
Rick's Place

Notes, Thoughts, and Random Musings on the Online Experience

by Rick Hein, AMIS web master

We worked very hard cooking up this vocal track with squeegees. We had to get a sense of intonation and rhythm and communication there that normally is not something you'd try to do with window squeegees. But then, we're in the sound effects business, so we basically never use anything the way it's intended to be used. It's one of our creeds.

“Big Movie Sound Effects”,
at *Behind the Scenes and Out of the Speakers*
Dane A. Davis, MPSE

Autumnal greetings! It's already been a busy year and the Festival season moves into a 'behind the scenes' phase while the audition packets roll in and the online forms pile up in the mailbox. The Boy's Honor Choir Festival and the International Honor Jazz Band are now memories. Most of us will have nightmares about the audition pieces for International Honor Band, International Honor Choir, Junior International Honor Orchestra, Senior International Honor Orchestra, Middle School Honor Band Europe and Middle School Honor Band Asia. Spare a thought for us brave souls manning the listening committees - their three days at the table are just about to begin.

He spoke about the fact that in the films the sound designer creates the world that only exists in the mind of the director and sound designer. They take the film before it has the special effects, the matte paintings, the CGI animation and make it sound as though it exists. In Middle School General Music when we were covering program music, I always included one of the scary films the kids already knew. They would watch the scary clip with the sound on and jump when the head appeared, or exploded, or whatever the shock was. Then we would replay the same short clip with the sound off. It never failed that they laughed at some of the more comic visuals and weren't even remotely frightened when the shock moment came.

Many years ago, I was in the audience for a production of *Dracula* in Chicago and learned the power of this first hand. As Van Helsing and Harker are walking to the sleeping vampire's tomb. The theatre was breathlessly silent. Harker placed the stake over the sleeping vampire's heart and as he brought the hammer down and struck the stake, the amplified sound of a sledgehammer hitting a steel spike rang through the theatre and Dracula sat up. Over a thousand people gasped and scraped their heads off the ceiling! Without that over-large sound effect, we probably would have thought, "How corny!".

All of these carefully scripted and planned sounds are like a musical score - pitch, melody, tone, dynamics play us like violins. As we rehearse our ensembles, we are building the soundscape of the concert - each piece plays a role in the total overall effect, each voice in each section builds the picture. When we listen to a live performance or a recording of a live performance, our ears fill in the sounds that our eyes can't see. The cough in the audience, the creak of the risers, the mute hitting the floor, the steps of the conductor on the way to the podium and the silence before the downbeat. In a studio recording, that isn't there and that is how the experience changes. Unlike a live performance, there is another take when the gong is struck and the stand falls over.

As the auditioning committees meet, they will be sorting through the soundscapes you send them, listening for the metronome, listening to the music you are sharing with us. They will be in that moment with you. We will enjoy listening to the sound tracks of your schools. We know that, like sound designers, you will have used every motivational and educational trick of the trade to get your students to live in the moment of the recording and put their best efforts forward. We all know the script of that unseen film.

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