

TITLE: Three local companies look forward and back

SUB-TITLE: Infinity Post & VFX's Gary Shaw, Core Music Agency's Ari Wise, and Maverick Post's Gregor Phillips reflect on the year that was, and share their plans for 2024

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There's a lot to be gained from pondering the recent past, especially if you're working in an industry like post which – for better or for worse – can expand or contract quickly according to new technology and societal trends. This business moves fast; it can be hard to carve out time to ponder what you've come through when you're already immersed in the next thing.

Before we move further into 2024, we asked the owners of three homegrown companies – Infinity Post & VFX, Core Music Agency, and Maverick Post Group – to reflect on the year that was, and share some of their plans for 2024.

INFINITY POST & VFX



Gary Shaw doesn't need to think long at all when asked about the biggest change his company experienced in 2023. The answer is in the company name: before it became Infinity Post & VFX last year, it had operated as Side Street Post & VFX for more than a decade.

The original name was “a bit of a lark,” according to Shaw; the entrance to its studio was (and is; they're in the same spot) on the side of the building, accessible via a side street. What complicated matters for Side Street was the fact that the company at the front of the building was none other than Front Street Pictures. Although Side Street worked on many of Front Street's projects, they weren't a Front Street subsidiary – but that idea persisted nonetheless.

“There was a situation where there were certain clients or opportunities that wouldn't present themselves [to us] because the name was so similar to Front Street Pictures that people were under the impression that we were the same company,” says Shaw. “It wasn't ideal, because it's a competitive field.” Thus, last year, Shaw made the decision to rebrand under a new name and logo.

Ultimately, Shaw settled on the infinity symbol for his company's logo, and Infinity Post & VFX for the new name, because of how they reinforced his company's philosophy. “We're about infinite possibilities, infinite relationships,” says Shaw. “We'll take on infinite creative challenges, and we always have. It doesn't matter what the project is, I want to embrace them.”

The change seems to be working. “We've been operating under the name Infinity Post on credits for a few months now,” including for a holiday movie for Hallmark, says Shaw. “I had the opportunity to work on that show because people started to understand that we aren't Front Street. We're a tenant in the building. Yes, they're a large client for us, but we're separate and secure.”

Shaw has worked as a colorist for more than 40 years. He got his start at Gastown Post back in 1979. “I’ve been in that creative work ever since, and that creative work is why I stay in the business,” says Shaw. Infinity Post works on projects of all sizes and from all genres, including short films, commercials, and documentaries, as well as films and series for clients like Paramount and Netflix. “We’ve done a little bit of everything,” says Shaw. “I’ve embraced everything.”

Looking ahead at 2024, Shaw is eager to work on more documentaries. He’s previously worked with celebrated documentarians Charles Wilkinson (*Haida Gwaii: On the Edge of the World*) and Nettie Wild, and will be making a special push to appeal to documentary filmmakers. “I really want to support documentary filmmakers, because I love to learn,” says Shaw. “I look at the whole world and I just want to learn, learn, learn, and I want to help other people learn, and if we can create content that’s engaging, and fun, and entertaining, and that people will react to and walk away with a changed view of the world, then you’ve really done a good job.”

GARY SHAW ON THE VALUE OF THE VPA: “The VPA offers a community of like-minded professionals facing similar challenges and opportunities. This peer support network has been invaluable for sharing knowledge, discussing industry developments, and finding collaborative solutions to common problems. Given the rollout of our new brand this year and as a growth sponsor, the VPA has significantly enhanced our visibility within the industry and among potential clients. The VPA's marketing efforts and events have provided us with platforms to showcase our work, leading to increased brand awareness and business opportunities.”

CORE MUSIC AGENCY



There is an art to film scoring, and Core Music Agency’s company philosophy is to support the artists who practice this art, says Ari Wise, the agency’s founder and director. And in 2023, Core’s artists worked their magic on a whopping 181 productions. Although Wise describes the number as “a lot of projects,” he notes that Core wasn’t immune from the Hollywood strikes. “We had to hustle a little harder last year, and we did see a drop in business from 2022, but overall, we fared pretty well,” says

Wise. “It’s a testament to the hard work that our agents do, and it’s a bigger testament to the work that our composers do. We’re nothing without our talent. We’re nothing without our composers.”

These composers include Mark Korven (whose credits include *The Lighthouse*, *The Witch*, and *Night Swim*, the last of which opened in early January), Jesse Zubot, Red Heartbreaker, Graeme Coleman, Matthew Rogers, Terry Frewer, Wayne Lavalley, and dozens more. Their work is heard in a variety of projects, including features and short films, documentaries, television series, animated projects, video games, and more.

“We have a diverse roster [of composers] with different skills and backgrounds of expertise,” says Wise, who started the company 17 years ago after scoring projects for many years. “We



don't pigeon-hole composers. Most of our composers are very good at doing many different kinds of things. Our goal is to make sure they keep seeing some kind of success. We work on a wide range of different things. I like to think that we have somebody for everybody."

