

Doug Fearn's Introduction to AGFA Recording Tape

Around 1980, the regional rep for AGFA magnetic tape, had a demonstration at a Philadelphia recording studio where a mix was made to three different reels of tape from the top tape manufacturers: 3M, Ampex, and AGFA. The two-track tape machine was carefully re-aligned for each tape formulation and the mix was identical on each.

The segments were edited together so all three could be compared rapidly. There were about ten of us in attendance, from most of the major Philadelphia recording studios.

The question was posed to us: identify the tape you are currently using. We listened to all three segments. No one said a word. Finally, I said, "I don't know which one is which, but the second one sounded significantly better to me." The AGFA people were delighted. I had chosen the AGFA 468 segment.

The AGFA tape sounded remarkably more transparent and exciting to me. By comparison, the other tapes sounded as if someone had thrown a cloth over the speakers. I was somewhat surprised that I was the only one who noticed this major difference; it seemed so obvious to me. I suspect some of the other engineers were accustomed to saturating the tape, and that compressed sound was what they wanted. I never wanted to depend on the tape to achieve the sound I wanted. My goal was to capture the sound in the studio in the best way possible and then add effects later, if needed.

At the end of the demonstration, we were each given a 10-inch reel of quarter-inch AGFA 468. The next day, I repeated the experiment with the tape we were using at the time (it could have been 3M or Ampex – we changed depending on who was having problems with their tape at the time). I was again amazed at the difference in clarity and detail.

The AGFA people told me that I could run their tape without flanges on the reels. I was hesitant to do this, because I had seen what happens when I tried that with other tapes. But in this experiment, I used only the bottom flange, and the tape tracked and packed perfectly, every time, fast-forward and rewind, no matter what I did. Impressive. This was with a Studer A80 2-track machine, but it seemed to work well with my old Scully machines, too.

I brought in a bunch of people to listen. Some were engineers that worked for me, a few were musicians, and some were simply ordinary people with a love of music but no technical background.

Remarkably, everyone in the control room chose the AGFA tape as sounding better.

We made the switch to AGFA 468 for all our recording, on quarter-, half-, and two-inch tape. I never regretted that change, and to this day, those recordings with 468 stand out as having a clarity and beauty that I never achieved with any other tape.

It was a sad day indeed when AGFA stopped making magnetic tape. I stockpiled as much of it as I could and used it exclusively until it ran out.

Doug Fearn



VT-1



VT-2



VT-24



VT-4



VT-5

PRESENTED BY:



The Bedford Consultancy • P.O. Box 111 • Nazareth PA 18064
Phone: (610) 746-9342 Cell: (404) 840-0070 • Email: lewis@bedcon.com