

COLLECTIVE IN-USE ASSESSMENTS

audio and video gear, and get to work. Synthesizer outputs were connected directly to the Studio 8's channel line inputs, along with the PCM-70 stereo returns. Echo send output from the Studio 8 was fed to the PCM-70's single input at line level. The PCM-70's MIDI In was connected to one of the four MIDI Outs on the Total Music interface box. I now approached the SMPL Chase Lock unit, only to find that no description had been included in the manual of front-panel access ports and connectors. Well, having some experience with audio-video interfacing, I jumped in and connected the Chase Lock to the audio and video transports. The panel itself turned out to be fairly straightforward: the Studio 8's back-panel accessory access jack was connected to the Chase Lock Slave port; the Slave Timecode Input to the Studio 8's channel #8 direct out; and the Master Timecode Input to the VCR's right-channel audio output.

The Chase Lock has two timecode outputs for simultaneously recording code onto two machines, which were connected to the VCR's right-channel audio input, and the Studio 8's channel #8 input. The Studio 8 is equipped with a switch that defeats the dbx noise-reduction circuit for track #8, while working with timecode or sync-pulse tracks. (Noise reducing such tracks is unnecessary, and can lead to problems during lockup.) Since the

NEC half-inch VCR is a consumer unit, it has no remote transport control capabilities, and so nothing was connected to the SMPL System's Master Control port. With all of the audio and video hardware hooked up, I made a quick call to Synchronous Technologies to make sure that I wasn't about to blow anything when power was applied! Having assured myself that the input/output configuration was correct, we were ready to roll tape.

Timecode Synchronization

A videocassette copy of the film workprint arrived at the studio with a burned in timecode window, but no code recorded on the audio track. Denis spotted the tape copy for his music cues, and calculated tempos and durations according to this visual readout. I proceeded to stripe timecode from the SMPL System onto the relevant audio and videotapes for sync lock. To allow us to properly calculate the punch-in and -out times for matching cues. I then ran the videocassette and calculated the timecode offset between the striped code and the visual SMPTE timecode display.

Since the SMPL System timecode had been laid down after the visual code, at the very extreme we would be half a frame off from the latter. (Of course, if the director had supplied us with a matching audio timecode track, we could have had exact sync!) Even though the SMPL System does not regenerate timecode, if you start with a good audio code track, it can

usually be copied a generation down without significant problems. (I am not recommending this practice; sometimes it is the only viable alternative.)

Having striped both tapes, I proceeded to follow the manual's description for calibrating the Chase Lock. This proved to be a problem, since the manual talks about adjusting calibration only in the Lock Mode, and I planned to operate the machines in the Chase Solo Mode. I thus had some difficulty with certain controls, and didn't achieve the desired results in locking together the two machines. After a good deal of frustration and experimentation, another call to the factory was in order, at which time they explained that Synchronous had omitted mentioning the Chase Solo calibration procedure. I was able to calibrate in the proper mode, and everything seemed to work fine. The calibration procedure was simple and easy to follow, and my only recommendation would be to see better quality pots installed in the unit.

The actual synchronizing of the Studio 8 and NEC half-inch VCR worked quite well — both machines locked within four seconds of passing the SMPL pre-roll cue point — although the procedure for setting this up was a bit time consuming. The master VCR had to be run and then put into pause at the appropriate cue point. The timecode location was then assigned to the Cue Window and, by hitting the SMPL transport key twice, the slave would locate to within five seconds prior to the cue point. Punch-



The Synchronous Technology SMPL Chase Lock system (seen with reviewer Bob Hodas above) comprises a modified Commodore VIC-20 PC running custom software (right) connected via an interface card to an external transport, timecode, sync and MIDI controller (below).

