



VFF & MPSE PRESENTS...
THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF

Back to the Future

They Partied Like It Was 1985!

BY TERESA MORROW MPSE



L-R: Eric Marks, MPSE VP, Scott Hecker, sound designer, and David Barber, MPSE President.

Regular readers of *Wavelength* in the Los Angeles area are familiar with the many MPSE events that happen every year. From special screenings to Sounding Board panel events to the annual family picnic, the MPSE creates interesting opportunities for those based in California to learn and meet other editors in their local sound community.

The MSPE is also an international organization with members in 44 countries around the world. The “MPSE Presents” event series has been

expanding over the past few years to bring some of these opportunities to international audiences. As part of the MPSE Presents series, sound editors based in and around Toronto, Canada, were treated this summer to an exclusive screening that proved to be a thrilling moviegoing experience, a great networking evening ... and for some attendees of a certain age, a real nostalgia trip. The MPSE, in collaboration with the Vaughn Film Festival (VFF), hosted a screening of the 40th anniversary re-release of *Back*

to the Future, followed by an in-person conversation and Q&A with renowned sound designer Scott Hecker, one of the editors on the sound team that made this film an Academy Award winner for Best Sound Effects Editing in 1986.

Moviegoers were welcomed into the theatre by VFF volunteers and MSPE Executive Director Tracie Costabile. MPSE President David Barber gave a short welcome speech and VFF founder Antonio Ienco revved up the crowd with a lively introduction to the film, sparing no catchphrases in the process.



VFF founder and MPSE member Antonio Ienco and David Barber, MPSE President, welcoming the crowd before the screening.



MPSE VP Eric Marks asked sound designer Scott Hecker to share memories about the making of the film.

Forty years on, *Back to the Future* still delivers. Right from the opening scene—the still-riveting clock sequence in Doc’s lab—the movie proves again that it is powerfully entertaining and a fantastic case study for storytelling with sound. After the credits rolled and a long round of applause, MPSE Vice President Eric Marks invited Scott Hecker to the stage to share some memories about

the making of this blockbuster hit. Scott recalled that he joined the sound crew after the movie’s release date was moved up by several months to hit the July 4th long weekend—in response to some very well-received early test screenings. The film was completed with just a two-month window from the end of principal photography to answer print. One week after that, it was in

theatres. Of the revised release date, Scott recalls: “They quickly realised that it was just too intense. It just wasn’t going to happen with the crew that [sound supervisor Chuck Campbell] had assembled.” An additional team of editors was needed and Scott was among those brought on to help get the film across the finish line. He recalls his first impression of the film that was in progress: “It was funny. The acting was great. You could tell we were working on something special.”

Scott Hecker was working for Robert Rutledge at Blue Light Sound at the time, and their team was delegated to create the vehicle sounds for the now-famous DeLorean and the flux capacitor, as well as the time barrier scenes. Their job “was to create cool sounds to match the quirky and unusual look of the DeLorean.” All hands were on deck for the climactic clock tower sequence, as iterations of the lightning effects from the Industrial Light & Magic VFX team continued to roll in until the very last minute. Regarding the initial design process behind the sound of the now-iconic DeLorean, Scott recounts:



"Funnily enough, we had recordings of the DeLorean and they were not very exciting. A lot of times in what we do, we try to be realistic, but in a movie like this, things need to be more amplified and intense. Listening to the recordings of the DeLorean, as cool of a car as it is—I think the engine was basically based off a six-cylinder Volvo. [Director] Bob Zemeckis was like, 'That is not going to do it.' We all agreed that we had to do something else."

That something included recordings of a souped-up '82 Ford Bronco, supplemented with a multitude of whines, turbine sounds, servos, and a few surprising elements from another science fiction film production: "In the library, we had composite transfers [from *Star Wars*] of the Landspeeder and the TIE fighter going by and so we thought we'll sneak those in every once in a while when the DeLorean goes by."

***"Opening scenes of films usually have music to launch the power and the emotion of the film and get the audience engaged. This is one of few films that just opens. It's all sound effects... It is truly magical."* –SCOTT HECKER**

Scott was asked how sound editing has changed since 1985. While acknowledging that the technology has obviously completely evolved, Scott took a few minutes to reminisce about the cumbersome processes of analog editing and before random-access cataloguing, when searching for sound effects required leafing through the pages of a binder. Everything required a lot of time and preparation. While the job has changed, he maintains the fundamentals of the role are still the same:

"We're the last ones in the process and we're pressed up against the deadline..."

We have to articulate all the different sounds and make sure they're in sync and are believable. And in this case with a sci-fi element, you have to try to make it sound as cool as possible. That's the most fun part of being a sound effects editor or a sound designer—just coming up with weird sounds that people wouldn't expect you to be using."

Before wrapping up the conversation, Scott took a moment to give credit to the many people who contributed to the soundtrack. "It took a lot of people to pull this off... A lot of different editors' instincts were poured into the film." He





L-R: Garrett Montgomery, MPSE board member, David Barber, MPSE President, Timothy Muirhead, MPSE board member, and Eric Marks, MPSE Vice President.



Tracie Costabile Dumm, MPSE Executive Director

points out the work of John Roesch and the rest of the Foley crew in particular, as crucial to the opening scene in Doc's laboratory workshop:

"I didn't work on that sequence, but it is truly magical. Opening scenes of films usually have music, you know, to launch the power and the emotion of the film and get the audience engaged. This is one of few films that just opens. It's all sound effects. It's an amazing scene to display sound design, sound editing."

During the Q&A portion of the talk, Scott offered some parting advice and encouragement to young editors, based

on his many decades of experience: "Make yourself invaluable, go above and beyond. Make it so they never want to work without you ... and keep at it."

Following the Q&A, MPSE raffle prizes were awarded, including some sweet *Back to the Future* memorabilia. The evening continued with a well-attended reception. It was a rare occasion for MSPE members in Toronto; everyone from industry veterans to young editors just starting out were able to strike up conversations in a relaxed and friendly setting and introduce themselves to Scott and the other MPSE members

visiting from L.A. Editors from different realms of production exchanged their impressions of the film and traded war stories of their own from the Toronto film scene.

MPSE board member Eric Marks explains that this is just what these events aim to achieve:

"Our primary goal in hosting MPSE Presents events is to spread excitement, knowledge, and some history about the artistic craft of sound. We hope these events bring together local communities to celebrate our work together and give people a chance to meet others in our industry."

As for the choice to host the event in Toronto, Eric Marks adds: "Toronto is an incredible city with a great artistic community, featuring many talented sound professionals who work on some of our favorite projects." MPSE President David Barber adds that "the MPSE is a truly international organization." Events like this screening, "serve and inspire our members and their sound communities—bringing Academy Award-nominated talent like Scott Hecker and some of their legendary projects" to other cities worldwide.

The MPSE continues to plan new events, like the London Meet Up held in August of 2025 and the MPSE Presents panel hosted in October at the SAE Institute in Mexico City. Collaboration with organisations like the VFF and Tonebenders podcast have helped create unique experiences, welcoming MPSE members in these cities. David Barber says to be on the lookout for more international screenings, Q&As, and meet-ups in 2026. Eric Marks adds: "We have a lot of event ideas in the works, and we'll continue to expand upon our events and territories in the months and years ahead. We love bringing people together and are grateful that our worldwide community is excited by these as well. Stay tuned for more in the months ahead."