SCREEN SCOTLAND
SGRÌN ALBA

SCREENING SHORTS

Sound

An Introduction to Screen Language

Sound

- Film is seen as a visual medium, but even in the early days of cinema it was clear that sound was an vital part of the whole experience - this is why musicians were employed to play live music alongside silent films.

- Sound used on screen might not always register – but you'd notice if it wasn't there.

- It has a strong influence on our experience of a film, helping to:
  – **establish time, place, character, genre, tone, mood...**
  – **immerse the audience in the film's "reality"**
  – **aid narrative continuity**
  – **provoke an emotional response from the viewer**
  – **elevate the film beyond the visual or narrative alone, connecting with the viewer on a sensory level.**

Three Areas of Film Sound

There are three areas of sound:

1. **Dialogue and recorded sound**: diegetic sound which accompanies the action on screen.
2. **Sound effects**: both on and offscreen; tend to be diegetic, though they may be artificially created in a Foley studio or exaggerated in post-production.
3. **Music**: can be diegetic (e.g. from a car radio) but is more often non-diegetic.

- **Diegetic sound:** sound motivated by the action in film (i.e. sound the characters **can** hear).
- **Non-diegetic sound:** sound not directly connected to the action on screen (i.e. sound the characters **cannot** hear, typically music which is added on).

Dialogue and Recorded Sound

- Sound recorded at a location doesn't sound how it is really heard (our ears are good at selecting what sounds we actually take in) or how a filmmaker needs it to be heard.

- **Be silent, close your eyes - and listen. What noises can you hear that you weren't aware of before?**

- Placing a microphone close to the speaker creates a sound balance between them and the background - but won't sound realistic!

- Mixing sound is a complex area of post-production; sound designers must create a **believable but emotive** soundscape.

Mixing Sound

- Sound must be cleaned up so it's **clear and distinct**. If audio recorded on set/location is not satisfactory, editors may need to re-record and dub new dialogue, have Foley artists create sound effects, or remove unwanted noises.

- To control **volume**, all sounds (dialogue, effects, background sound, room tone, music) are laid out on a variety of tracks in the computer to be adjusted and mixed.

- This is why you can still hear characters speak even when there are explosions all around them!

Sound Effects

Sound effects (FX) are added in post-production and can be used to:

- **help move the narrative forward**
- **punctuate and reinforce action**
- **guide audience attention**
- **motivate reactions or cuts**
- **bridge scenes**
- **build pace**
- **establish time and place**
- **establish genre**
- **enhance mood**

THOOOM! CRUNCH! KAPOW! KRAKK! SPKOW! BAROOM! BAMM!

Sound effects can be...

- **Diegetic and realistic:** fit the 'real world', even if they are not recorded at the same time as the film.
  - e.g. the sound of a book being dropped or horses coming up a road.
- **Diegetic and realistic but exaggerated:** often used in children's films to help them understand the action.
  - e.g. the tinkle of a bell.
- **Diegetic and non-realistic:** meet our expectations of sound - even when no sound would actually be there.
  - e.g. the sound of a ghost, horses' hooves on sand or a spaceship travelling through empty space.
- **Non-diegetic:** like how speed marks are used in a comic book to suggest movement.
  - e.g. travelling back in time, or an inner response from a character to the action, like having a 'lightbulb moment'.

- Listen to the **sound only** from the first minute of a film.

- Write down everything you hear as precisely as possible and ideally in order.

- What can you learn about...

  - **where?** (inside/outside? rural/urban? what country?)

  - **when?** (day/night? past/present/future?)

  - **who?** (age? gender? how many characters?)

  - **what?** (clues to actions/events)

  - **mood/tone?** (happy/sad? calm/tense?)

  - **genre?** (horror, adventure, comedy...?)

  - **style?** (colour/b&w? animation/live action? visual style?)

- What do you hear that makes you think these things?

Sound On/Vision Off Scribble Pad

Where? (inside/outside? rural/urban? what country?)	When? (day/night? past/present/future?)
Who? (age? gender? how many characters?)	**What? (clues to actions/events)**
Mood/Tone? (happy/sad? calm/tense?)	**Genre? (horror, adventure, comedy…?)**
Style? (colour/b&w? animation/live action? visual style?)	**Any other notes**

Ambient Sound

- **Ambient sound** is sound that is natural to the setting (e.g. birds tweeting in a forest or wind rustling leaves on trees).

- It can be recorded when filming but it might be unclear or too loud. This means effects need to be added during post-production.

