us about five years ago, because I actually discovered the benefits of power before cables. In fact, Richard Marsh, who worked with me at Lawrence Livermore Laboratories in research, came to me with his first power conditioner. We lived in the same city, Livermore, California. That's over 20 years ago! Monster Cable was three or four years old at that time and we were on a skyrocket up. Everybody loved the sound improvement that the cables delivered. But as soon as I plugged in Richard's power conditioner I said, "Oh my god, listen to that! I cannot believe that the difference in power is greater than the difference in cables." But at that time, we were just a startup company. We had no resources to develop something as sophisticated as power, which needed tooling and manufacturing and UL Certification. So when Monster was 20 years old—16 years later—I called Richard again and said, "Richard, remember that demo that you did for me? I'm ready for power now. I want to bring the benefits of power to all the Monster Cable customers and show them that power is needed in addition to cables." So, now that we've introduced Monster Power, we've shown that stabilization is important. Richard designed clean power with various stages from Stage 1 to Stage 5 power conditioning as you go up in price, and now we have the #1 power products on the market. Richard is still on staff; we still sit around and we listen to stuff and we are just continually marveling at the benefits of what power can do. But also, the need for power today is more critical than it was in those days because today you have computers and digital products in the home that you didn't have when I listened to the product 20 years ago. So, the power today is worse than the power that it was when I first listened to it. It's a huge potential business and I believe, Gary, we have just scratched the surface.

**WSR Reber:** Speaking of Richard Marsh, your next diversification was in power amplifiers. So, how did that come about?

**The Head Monster:** Well, Richard is one of the premiere power amplifier designers with his own company, Marsh Designs, whose products have been reviewed as top performing products. I've known Richard and his research for many years, but his craft and his knowledge has never been expressed to the mass consumer, so only a small handful of audiophiles have been able to experience a Richard Marsh design. So, when we perfected our power products, we said, "Power doesn't end at the power conditioner. It begins at the power conditioner. We really need to extend that same quality all the way to the loudspeaker." So, imagine plugging a loudspeaker into the wall. All of

that power through the power supplies and the amplifier, the quality of the amplification, the power conditioner that's behind that, the power stabilization that's behind that is really one cohesive system. We call that the Monster Power Backbone. Backbone and the Monster Power amplifiers that Riichard designed for us is the culmination of that concept. All other products, processors included, are peripherals to that backbone. I don't care if you go to different sources, digital sources, or a home theatre-in-a-box system that so many customers are buying now. There is no substitute for clean high-power for home theatre systems and high quality music.

**WSR Reber:** I noticed that the amplifiers have big digital meters on them.

**The Head Monster:** The meters are really special and I did not know how much people would love them when I invented them. People really don't have any idea of how much power is needed to reproduce great home theatre or music and power requirements are "logarithmic." Meaning that you can go from a normal listening level of 4 or 5 watts to 500 watts and more in a millisecond. With these digital meters, you can actually see it happen right in front of your eyes! But unlike some other amplifiers that may have meters, these are digital and measure "true power." This means that it is actually measuring the true current draw which changes dramatically due to the changing impedances of loudspeakers at various frequencies.

**WSR Reber:** Speaking of the Monster Power Backbone, you and I both know that the quality of the source is going to determine the ultimate quality attainable in system reproduction. If down the line, system components can't reproduce that or if the source quality is limited in any way, you're never going to be able to get beyond whatever that initial quality is. An extension of the Monster Power Backbone would be, of course, to drive a loudspeaker load and again, further diversification in the last couple years, has been in a complete line of Monster loudspeakers. What was your thinking there and where do you see that going?

**The Head Monster:** Gary, the loudspeakers are brand new products for us. They've been in development for quite a long time. And I've broken them up into two categories. The first category is because home theatre really resides in the home, and your wife and my wife, and your readers' wives have a lot to say about it. What I would love are big huge loudspeakers, big massive subwoofers. Only your wife, Gary, is tolerant enough to have a Gary Reber, *Widescreen Review* system in the home, but nobody else's wife will really tolerate that (laughing). So, we have to bring big



Noel's Home Equipment Rack

sound into living rooms of homes in America because each and every wife has to like it. So, our first goal was to design a loudspeaker with extremely high resolution that can really deliver the power in a big, wide array. We needed to bring big power sound into living rooms in a way that the spouse will approve it. So that is our M•Design project, and that is extremely successful rolling out today in over 200 showrooms across the country.

