**A Guide to Sound Design for Theatre**

**The Role of a Sound Designer**

A Sound Designer can have several roles in a Theatre production.

It can include designing the speaker layout for a production or touring show, working with a Composer or Musical Director to achieve the type of sonic reproduction required. Alternatively it can be to work with the director using sound to create atmosphere and mood as well as reproducing sound effects already in the script.

The first job of the Sound Designer is to read the script and mark any sound references: sound effects, musical references and sonic points of interest. The second job is to talk to the Director about their interpretation of the script, the time it is set in and the mood that the Director wants to create. This will help the Sound Designer to decide what kind of sound is needed, any period effects or whether any of the sound is to be performed live. The Director may want to have more or less continuous sound, in which case a composer may need to be employed to write some music, or the Sound Designer will create soundscapes using ideas of his own and the Directors’.

**Sourcing and Creating sound effects**

There are many different ways to source effects, in recent years the internet has become a common way to find sounds and there are many free sounds to be found if you know where to look. However the drawback is a lot of these are low quality mp3 files that may sound fine on your mp3 headphones but when amplified into a large theatre space through good quality systems they can become distorted and unrecognisable. Downloading from well known sites like iTunes can give you much better quality but with the drawback of only working on a limited number of devices. You also have to pay for them.

Alternative places to look are libraries – for music especially popular music, or other peoples cd collections.

An alternative is to create your own effects. Using a little imagination you can create most popular sound effects. Using a small recording device (or even a iPhone these days) you can record from real life, and there are lots of open source audio editing programmes out there for both mac and pc platforms.

Tip: the better quality the original sound the better. So if you can use an external mic for a voice over, do so rather than the internal mic or a recording device. However, if you don’t have access to an audio recording device or mic set but have a video camera, then you could record using that. These days video cameras have a good inbuilt microphone and you can capture the sound from them using most video editing software.

For more detail on creating your own sound please see the document

‘ A Guide to creating Sound effects’ .

**Using recorded music**

Recently it has been become more popular to look towards the internet for finding music that has already been created. Youtube is a great place to find music but its drawback for those trying to source music for theatre and other types of productions is that it is full of different versions of the same song. I do not recommend Youtube for sourcing music as the only way to get it out of Youtube is to use a very dodgy MP3 converter! Firstly as stated in ‘A guide to creating Sound effects’ MP3’s are not good through larger speakers as they are a compressed file. Secondly the conversion from Youtube can make it unplayable.

Spotify also has become the norm for playing music – this is mainly a streaming service and so not good if the internet is being unreliable. Until recently I always advised against using this as well. However having looked at it I am aware that there are deals for students that allow you to have a account which allows for downloads. This means that the tunes are playing off line. If you use this type of Spotify service then it is possible to create a playlist to play as music for a production.

Using iTunes is another way to source music via the internet – here you pay for the right to download it (but not the right to play it!)

Note: please make sure you have the relevant copyright for all the tunes you are downloading.