**DRAMA**

PRODUCTION SKILLS:

SOUND DESIGN



Name:

Class:

***SOUND***

Sound in theatre can be used to establish the **time** or **location** of a performance, or to create and enhance **mood** and **atmosphere**.

Time and location are the ‘**when’** and ‘**where’** of a production.

Sound designers need to consider the **period** and **genre** of a play, as well as the **venue** where the performance will take place. They also need to respond to the **social**, **historical** and **cultural** context of the production.

For a play text, this might mean thinking about when and where the play was written, as well as when and where it is set.

A **sound effect** of a car or aeroplane will be very different according to the period of the play and the type of vehicle.

**Mood** and **atmosphere** are the feeling that the production creates for the audience.

Sound is very significant in creating mood and atmosphere, and audiences will associate different sounds with different moods. Mood and atmosphere can be created using **music** or through a **soundscape** or choice of **sound effects**.

Moods and atmospheres can also be achieved through the alteration of sounds, for example adding **reverb** or **echo**.

**The Role of a Sound Designer**

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| The Sound Designer is responsible for obtaining all **sound effects**, whether **recorded** or **live** for a specific production. They are also responsible for setting up the **sound playback equipment** and must make sure the **board operator** is properly trained.Sound Design is an artistic component of the production. The Sound Designer needs to have imagination to create sound effects, not just rerecord them. |

**What Should A Sound Designer Do?**

* The Sound Designer should **read the script** and meet with the Director in order to discuss the sound design for the show and begin to make the **cue list**.
* There are many types of sound effects and many ways they are created. There may be a composer creating music for the production.
* The Director may have specific pieces of music picked out or they may want the Sound Designer to make some selections.
* There quite possibly will be **non-musical effects** needed. These may be **recorded** from other sources for playback or created **live** during the performance.
* The Sound Designer is also responsible for setting up any sound reinforcement equipment that may be needed.

Complete knowledge of the cues and their placement in the performance is very important. The Sound Designer will need to be able to decide how complicated cueing will be set up.

**Live**, **offstage sound effects** (e.g. thunder and gunshots) are the responsibility of the Sound Designer. The **Stage Manager** should be consulted in order to determine **where** to set up the effect and **who** will run it. The Sound Designer may also work with another member of the production team to create an effect (i.e. the **Props Designer** and a telephone).

They must attend all **Technical/Dress rehearsals**. **Volume levels**, **specific cueing**, and **changes** will be made during these rehearsals. The Sound Designer must be able to complete any changes before the next rehearsal.

The Sound Designer should be familiar with a computer editing program such as **Audacity**. They should also become familiar with **QLab**, the program used for playback. Audacity is a free program. The basic QLab is also free but is a Mac only program.

**Soundscapes**

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| Sound is a constant part of our daily lives: it is very, very rare and practically impossible for the world to be absolutely silent.Take a moment to listen to the world around you and try to list all of the sounds you can hear. These sounds make up the **soundscape** of your life at this moment.Soundscapes can be used effectively in performance to create a **location** or an **atmosphere**. For example, a play set in a seaside town might need a soundscape of waves, children playing and seagulls to tell the audience **where** the action is taking place.Watching a horror film can give you a clear idea of how sound can create **atmosphere**: creaking doors and sinister music are used not only to tell the audience **where** the film is set, but also **how** they should feel about that setting! |

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| Remember:**Everything’s deliberate**! Good sound design is a series of deliberate decisions. Always assume that anything on stage has been put there for a reason and contributes to the audience’s experience. |

**CHOICE WORDS**

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| **Sound levels**: how **loudly** or **softly** the sound effects or music are played. The choice of volume can create an **atmosphere** for an audience. For example, the sound of a library is very different to the sound of a nightclub! Sound played at a very loud volume can have a physical effect on the audience: it is possible to feel very deep or very loud sounds vibrating through the theatre space. But remember, sound levels must **always be set so that the actors can be heard**. |

**Reverb**: as an effect added to a sound using editing software or occurring naturally in a performance space. Reverb (or **reverberation**) occurs when sounds **bounce off the surfaces** in a space. Even after the original sound has stopped, the reverb can continue. Reverb can sound different in different spaces: imagine the difference between playing loud music in a cathedral and a classroom.

