SOUND FX

WITH JIM SOTO

Although we might think of film as a visual experience, we shouldn't underestimate the importance of sound in film. A meaningful soundtrack can be as complex as the image on the screen. Sound effects are an vital part of a film's soundtrack.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SOUND

Sound is used in film to heighten a mood, provide us with information about the location of a scene, advance the plot, and tell us about the characters in the story. There are two categories of sound in film: Diegetic and Non-Diegetic.

- Diegetic sound is a sound which has a source on-screen. They have not been edited in, for example dialogue between characters or footsteps.

- Non-diegetic sound is one which does not have a source on-screen, they have been added in. For example music, a voiceover, and sound effects. Non-diegetic sounds are often used to add drama to moments that would be silent without it.

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Sound effects (or audio effects) are artificially created or enhanced sounds, or sound processes used to emphasize or express an action, mood, or feeling in films. Their importance as narrative and subliminal tools is very valuable.

WHAT ARE SOUND FXₛ?

Sound effects were initially used in radio dramas; anyone near a microphone who was available could supply a make-shift sound effect. The lid of a piano might be dropped to imitate a door closing. A wooden match stick could be snapped near the mic to simulate a baseball hitting a bat. Gun shots could be a dowel hitting a leather couch.

Isolated Sounds

Isolated sounds include those of common items like doorbells, car horns and phone rings. They are the real and specific sounds from daily life such as dogs barking, doors slamming and car tires screeching during a chase.

Specialty Effects

These include sounds designed to be used for items and places that exist only in our imaginations. You find them in cartoon, fantasy and science fiction productions. They enhance the production by creating a special sound for a light saber, the magic of a genie's lamp, or for a gigantic kaiju.

Foley Sounds

Foley sounds are synched with the visuals in a film. It's the process of creating sound fx with everyday objects, and adding them to movies. The magic of Foley places footsteps into a soundtrack – the rattle of a cup placed on a table –the rustle of curtains and the popular punch in the face.

Background Ambiences (Atmos)

Background ambience tracks provide the basic environment for a production. They provide the subtle atmosphere that makes film-goers or radio listeners feel like being in a courtroom, a church, a train station, a thunderstorm or a jungle.

Among all cinematic terms used in the movie industry, such as backlighting, deep focus, framing, tracking shots, storyboard, blocking, sound loop and dailies, there is one that always pops up whenever sound production is being mentioned: Foley!

The term was coined to describe "Foley art," a sound-effects technique used in films today in recognition of Jack Foley and his many contributions to the art of sound effects.

FOLEY'S LEGACY

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The term was coined to describe "Foley art," a sound fx technique used in films in recognition of Jack Foley's contributions to the art of sound fx. The magicians who create many of the sound we hear in films are nowadays referred to as "Foley artists".

Unlike other types of motion picture sound fx, Foley art must be created to match up with certain actions and movements of the actors.

Lets check out a video with Foley artist Gary Hecker.

Specialty sound design involves specifying, acquiring or creating auditory elements using a variety of production techniques and tools. This could include Foley, but usually goes beyond its physical limitations. These sounds can be a composite of various unrelated sounds found in our surroundings and/or created digitally to engineer soundscapes never heard before.

Ben Burkett

Ben Burkett prepping for more sound fx work on another Star Wars movie.

SPECIALTY SOUND DESIGN

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Good examples of this include Chewbacca's growl, the light saber swoosh and Predator's clicking noise.

Lets check out a video with legendary sound designer Ben Burkett .

In the world of filmmaking, sound design is not merely an accessory. Sound is an integral part of the storytelling process — breathing life into scenes, adding complexity of emotion, and transporting us to both familiar and fantastical realms.

Reality check. Is there a sound designer among us? I wish we could say yes. Still, your film needs sound fx! Where can you find what you need? Try these fantastic websites:

✓ soundbible.com
✓ footagecrate.com
✓ freesound.org

1. Why is sound important in a film?

2. Which are the two types of sound? How do they both differ?

3. What is a sound effect?

4. Describe the four types of sound effects.

5. Who was Jack Foley?

6. How is specialty sound design different from Foley?

7. After visiting one of the websites listed with sound fx, download one and explain how you would use it in a movie you'd be making.

RESHOOT

Next:

THE SCORE