Core's trajectory was set a few years ago, says Wise, and the agency's goal for 2024 is to keep pushing that agenda along. "Our goal for 2024 is to continue to seek more challenging work for our composers," says Wise. "We're making bigger inroads into foreign markets and we want to push that more. That's something we did in 2023, and we want to do more of that. We're signing some international composers, some European composers, and some American composers. We are a Canadian company, and our mandate is to serve Canadian composers, and if I want to make some over-reaching goal statement, we want to make Canada a destination for scoring for the world. We want the world to come to Canada to score here." In order to accomplish this goal,

One characteristic that makes Canadian composers so appealing is the fact that they don't stick to one distinctive style, says Wise. "If you look at Icelandic composers, they're notorious for having a certain kind of style, and I don't see that in Canada," he says. "Canada has such a wide variety of people, and a practice of respecting different cultures. A lot of our composers have studied overseas, and they're bringing that world knowledge back here, so you can get anything you want in Canada. There's no Canadian style, but I do see a Canadian work ethic. I see a Canadian character that should be very appealing to the world in how hard we work, how we do things, how collaborative we are, and how much we respect the filmmaker and the process. That's what I see from Canada in terms of a Canadian composer national identity. We're humble. We're collaborative workers. We're not insane artists who demand attention."



And one thing Wise is not worried about in 2024 is AI. "Every film festival I go to and every conference I go to, there's always a panel on AI, and so far, every panel I've gone to has a part where they go, 'Here's how AI scored this scene,' and they use different AI platforms, and in every case, the audience erupts in laughter because it's so ridiculously bad," says Wise. "Everyone is worried about how AI will change the industry, and composers are maybe worried the most. But, in the end, we're confident that if humans are still making movies, they'll want humans to score them."

ARI WISE ON THE VALUE OF THE VPA: "Composers who are moving here, they reach out to me, and I can't represent everybody, but if I recognize talent and I can see that they're highly qualified or they just have some sort of promise or spark, I say, The first thing you should do is join the Screen Composers Guild, and then join the VPA. That's how you're going to get to network, how you're going to get to know the people who may bring you to the table. The bottom

line is people don't work with companies. People work with people, even if they're working for companies, so you have to meet those people, and you have to like those people. You should like the people you work with, and the best way to do that is engaging in community activities and meeting them and talking to them and working with them, and the VPA provides that milieu. I can't say enough good things about it."

MAVERICK POST GROUP

When Maverick Post Group's President and Co-Founder Gregor Phillips looks back at the year that was, he does so with pride.



"To state it plainly, I think it was an accomplishment to get through [2023]," says Phillips, who, with CEO Miguel Nunes, founded Maverick Post Group nearly four years ago. "You've probably heard this refrain from a lot of people, that it was a really challenging year, and it was."

Building a sound studio like Maverick Post Group – with its state of the art facilities designed to serve an impressive range of projects from an equally impressive array of clients – was "a crazy endeavour," says Phillips. "It's a big commitment, and so Miguel and I, being independent sound people, we don't have deep pockets, so when we had the strike happen, it was obviously an unfortunate situation to be in and we didn't have a lot of say over the matter, but we did our best, and it wasn't until the very end of the year that it started to catch up with us, so it was a real struggle."

But Maverick Post Group made it through 2023, which is where the pride – and the gratitude – comes in. Says Phillips: "We didn't have to lay anyone off. We didn't have to make any drastic decisions. To ride that wave after only being a company for three years, to us, it feels like an accomplishment. We're so lucky to have what we have, to work in this industry, to do what we love to do, and we're not taking any of that for granted. We've gotten there, and now we're saying, 'Okay, 2024, let's see what happens.'"



It's impossible to talk to Phillips and not hear his passion for sound design. That passion is a foundation stone for Maverick Post Group. "Both Miguel and I have backgrounds in sound design and music, and we're both really passionate about sound," says Phillips. "We both drive home the importance of sound and storytelling with filmmakers, and the opportunities that sound presents to elevate a story. We're all about pushing for bold choices. That's what our DNA is all about."

And 2024 is off to a great start for Maverick Post Group, with new and returning clients on both sides of the border, including the live-action *Monster High* film franchise (which was nominated for an Emmy in 2023). Phillips is excited to continue to build Maverick Post Group's company culture in order to serve these clients. "Work practices, creativity, having a great team: it's impor-

tant to a company, to the culture of a company, to have everyone working and vibing well together,” he says. This builds off of what was made clear during the pandemic, which is “the importance of human contact and being able to have people in the same room together.”



What else is Phillips excited about in 2024? Technology – specifically, technology that has “the potential to do great things” in the industry, including immersive and binaural audio. “We’re still waiting for [these technologies] to really gain traction in the industry but they’re getting there, and we’d like to see it become more common place because they’re great tools and a great way to immerse and engage viewers,” says Phillips.

GREGOR PHILLIPS ON THE VALUE OF THE VPA: “I think it plays a hugely important role in our community in a very quiet way. I see it as this hive of people who are working diligently behind the scenes to make all these incredible things happen, like seminars and networking events. People don’t know how much work is involved in putting that stuff together. I feel like the VPA is working quietly behind the scenes to support, to broaden, to advocate, to do all of these amazing things on our behalf. It’s one of those things where, if we didn’t have the VPA, we would all be in our little rooms working away silently. We need to have that voice. We need to have that advocacy. We need to have that presence to really say, ‘Hey, there are a lot of people in this town who do great work.’”