

9.6 Sound

Knowledge Organiser

HISTORY

The earliest films had no sound and were silent.

Filmmakers experimented with sound, including having a band or pianist in the projection room, for many years before the first film with a soundtrack was released in 1927.

The Jazz Singer was the first feature-length film to feature a soundtrack. Starring jazz star Al Jolson and directed by Alan Crosland, the film featured dialogue and music alongside sound effects.

Since then, sound has continued to develop and evolve, with the introduction of stereo sound, surround sound and most recently, Dolby Atmos. Each designed to create more immersive and detailed sounds that not only replicate the sound in a scene but often trying to evoke the feeling of being in a scene.

Whilst films tend not to feature bespoke and grand scores like they used to, films are still generally soundtracked by a unique series of scores or suites or music alongside specifically curated sound effects, called foley.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

Is the music fast or slow? Does it increase or decrease in pace?

What does the pitch of the music suggest about the action?

How do you think that the sound is trying to make us feel?

What types of sound can you hear?

What sounds are most dominant, either in volume or in significance to the film and the action on screen?

Can you characters hear anything besides their own voice? What can they hear? How might that influence their reactions?

Do the sound effects or music contribute to the genre?

What is the dialogue telling us about?

How is the dialogue being delivered?

How does the mix of sound overall contribute to meaning?

KEY TERMINOLOGY

Diegetic	Sound that occurs within the film's world and which the characters can hear, for example, dialogue, sound effects etc.
Non-diegetic	Sound that occurs outside the film's world and the characters cannot hear it, for example, the score, voiceover.
Dialogue	Dialogue as written text was developed a very long time ago, becoming a genre by the time Plato had made it his own. These days, it refers to many other things, including conversations among people.
Voice over	The inclusion of a narrator speaking on top of the visuals on screen. May be spoken by someone who appears elsewhere in the production or by a specialist voice actor depending on the type of film and story being told.
Score	An original piece of music that is written and tailored for a specific film. Film scores are composed to enhance a film's story and emotion. Composers create the music for a film based on the direction given from the director.
Soundtrack	Applies both to the name for a song that already exists and is used within the film and a collection of pre-existing songs that are selected for either use in the film or as part of a marketing tool for the film.
Sound effects	A sound other than speech or music made <u>artificially</u> to create realism, add authenticity, to emphasise something or to develop character.
Foley	The art of creating sound effects using practical tools and techniques to create sounds that may not be naturally occurring.
Post-production	The term used to describe the filmmaking process overall once filming has completed. For example, foley is usually created post-production.
Sound design	Sound design is how filmmakers flesh out the aural world of a film to enhance the mood, atmosphere, and/or tone. Sound design components include sound effects or SFX sound design, mixing, Foley sound design, dialogue, and music.
Synchronous	Synchronous sound is when the audio of a film is synchronized to the visuals, otherwise described as the film being "in sync."
Asynchronous	Asynchronous Sound is a situation when audio tracks are out of unison with the visuals in the frame. It can sometimes be intentional and sometimes accidental. In intentional examples, this can be used for comedic reasons or to emphasise something of significance.
Contrapuntal	These are sounds that are used in deliberate contrast to the action that is being shown on the screen.
Parallel	These are sounds that compliment the mood, tone, or atmosphere of a scene.
Ambient	Ambient sounds in film represent the background noises that are present within a particular scene or location.
Sound bridge	An editing technique used to transition from one scene to another through sound. Sound bridges, also called an audio bridges, allow filmmakers to transition in or out of a scene by "bridging the gap" with audio
Tempo	How 'fast' a piece of music is played.
Pitch	How high or low a note or chord is.