- Ambient sound makes a film realistic so we believe what we see, but it can also create **atmosphere** – it might make a house seem like it's in an isolated place, when in reality it was next to a busy motorway!

Sound Activity: Ambient Sound

- Film a location in a single shot for about 30 seconds.

  – It could be the classroom, the playground, the street, a park, the school canteen…

- You can stay in one position or slowly **pan** (move) the camera around the location .

- Remove the original sound, then add appropriate ambient sound from an effects library like Free Sounds Library.

- You could even try adding different effects (like an owl hooting - or a scream!) to see how they change the atmosphere.

Sound: Foley Artists

- The **Foley track** is made up of effects created using sources other than those shown on screen.
    - Named after Jack Donovan Foley who invented many techniques for creating film sound effects.
- **Foley artists** create both the sound effects and the sound **props** specifically for the film. This controls volume, so crunching footsteps don't cover dialogue and so on.
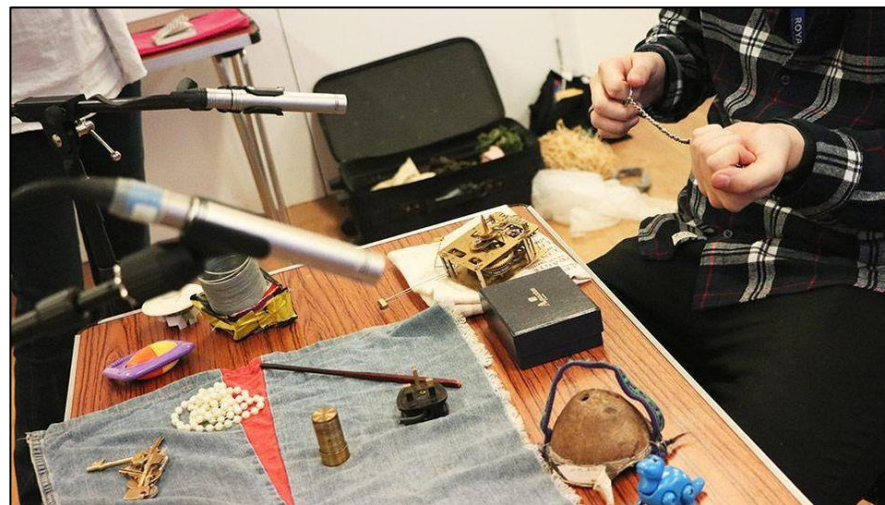
Foley Artists in the Studio

- Sound is recorded live to the picture, using tools and props.

- Studios might have a floor built-in, made of different surfaces - cement, gravel, dirt, different types of wood, linoleum, smooth concrete…

- Foley artists have huge collections of shoes, masses of cooking utensils, stationery, crockery, fabrics, jewellery, boxes and more.

- All this ensures a perfect reality for the audience.

The Soundscapes of Middle-Earth

This video from the Foley artists behind the 'Lord of the Rings' films gives a fun overview of their work:

The Soundscapes of Middle-Earth | The Lord of the Rings

Sound Effects Activity: Foley-ing Around

- Gather a selection of objects that can create sound. Explore and play with them.

- **What sounds can they make**? How might you use them? Tap objects against each other, scrape them with your nails, rub them with some fabric...

    – Think creatively - a blown up hot water bottle squeaked along a table sounds like a car screeching round a corner!

- What sounds can you make with just your hands?

- Now play a short film without any sound and **provide appropriate sound effects**.

Sound: Music

- Music is added to a film for similar reasons to sound effects:

  – **establish a mood, character or theme**

  – **heighten suspense**

  – **reinforce action**

  – **change pace**

  – **provide links**

- Music is there to help tell the screen story, not to be listened to in its own right - it might even barely be heard in the sound mix.