**WSR Reber:** What does the M•Design product line consist of?

**The Head Monster:** The first things that you have to bring into the home and make look good are loudspeakers, so the line array loudspeakers we designed look fabulous. They look like architectural statements that will play to any décor, but the performance of them, Gary, is phenomenal. It delivers that huge soundfield but without the big cabinet. So, I believe that we're the first to be able to deliver that to where spouses will like that, too. The second part of that are subwoofers because you and I love bass. There is no substitute for big diameter powerful powered subwoofers to reproduce bass. Big bass boxes just don't fit into the home, so we had to disguise them in extremely high quality fine furniture. And that extended itself to a line of component centers. So you can stack a Monster Power Backbone and put it into furniture pieces that are the finest furniture quality that money can buy today—big huge rounds and edges with true piano gloss black finishes, deep cherry woods, all hand finished with seven coats of lacquer, each hand applied. These things are incredible pieces to look at. They allow enthusiasts to bring all that gear that we like into the living room where the spouse isn't going to mind. So, I say it kind of gives you permission to bring stuff in because of their high wife acceptance factor, which is what a lot of your readers really need to be able to buy this stuff that we talk about.

The second line that we've designed incorporates the Monster THX brand. In a big box loudspeaker, we want to have

incredible dynamic range, incredible clarity, but at affordable price points. So this line is a box line, still finely finished furniture, but of conventional loudspeaker sizes. They deliver the dynamic range and clarity like I've never heard in any other loudspeaker that is tuned for both home theatre and music. So music reproduction was a high priority of the Monster THX line.

**WSR Reber:** I think the M•Design product range in concept is ingenious. It just nails it for modern day lifestyles where you have families that want this stuff hidden but in furniture of beauty. You're appealing to the performance-oriented guy who wants all the big stuff, but you're also appealing to the wife in terms of the design and appearance related to the home décor.

Where do you see retail today? Is retail embracing this concept? Do you see retail transitioning at this point? Is demonstration still an important aspect of retail? Why are so many independent retailers going out of business, more so than coming into business?

**The Head Monster:** Unfortunately, we see, at this particular period in time, that some high quality specialist retailers are having difficulty maintaining their business model. Maybe some of your readers don't know that some of the best retailers are now having trouble staying in business and making a profit. This is unfortunate because the art of the demonstration is being lost. There is less and less opportunity for your readers to be able to get a proper demonstration of extremely high quality home theatre with high quality audio and the very best interconnects and the very best video cables all done correctly. To be able to demonstrate and display an M•Design system and the space it takes versus the cost of doing business just makes it a difficult business model. But here's what's going to be the solution for all of your readers to be able to go into a retail store and request a demonstration. Your readers need to say, "I want to hear this stuff. I want to hear what the very best quality cables and power conditioning does for performance and I want to experience it with the best quality DVD and surround music material. I want to hear DVD-Audio and SA-CD the way it should be." If your readers request it, then the retailers will gravitate toward it. The retailers today think that consumers don't really care. And, of course, that is not true of any *Widescreen Review* reader. But as long as they keep thinking that, they think they can keep selling products without doing the demo. If this trend is not turned-around, it's going to be hard for us to actually experience a good demo except at your friends' house. So, I would love to see a movement by *Widescreen Review* readers demanding of their retailers

and custom installers that we get a high quality demonstration with all of the source material that is available to us today.

**WSR Reber:** Do you think that there might be an evolution to a manufacturer-supported retail scenario with full blown comprehensive demonstration capability if the retailers don't step up to the plate?

**The Head Monster:** That would be hard to do because you'd be in competition with your retailers. But it has been done with Bose stores, B&O stores, and Sony stores. It's a frustration for manufacturers like us who want to have our products demonstrated properly to get the retailers to devote the space and the time and the training it takes to deliver that vision. Our retailers are extremely capable and are strong Monster supporters. It's our hope in our new training program for our retailers, which we call the Monster Reference Home Theater Music Experience, to be able to train more salespersons to give better demonstrations. Hopefully through that, all of your readers will buy more stuff and make it a successful business model for them.

**WSR Reber:** You have always been the leader in training programs for your retailers. I remember when I was at Monster Cable, I worked with you in the development of the M-4 program. It was an incredible training program and all those retailers that adopted that program and went with that program on the sales floor became very successful. What kind of training programs are you launching today?

