

AUDIO FOR VIDEO, Part 1

The next time you are running the vacuum cleaner while the TV is on, see if you can figure out what is really transpiring on the tube. Oh sure, if you are watching *CSI*, you know the stodgy old guy is saying something like, “It looks like our vic has been riddled with bullet holes from a very rare Glock model 16B .32 caliber with the twelve-cartridge clip.” While the sexy blond assistant says, “And judging by the size of the holes, it appears that the bullets were magnum-loaded platinum-tipped lead hollowpoints with copper jackets.” At which point the stodgy old guy says, “Which means that our deceased friend here died of lead AND copper poisoning.” But apart from that program, you may not be so sure.

Some people claim that audio is more important than video, and being an old audio guy myself, I completely agree. However, I think it is safe, and less controversial, to say that both audio and video are equally important in a quality TV program. Apart from the obvious value of speech, think of the impact of music in *Jaws*. Think about the sound effects in *Star Wars*. It might shock you to learn that the average movie these days has well over a hundred audio tracks and that entire teams of sound designers and audio engineers cooperate for months on end to create the sound track.

We at PEGASYS do not tend to have the time or budget to go to these lengths (or the inclination), but a closer look at our audio practices might work wonders for our respective projects. Because of the variety of programs produced at PEGASYS, let us not look now at specific practices but at the different types of audio found in the audio-for-video realm.

Dialogue Probably the first thing that comes to mind when we think of audio in relation to a TV program is dialogue, which is basically on-camera speech. This could be two people having a conversation, an interview, a sermon, etc. In reality, a sermon would be a monologue, but we shall not be that picky. Technically, dialogue is usually recorded either with a shotgun mic or lavalier mics, both wired and wireless. In the case of an on camera location interview, such as we see on news clips, an omnidirectional handheld mic is often used.

Narration The other primary type of speech we find on TV is narration, which is off-camera. Advertising is loaded with narration, as are documentaries. Unlike dialogue (on-camera), narration is typically recorded in the controlled environment of a studio with a large-diaphragm condenser or dynamic mic. Since it is not seen, the object is to get as good a sound as possible, rather than good appearance. Another term for narration is voice-over or VO.

ADR When one wants to spend countless hours in post-production, especially if location recording conditions are less than ideal (high winds, kids screaming across the street, Tom Wnetrzak flying overhead every three and a half minutes), the fine art of ADR, or Automatic Dialogue Replacement, is called upon. There is nothing whatsoever automatic about it however. It involves the actor(s) watching themselves onscreen in the studio, listening to their location recording in headphones, and re-recording their dialogue with perfect synchronization. It is positively laborious, but it can result in truly magnificent sounding dialogue.

Sound Effects Sound effects (SFX) can be obvious, as in the famous light sabre noise (which was allegedly made by hitting the ground wire coming off a telephone pole and slowing it down a great deal), or they can be subtle to the extent that you don't really notice them. Yet such sounds can have a dramatic impact on the believability of the picture. Sound effects can occur naturally as the scene is recorded (as many of you know when a baby cries out during a church service, for example), or they can be added in post-production by way of sound effects libraries (see Penn) or...

Foley Foley is the sound effects version of ADR. In the classic example, foley artists operate in foley pits in deadly quiet studios specially built for the purpose. A foley pit is a studio floor that has been divided into multiple sections, each full of some type of surface found out in the real world, such as gravel, sand, concrete, squeaky boards, etc. A foley artist watches the edited video (or film), and creates sound effects in real time to match what is happening on the screen. If the picture calls for footsteps, the foley artist steps up and down in the appropriate foley pit. If the picture calls for another type of sound, say a can opening, the foley artist refrains from stepping up and down in the foley pit and instead opens a can. Foley is useful when the sound effects needed are intricate in a way that would make using prerecorded sounds from a library very tedious. It can be great fun, and everyone should try it some time.

Walla A particular type of sound effect that can usually be found in an effects library and easily used is known as walla, which is general background noise. The sound of a restaurant, for example, might include dishes and glasses clinking, people talking (but not saying anything particularly noticable), doors opening, cash registers beeping, and even indistinct music. It may simply be the sound of the general outdoors, such as birds, cars, dogs barking, etc. Walla is very important when the dialogue has been replaced using ADR.

Music Music needs little explanation. We have (probably) each used it in our productions, perhaps only during the open and close, perhaps throughout for emotional impact. It is rare when a TV program does not include at least some music. Again, music comes in all flavors in music libraries, and PEGASYS has a few of these on hand. If you want to get fancy, spend lots of money, and wait around awhile, you can have your program scored, which is where a composer creates music specifically to match the picture.

How to capture good audio or apply it in post-production is beyond the scope of this article, and may perhaps be discussed in future editions of this publication. But simply being aware of what can be done with audio to enhance your projects is a good start.

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