- It usually avoids drawing attention to itself (with exceptions - like musicals!)
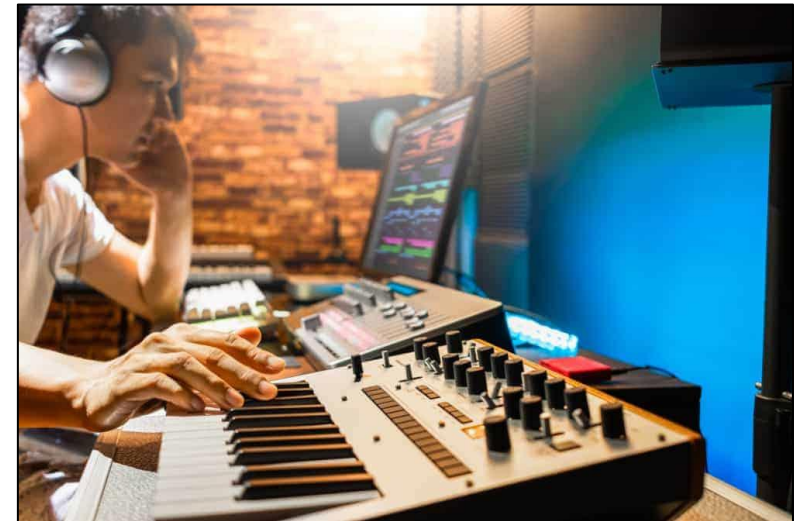
Sound: Music

Film music comes in two forms:

- **score** - instrumental music (mostly), written specifically for a film.

- **songs** - pre-existing or recorded for the film by popular music acts.

- Albums of film music are called motion picture soundtracks.

- But a film **soundtrack** is actually all the audio components of a film – dialogue, sound effects, music track...


ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK

GET ON UP
THE JAMES BROWN STORY
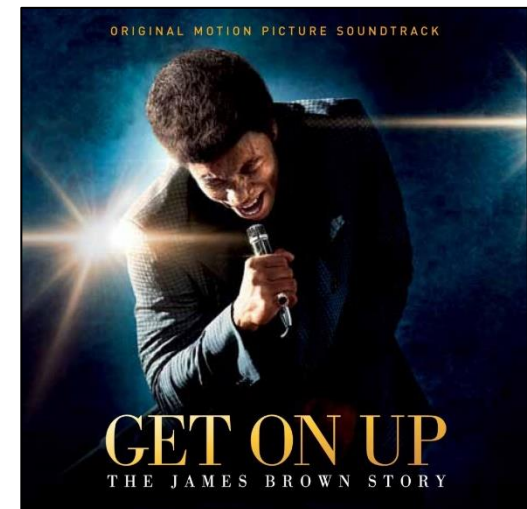
Screen Scores

- A screen **score** is composed specifically for a particular film, written to ensure it suits the story and creates an appropriate mood.

- The composer and musicians even record the music in a studio while watching the finished film so that it fits perfectly.

- And, of course, some scores become iconic and famous in their own right...

- Can you hum any of these scores?
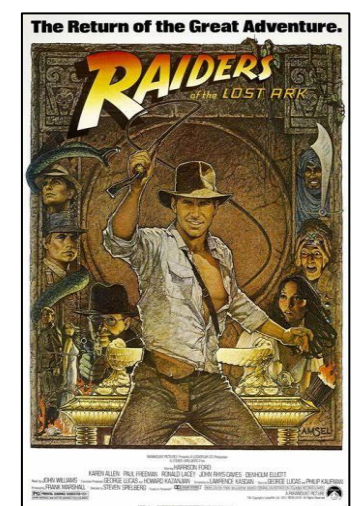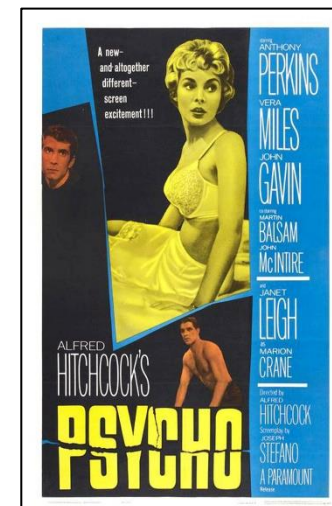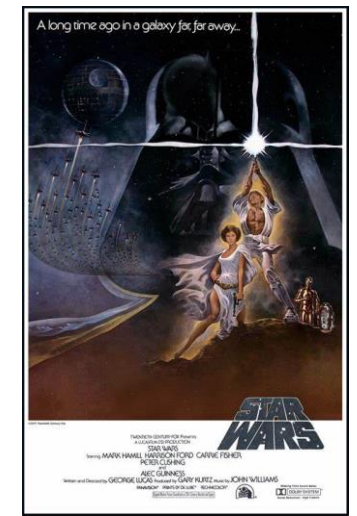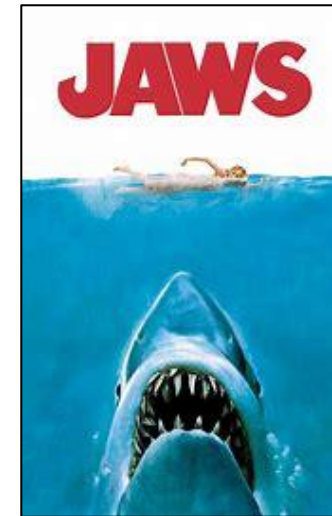
Sound Activity: Reading Film Music

- Listen to **five** excerpts from different film scores.