**The Head Monster:** The Monster Reference Home Theater Music Experience is our latest training program. It's the most comprehensive training program that we've ever launched, Gary. It really addresses expressing products in the way that their customers want to hear it. Many consumers don't care about all the technical gobbledygook that manufacturers put out. They really want to know "What's it gonna do for me?" Retailers aren't very clear about delivering that message. So part of the training program is how you can integrate the system into your lifestyle, how it's going to fit properly in your home, how to relate to other members of your family. For example, video gaming is a huge component of this new training program because the gaming technology in many ways is ahead of music and movie reproduction. Especially with the new X-BOX and new Playstation technologies coming, you'll be able to buy an X-BOX that is as superior as many of the best DVD players that are out there. But you have to connect it properly with the right Monster Cables to get all the performance out of it. So we're educating on that as well.

**WSR Reber:** I agree with you that video



Bruce Swieden And Head Monster

gaming is a major force in the market, and I see a convergence of the gaming world in an all-in-one comprehensive system delivery that does home theatre, gaming, and surround music. Where do you see gaming, and how does Monster fit into that?

**The Head Monster:** For all your readers, if you're not connecting your X-BOX through component video and surround sound and you have a gaming console in your family, you've not experienced what gaming can actually do. The picture quality is astounding, as the new X-BOX outputs 720p. You're also not maximizing what you can do with your home theatre system unless you hook up a gaming console to it. Imagine a game in full surround sound with 720p and soon 1080p out of an X-BOX, that's as good a DVD player as you can buy today. The quality of the sound is getting better. You even have music and a movie-like experience together with many of the games. So, gaming is part of your home theatre experience, if you will, a different kind of experience. So, I encourage all of your readers to integrate their gaming consoles immediately into their home theatre experience and look at the quality of the games. I believe many of your readers are also gamers too. It's not only kids.

**WSR Reber:** Then gaming should be part of the retail experience, in terms of demonstration, for those retailers who are really doing a good job of it?

**The Head Monster:** Gary, you're absolutely right. But they're not doing it. Part of this Monster Reference Home Theater Music Experience will help retailers put a gaming console in the system so their customers can also have that experience. Not only movies, not only music, but also the ultimate video gaming experience too. So, you're absolutely right, we need more effective demonstration.

**WSR Reber:** Every year at the Consumer Electronics Show, you make a gift to the industry with an incredible con-

cert, which follows a very impressive presentation of dealer awards recognizing the best retailers in the business. Who are some of the best retailers and why are they successful versus others that aren't?

**The Head Monster:** Well, Gary, it's always a pleasure to bring music and some of the greatest performers to the industry. One of the things our industry has lacked at CES is a real quality music experience, so that's why we've brought a lot of the great artists like Ray Charles, James Brown, Crosby Stills & Nash, Santana, and a whole series of people in a smaller venue, and a very high quality audiophile experience. It's for an intimate setting. So that has been very exciting for us to put on every year.

The retailer industry has changed a lot and a lot of businesses shifted toward the big multiple national retailers who are actually doing a much better job in delivering a customer experience. They are looking to improve that experience to consumers on a mass basis. The best demonstrations and the best retailers are still the independents. They are the small retailers in your neighborhood that do a high quality job with custom installation and also a high quality job in demonstrations. You can recognize some of those retailers by some of the groups they are in. One is HTSA, which is the Home Theater Specialists of America. There are approximately 70 retailers in that group. And also PARA, which is the Professional Audio Retailers Association. The retailers of both those groups get together once or twice a year to exchange views on what are the best ways to present audio and video equipment experiences to the consumer. Look at [www.htsa.com](http://www.htsa.com) or [www.para.com](http://www.para.com) and you'll be able to get a listing of those high quality retailers. They're the ones who continually win our best Most Monsterous Retailer awards.

**WSR Reber:** Their secret is that they take demonstrations seriously, and they do it right.

**The Head Monster:** They build their business model on proper demonstration and relating to the consumer in a higher quality way.

**WSR Reber:** During my tenure at Monster Cable, you and I launched the Famous Monster Program, and it was amazing how many famous recording engineers and artists embraced the Monster ProLink cable technologies that we offered to them and demonstrated to them—the list reads like a who's who. The success of this program was all based on demonstration and better performance results, whether used for recording, tracking, editing, or mastering and in stage performances. I remember, for example, when both Santana and George Benson embraced the Monster guitar

cables. Why do you think the program was so successful?