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| **Echo**: as an effect added to a sound using editing software. Like reverb, echo occurs when sounds bounce off surfaces. Unlike reverb, which is a **blend of different sounds**, echoes are **specific sounds**, for example if you shout your name in a tunnel and hear it repeated back to you. An echo can indicate a specific location, for example an empty cave, or can create a mood for an audience, like the isolation or loneliness of a character. |

**Fades**: how the volume of a sound **alters**. Music, sound effects or soundscapes can be **faded in** (gradually made louder) or **faded out** (gradually made quieter) during a performance. This might be used to start or stop an effect, or to alter the sound level in response to the action on stage. Sounds can also be established at a higher volume, faded to a lower level when the action begins, and brought back up at the end of a scene, giving the impression that the sound has been played at the same volume throughout.

Your design needs to work for the production. You need to be clear about what the production needs (this is called the **production brief**), and how you will creatively interpret these needs to develop your final design.

Your brief can take different forms: either from a **written text** or a **group devised project**. Essentially, the brief is an **overview of the production project**, explaining what it will be about, what ideas are already decided, and what aims you and your fellow theatre makers have.

NOW… Try making a **mind-map** of all the things your production needs:

* Are there any specific sound effects or music mentioned in the play text?
* What different locations and times do you need?
* Are there any atmospheres you need to create?
* Do scenes take place indoors or outdoors?
* Will you need any live sounds or music?
* Will you need any microphones or similar equipment?

* Do you need any music or sound effects during scene changes?

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| Once you have your brief, use it as a starting point to develop your ideas.Starting with the needs of the production will ensure that your designs are **appropriate**, **practical** and **functional**.As theatre is a practical art form, it is important to make sure that what you design will function in practice, in performance, and be effective for an audience. |

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| **Sound cue list**A sound cue list is a list of all of the sounds in the production in order, with an indication of what the sound is, how it is faded in and out, what level it is played at and when in the production it takes place (the line or action that cues the sound).  |



Any notes made to direct the Sound Designer can be abbreviated, e.g. “Fade In” becomes “**F.I**”, “Fade Out” becomes “**F.O**”, “Lights Up” becomes “**L.U**” etc.

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| **Sound ground plan**Sound designers can use ground plans to indicate where any important pieces of sound equipment will be placed during a performance. This can include speakers, microphones, any instruments you will be using and any other objects that might be used to make a sound. |

**Sound Equipment**

Here are some examples of different types of sound equipment as well as their possible uses in performances. Remember, though, that you can also get good effects using everyday or improvised equipment, including mobile phones for recording, free editing software, homemade musical instruments, or any object used to make a sound on stage.

**Handheld microphone**

Handheld microphones (or hand-mics) are exactly what they say: microphones that can be held in an actor’s hand! They can also be placed in a stand to give the actor free hands.

**Wireless microphone**

Wireless microphones (sometimes called radio microphones or radiomics) are microphones that send a radio signal so do not need to be directly connected to the sound system. They can be very small and give an actor freedom to perform without holding a microphone or having any cable attached. Some have a clip to attach to clothing or are attached to a headset or headband.

**Hanging microphone**

These microphones can be hung above the stage, picking up sound from a number of performers at once. They are particularly useful for making sure that large choruses can be heard.

**Sound desk**

Sound equipment is controlled through the sound desk. This is where the sound technicians can control the quality, level and fade of each sound.

**REMEMBER**

As a Sound Designer, **research** and **review** your sound choices for your production. Is it **effective** for the audience? Does it make sense? Does the play give an indication of any sounds to use? Are you going to include **sound effects**, **underscoring** (music played quietly during the play), **live music** etc.? All of this must be in the **production brief** as well as clearly detailed in the **cue list**.

Answer the following questions:

1. What can sound do for a theatrical production? Make two points.
2. What free computer editing program should a sound designer be familiar with?
3. Give a detailed description of what a soundscape is.
4. What does reverb mean?
5. What does echo mean?
6. What is a sound fade?
7. What is the production brief?
8. What is a cue list?
9. Describe one item of sound equipment.
10. Make a cue list of a scene (you can make it up!) that has four pieces of sound.