- List words that **describe** the music (soft, loud, screechy…)
  - This word bank will help you: Screening Shorts Writing About Film: Word Bank

- Say what **genre** the music might belong to.

- Describe what you **imagine** might be happening onscreen when that piece of music is playing.
  - Use this worksheet to record your answers: Screening Shorts Reading Film Music worksheet.pdf

- When you've finished, find out what films the scores were from. Were any of your answers accurate in any way?

Music Activity: Song Choice

- Choose a **character** from a film or TV show then create their **ideal playlist**. Give reasons for your choices.

- Choose a **scene/moment** from a film or TV show that has great **emotional or dramatic impact**. Select a song for that scene/moment that fits well and play it over the film. Explain why you chose it.

THE GREATEST SHOWMAN
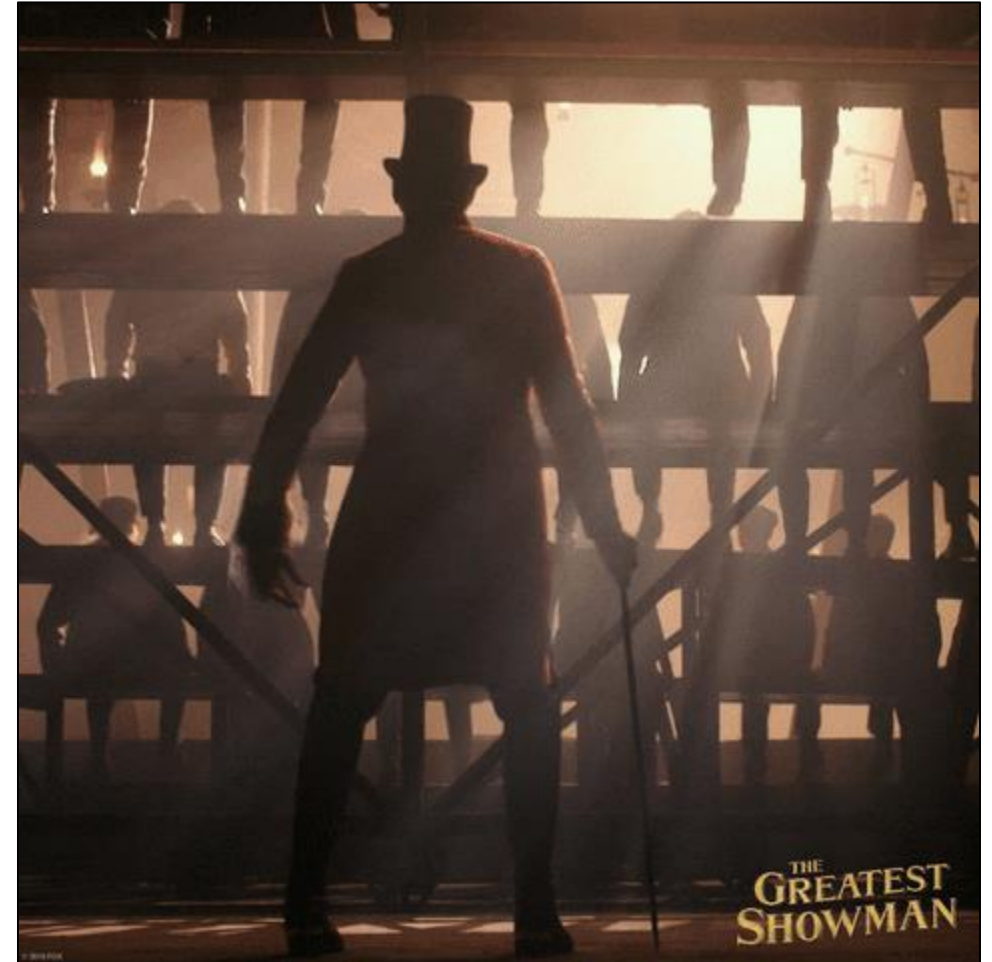
Credits

Resource developed by Gail Robertson on behalf of Screen Scotland.

For more information on Film Education resources and opportunities, go to Home | Screen Scotland.