**The Head Monster:** Well, Gary, the recording engineers and producers that you were very instrumental in introducing Monster Cable to, might listen to a track hundreds of times during the recording and post-production process, so they know what their equipment sounds like more than probably any other user in the world because they are intimately familiar with both the work and the equipment. So they can sense extremely fine differences in the reproduction chain. When we first started this process, the recording chain was pretty much state-of-the-art, they had the best loudspeakers, they had the best amplifiers, they had the best recording consoles, yet the reproduction was not up to their expectations. There was something missing. When we introduced Monster Cable to these recording engineers, they found out that was the last link. That the sound was being constrained by the quality of the wire. We had recording engineers who carried their own Monster Cables all around the world. We have studios that have rewired their complete systems, and the most famous recording engineers in the world, such as Phil Ramone, Elliot Scheiner, and, Jack Renner, as well as so many, many others, use only Monster Cable in their recordings. I think we're going to take some credit for recordings today sounding as good as they do because they've been recorded with Monster.

**WSR Reber:** Do you remember how the Famous Monster story got started?

**The Head Monster:** As we had consumers using Monster Cable on the reproduction side, we saw that the weak link was the recording side, so you're playing back through high quality Monster Cable but you're still recording through junk wire. So, we had to educate recording engineers that the wire they're recording through wasn't as good as the wire consumers were using to play it back on. So that's how the first Famous Monster story got started. Then and now it has extended to professional musicians where they are intimately familiar with the sound of their guitars and pianos, especially acoustic instruments, that when they plug in a Monster Cable the sound and the tonality is much more rich, much more natural. Now we have a phenomenal group of the world's finest studio sessions and famous musicians, like George Benson, who use Monster Cable religiously.

**WSR Reber:** I remember one of our first successes was with Bruce Swieden, the recording engineer responsible for all of Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones' projects. I did several demonstrations for Bruce, and he became an immediate endorser, and to



this day he records with Monster Cable.

Likewise was Telarc Digital's Jack Renner, who credits every Telarc and Heads Up release with Monster Cable.

One of the most memorable projects, going back some time ago, was when we enlisted the support of the Mann Theatre chain, which is one of the premier movie chains in the world. Two of their most technology-sophisticated theatres, the National and the Mann Village in the Westwood District in West Los Angeles were wired in Monster Cable. These are the two theatres where most directors and filmmakers go to see their films. I remember that we completely rewired the Village sound system directly out of the 35mm and 70mm projector sound head into the whole auditorium. It was amazing the difference in sound quality. I remember that THX people from the professional division were sent in to do measurements of the Village before and after, and it was so remarkable the difference that that made in the presentation. Do you remember that?

**The Head Monster:** I remember that. It's phenomenal. Gary, it was really through your connections in the movie business that allowed us to do that. And today, I think that is the best sounding theatre in the world. But, unfortunately, the theatre owners don't believe in wires because it's not very economical.

**WSR Reber:** That's right: they believe in popcorn.

**The Head Monster:** Yeah, popcorn is good. You can make a profit on popcorn, but it cost ten thousand dollars to wire the theatre and so, it remains one of the few theatres that is actually wired from the projector head. It's an unbelievable experience. That was an exciting time; it was because of you and your enthusiasm that made that happen. I wish more theatre owners would do that.

**WSR Reber:** Before I forget, please tell our readers the story of Monster Music and your plans for its future.

**The Head Monster:** Monster Music has been a long time dream of mine to bring high quality music to our customers. But I did not want us to be a small audiophile label with unknown musicians and groups that don't attract a lot of people.

Today, unlike the audiophile recordings of yesteryear, is a surround sound world. Yet the enthusiasts have DVD-Audio and SA-CD recordings that don't represent the best music available today.

So our goal is to bring the highest quality music to your home theatre enthusiasts that can be played on almost any sound system. We will bring today's best music with the latest albums, with the best groups and musicians in Surround Sound performance that will make two-channel sound like yesterday's antique. We have the technology. Unlike DVD-Audio and SA-CD, we are going with a high quality DTS digital disc. In addition, we will be doing special mixes in digital file format that we're downloaded directly from the uncompressed masters right on the disc! So playing Monster Music on MP3 players will provide a high quality experience.

Our first project that will release right around the time your readers see this interview is with the extraordinary rock group 3 Doors Down. This group is clearly one of the hottest rock groups with sold out shows on their current tour. Our first release is actually a DVD-Video with Monster High Definition Surround sound of 3 Doors Down Live. But to highlight the band, we not only did the traditional live mix, but we went back into the studio to provide our listeners with an "on stage" mix. Wow, this is an incredible music experience for surround lovers; it sounds like you are actually up on stage with the band!

