

MEET FAMILIAR VOICE BEHIND THE SCENES

By **Cathy Grimes**

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You know JoEllen Anklam's voice, even if you have never spoken with her and have no idea who she is.

You've heard her warm, concerned voice pitching services for **Bon Secours** Health Systems. Her clear, musical voice almost bubbles with merriment on Newport News Public Schools videos.

She has pitched laundry detergent for Tide and lingerie for Victoria's Secret, hamburgers for McDonald's and windows for Pella. She's even sold the British on Florida grapefruits, with an accent good enough to fool the natives.

For more than 20 years, Anklam has been a voice talent, providing narration and dialogue for commercials, training films, videos, even comic-book characters.

She turned a childhood passion into a profession.

"My favorite toy as a child was a microphone and a cassette recorder," she said.

She wanted to grow up and become the Disneyland storyteller. She earned degrees in television and theater in college and did some television work until she had children. Then she decided to pursue voice-over work.

When her daughter was a year old, Anklam auditioned with Studio Center, a 43-year-old national commercial and voice talent production company, and landed her first voice job.

That was more than 18 years ago. Since then, she has consistently ranked among its top female voice talents. This month, she was ranked fourth.

A slim, petite woman with fine bones and large eyes, Anklam speaks softly and with beautiful diction, her voice in the medium-high register. The studio describes her voice as sweet and caring. But in the recording studio she can move it up or down the scale to suit the character or announcer.

She can be a breathless teen, the girl next door, a best-shopping buddy, concerned mother or sexy lover, all depending on what the client calls for in the script. She can deepen her voice to suggest maturity, add a quaver for age or lighten it to sound like a child or cartoon. She loves accents and is known for producing a

credible British sound. One of her first national commercials was for Victoria's Secret, the lingerie company, using her sophisticated British tones.

"I can fake a lot of accents for 30 seconds," she said.

Anklam said she worked one recording job her first year with the studio, but now records hundreds of commercials and other assignments each year. She works almost every day and even plans trips around availability. An upcoming road trip with her oldest son will include stops in Memphis and Las Vegas so she can stop in at studios and do some recording.

"The thing about having 140 women on the roster is, two or three people can sound like me," she said. "Being available is the key. Missing one job could be huge."

While she is one of the studio's top voices, only about 10 percent of her work is heard in Hampton Roads.

"I do a lot of McDonald's commercials in the Southern states," she said of Deep South states including Alabama and Georgia.

COUNTING ON COMMERCIALS

Locally, her voice is most recognizable in ads for Bon Secours. On a recent day at the studio in Virginia Beach, she reviewed scripts for commercials for a West Coast bank and a Jacksonville, Fla., delicatessen.

Anklam said most voice actors dream of becoming the voice of animated characters. Comics aficionados can find Anklam voicing the role of the character Black Widow on the Marvel Comics Web page.

But most of her character work is for commercials.

Clients request voices of certain ages and provide specifications, or specs, for additional qualities, such as emotions or accents. The specs often pose challenges: be both spunky and sophisticated, sound like **Sarah Jessica Parker**, be maternal but sexy.

If she is doing a main voice or character, "I try to put myself into the character. You have to do everything in 30 seconds. You have to act in 30 seconds," she said.

'REAL' SOUND FOR SCHOOLS

During a recent recording session, she worked with audition director Alan Swenson on a "money fairy" character voice for a bank spot. In a recording booth behind a windowed, sound-proofed door, standing in front of a microphone, she paused for about 15 seconds, then began to read. She and Swenson discussed each take, with Anklam "slipping on" different character voices to find the ideal sound. In addition to nailing the

voice, she has to have perfect diction, rhythm and breath control.

Anklam said the length of the script dictates the timing and the pace of her speech.

"I've developed an internal clock down to a tenth of a second," she said. "I know where to breathe, or not. It's a lot like singing when it comes to breath control and breath support."

Anklam said clients often want an announcer, not a character. The Newport News schools videos fall in that category. She tries to sound "real" for those.

She uses a version of her announcer voice for the Newport News schools videos, a role she's had for more than 20 years. Her husband, Jim, manages the district's television station. The district sends her the video script and she records several takes in her home studio. She sends the best two or three recordings to the district and producers load her voice track onto the final product.

The studio's Web site features a demo audio compilation of Anklam's voice showcasing her range. But now clients want actors to audition with scripts and Anklam does at least one audition daily. With advances in technology, almost anyone with a computer and a microphone can audition for a job.

"People all over the country are doing auditions out of their closets or garages," she said.

HONING HER 'MONEY VOICE'

To stay competitive, she surfs television channels looking for commercials, analyzing trends in voices and production values. She also constantly works on what she calls her "money voice," which gets her the most work. That voice must establish a rapport with the listener and convey the ad's message in as little as 30 seconds. Anklam said her current money voice is a soft-spoken "non-announcer with a little attitude." But clients also turn to her for an upbeat tone.

"I get a lot of work doing perky," she said.

But did she ever fulfill her childhood dream of recording for Walt Disney Co.?

Anklam beamed. She has narrated several DVDs for the Disney Vacation Clubs. "That was a dream come true."

HAVE YOU HEARD?

JoEllen Anklam's clients include Tide, Febreze, McDonald's, Pella, Chili's, Verizon, Hardee's, Cracker Barrel, Nokia, Sears, Oil of Olay, Dove, Victoria's Secret, [AAA](#), Lowe's, Bank of America and Walt Disney Co.

To hear Anklam's demonstration audio file, visit the Studio Center Web site at studiocenter.com and search "JoEllen Anklam".

INTERESTED IN BEING A VOICE TALENT?

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