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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF KING OF TRAILER VOICE-OVERS;
MOVIES: FOR **DON LAFONTAINE**, A DRIVER AND A LIMO ARE THE ONLY WAY HE CAN GET ALL HIS JOBS DONE IN A GIVEN WORKDAY.

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Voice-over performer **Don LaFontaine** barrels into a Hollywood recording studio, snatches a page of copy and crouches in front of the microphone.

"Don't miss the most grippppping . . . terrrrrifying and nail-biiiiiting film of the year," he hisses, his rich, smoky baritone imploring an unseen audience of millions of would-be moviegoers into their seats.

For 15 years, LaFontaine has reigned as king of the movie trailer voice-over business--the proud owner of the edgy, threatening, excited basso profundo that momentarily delights, scares and hypes film preview audiences across the country.

And on this afternoon, like many others, he rarely fails to satisfy his producer hosts, hitting the perfect pitch in only two takes.

"I've been working so much that I have a familiarity," says LaFontaine. "These producers want it quickly and accurately, and with me they know they won't have to wait."

LaFontaine is an exclusive member of an illustrious fraternity in the movie industry--a steady cadre of about a dozen performers whose narrative voices can cut through the movie preview chaos of special effects, action, music and dialogue. In this exalted club, women are a nonexistent breed. Industry-watchers say the pumped-up delivery of LaFontaine is the model, his signature voice evident in the movie trailers of "L.A. Confidential," "Contact," "Jingle All the Way" and "Volcano."

And while there are several other notable performers in the baritone business, such as Andy Geller, Beau Weaver, Peter Cullin, and Nick Tate, LaFontaine is often the first pick.

With the advent of the \$ 100-million blockbuster, risk-averse production executives are routinely employing LaFontaine's now-standard stentorian pitch, giving the voice-over veteran a lock on a significant part of the market.

"People are becoming more savvy about movie marketing, they're following the weekend grosses every Monday," said John Long, a writer-producer for Cimmarron, Bacon and O'Brien, a movie-trailer production company in Hollywood. "These voices are a crucial part of the marketing effort and there's a lot of money at stake."

Analysts say that up to 50% of all movie audiences go to specific films because of their trailers, a good reason for LaFontaine's more than \$ 1 million in annual earnings. Besides the sweat involved in performing voice-overs, experts say there is also some art in the chore.

"These voices tie in the different cuts the producer chooses for the trailers, which bind all the scenes together," said Lisa Dyson, a director of the Voicecaster, a leading voice-over casting company in Burbank. "They're not just reading words off a page, there's a lot of nuance in it. They're the wrapping on the whole package."

LaFontaine has become so busy that he recently hired a limousine and driver, to rush him to as many as 80 recording sessions per week. His agent says the time saved on parking allows an extra two recording slots per day.

The legendary narrator, who bears a barrel-chested resemblance to Sammy "The Bull" Gravano, has already accumulated his share of nicknames: Thunder Throat, the Voice of God, and King of Trailers. But despite the macho monikers, he remains ever the attentive artist, aware of each pitch and nuance, always ready to fiddle with his instrument for a better read. He plays horror, suspense and drama with a thick delivery, often using a deep-throated whisper. Comedy is a verbal tap-dance, frolicsome and light. With action, he says he tries to drive each point home and often brings out his best chain-saw voice.

"It's a highly specialized form of acting; I call it acting for the blind," LaFontaine says. "You're creating an aural image that has to amplify the picture."

Born and reared in Duluth, Minn., LaFontaine came to the business in a roundabout way. A stint in the Army Signal Corps as a recording engineer led to production work in the advertising industry in the early 1960s. Soon he was writing and editing copy for radio and TV movie trailers. When a voice performer failed to show up one night for six radio spots, LaFontaine jumped in. Nearly two decades of work followed, culminating in a three-year job as head of Paramount Pictures' trailer department in the late 1970s.

Soon after, he began working as a freelance voice-over performer, and his duties have continued escalating. In recent years, he has at times recorded up to 99 spots or visited as many as 25 recording studios in one day.

By noon one day not long ago, events were a blur. LaFontaine had already completed more than half a dozen promos for several television series and movies. (Besides movie trailers, he also performs for clients such as Stroud's linen stores, Orkin pest control and Miller beer.) Soon after, he dropped by a recording studio in Hollywood, to re-narrate several lines for a two-minute trailer for "Spiceworld: The Movie," the forthcoming Spice Girls film from Columbia Pictures. By late morning, he was growling lines at another nearby studio for Bill Murray's recent film: "Bill

Murray is the intelligence community's most lethal weapon--the Man Who Knew Too Little!"

On an adjacent street, Clinton Hendricks, LaFontaine's driver, keeps the motor humming and some soft tunes playing on the radio. The cell phone rings. It's LaFontaine's agency. Woodholly Productions, a movie-trailer production house in Hollywood, wants LaFontaine to read TV spot and movie trailers by mid-afternoon for seven features including "Scream 2," "The Jackal," "Red Corner," "Mr. Magoo" and "Mad City."

"Some days just get crazy," Hendricks says.

Surprisingly, LaFontaine rarely thinks about preserving his precious pipes. In his limousine, there are no lozenges, humidifiers or wet towels. By the end of the day, he's barely had a drink of water, much less lunch. He doesn't have insurance; the premiums for the \$ 10 million in coverage he thinks he would need cost too much.

"My voice is not attributable to three packs of cigarettes or two bottles of whiskey a day," LaFontaine says, as he calmly surveys the passing traffic in his limousine. "I've had this voice since I was 13--one day it just changed mid-sentence. I don't go out of my way to conserve it, but I certainly don't scream my lungs out at sports events. About all I do is have a little snip of brandy on the way home in the limo."

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