**WSR Reber:** You mean you were able to create a mix that places one on stage?

**The Head Monster:** The experience is extraordinary. Because I spent several years playing in a band on stage, I knew exactly what the experience would sound like, so I worked with their engineer to reproduce that experience.

**WSR Reber:** Did you let the band hear it? What did they think?

**The Head Monster:** We played it for the band with our new Monster THX loudspeakers. They were blown away! They actually felt it was like being on stage, which of course is the way they hear it every night.

**WSR Reber:** Did they compare the two mixes?

**The Head Monster:** We went back and forth several times. They were so excited that they invited me to hear their concert in Camden, New Jersey and sit back stage with them! It was wild and it very closely matched the mix. What a dynamic group.

**WSR Reber:** What about the video?

**The Head Monster:** Well, that's the best part. It was filmed in high-definition. We will



Monster Park

be showing it to our retailers in high-definition and when high-definition DVDs become available, we will release it in that form.

**WSR Reber:** When will the recording be out, and where can our readers purchase it?

**The Head Monster:** That is being figured out right now, but suffice it to say, nearly every Monster Retailer will be carrying it.

**WSR Reber:** What else is in store for Monster Music?

**The Head Monster:** We plan to release the Grammy Album of the Year, Ray Charles *Genius Loves Company* in High Definition Surround. The recording is incredible, surrounding you with vocals and instruments. Should be out by this Christmas.

**WSR Reber:** We look forward to the future of Monster Music. We know that whatever you do you get really passionate about it, and that you've done great things for this industry. Bringing great music experiences will be welcomed by our readers.

**The Head Monster:** Thanks, Gary, this is a real labor of love.

**WSR Reber:** That is exciting! As a long time recording engineer and producer, I am thrilled about the prospects for the future of surround music.

Noel, we're coming down to the end of this conversation due to limitation on page count. Are we missing any points you want to make? Do you have other comments you want to convey to our readers?

**The Head Monster:** Yes, I have a few things. Gary, I want to say that I'm very proud of what you've done for the industry and what *Widescreen Review* has done for education. I still think there's not enough pictures in the magazine (laughing). But that's okay. It's an enthusiast magazine. It takes a long time to read an issue, but it is the premiere home theatre magazine in the world. The industry owes you a gratitude of thanks. Although we've had a long relationship,

you've maintained your objectivity when reviewing our products. You've always said that you want to give all the cable guys and all the loudspeaker guys and all the power guys equal time. In *Widescreen* land, you've been able to do that. So that's a credit to your integrity as well.

Another subject is that your readers have a lot to do with the success of driving high quality products to the marketplace. So your readers should keep demanding that manufacturers make higher quality gear: that's projectors, amplifiers, power conditioners, cables, and loudspeakers. Because as long as there is demand, we'll keep making them. Retailers will keep stocking it, and they'll keep merchandising it and selling it. If the industry thinks that enthusiasts are only a small part of the market, we'll never see the best products, and that would be a shame not to have the best technology available in more stores across the country. It is a cart and horse that your readers have a lot to do with and I want to thank all the readers of *Widescreen Review* that support Monster Cable and Monster

Power and all of the other great video and audio products out there. And I want to thank them for their enthusiastic responses on the Internet and their support of your magazine.

**WSR Reber:** I appreciate that, Noel, thank you.

I do have one other question before closing. One of your most amazing marketing brilliancies is Monster Park, the home of the NFL's 49ers. How did that ever happen? Please explain Monster Park.

**The Head Monster:** Monster Park is the renaming of the very famous Candlestick Park. When the naming rights became available, we never even considered it. But the City of San Francisco asked us to throw our hat in the ring amongst some very big players like Oracle and Wells Fargo Bank and Macromedia. So we said, "Okay, sure, we'll throw our hat in the ring" never thinking that we would even get it. But the reason that they selected Monster over all these very, very big companies is because we represented the small company. We represented minority business, and we represented the entrepreneur. We're not a public company. So it was a statement for the 49ers and the City of San Francisco to select Monster as representing what is important for businesses in America and give Monster some great recognition. For the consumer electronics industry, there are very few manufacturers that have that kind of recognition; there's the RCA dome, Philips Arena; so, very few for our industry. The fact that Monster is on the freeway signs of this phenomenally rich building, where some of the greatest players of football have played, is really an honor for us to be a part of that rich history for the next four years.

**WSR Reber:** Thank you, Noel, for being such a good friend and teacher to me. To your continued success. ■

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