

The Video Editor's Guide to Soundtrack Pro

Workflows, Tools, and Techniques

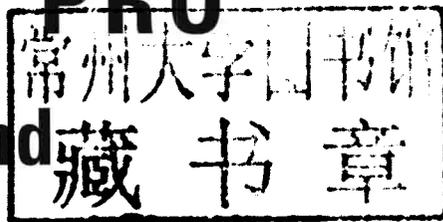


Sam McGuire
David Liban



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SAM MCGUIRE AND DAVID LIBAN



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**THE VIDEO
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SOUNDTRACK PRO**

Dedications

Thanks to my beautiful wife Jenny for putting up with long hours and late nights. I couldn't have done it without you! I'd also like to dedicate this to Adam, Jacob, and Hannah – the finest kids one could wish for.

—Sam McGuire

I'd like to dedicate the book to my wife Angela and son Caleb.

—David Liban

INTRODUCTION

Audio post-production can be an intimidating process for a video editor. Hopefully the audio on your project will receive the appropriate attention from a skilled audio engineer, but that doesn't mean you won't be working with audio all along the way. This book is written for the video editor using the tools in Final Cut Studio. It makes no assumptions about your knowledge of the world of audio, but does assume that you know how to use Final Cut Pro. What we have done is collect a number of experts in the field and bring them together to provide you with real world examples and a resource that will help you understand the audio process and what you can do when using Soundtrack Pro 3.

As we progress through the text, you will notice that a good amount of emphasis is placed on explaining the process; this is not simply a glorified software manual. The goal is to inform your work as a video editor, enable you to do some basic audio editing, and allow the more adventurous among you to complete the entire audio mix. Not every project is going to have a big budget for audio, and more than once I have been asked to help a video editor learn enough to spend the hours required to complete the audio portion of the project. Well, this is the result of those requests. Instead of pushing you to a separate audio application, the text enables you to use Soundtrack Pro 3 for all of your audio tasks. Not only is it a powerful tool, but it will also be instantly familiar to you because it works a lot like Final Cut Pro.

In the text many topics are covered, but we have spent a lot of time narrowing them down to things you need to know. Some of the topics don't translate well to the written text, so we've also created a DVD with an example project that you can copy to your computer and video clips that you can view on your computer or any DVD player. The clips walk you through some of the functions that make more sense when learned visually. We've covered all of the bases and hope that you'll work with the example project as you read through the text. The project is an excerpt from a film by David Liban about an artist named Erik Rieger. Erik Rieger works in many mediums but is best known for working with his grinder as seen on the video. He is also a fine artist, a furniture and wood craftsman, and a musician. He has performed as an opening act for Santana and has done hundreds of shows as you will see on the video.

In addition to things related to the text, the DVD also includes sections on composing music with Apple Loops, mixing in surround, and demonstration of effects not listed in the text.



Each time there is a section of the text that relates to a sample on the DVD, you will see the DVD logo on the side of the page.

Another thing we've done is to include sidebars and extra boxes that provide alternate interpretations and insights from David Liban's personal experience. An Internet search on David Liban will show you just how much experience he has.

As an additional resource, I have made arrangements with VTC.com to open up several additional tutorials on effects from Soundtrack Pro 2 and 3. This is another project I worked on in the past, but the information remains relevant. Go to <http://www.vtc.com/products/Apple-SoundTrack-Pro-2-Effects-Tutorials.htm> to access these clips.

As you read this book, keep in mind that, although working on audio post-production is not an exercise in voodoo wizardry, it is a specialized skill that takes specific equipment and lots of practice. If you want to be able to work on both the audio and the video, then keep at it and learn what Soundtrack is capable of; it has a lot of tools that can make a huge difference to your project.

Most importantly, have fun with it.

Sam McGuire

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THE VIDEO EDITOR

What does it mean to be a video editor? It means finding order amongst the chaos. There are infinite possibilities to every edit you make and, while there are accepted practices, there is no right and wrong, just subjective interpretation. This is why editing is an art form most analogous to writing music mixed with writing fiction. The viewer knows if they like it or not, but it is up to the editor to guide them to a particular thought or emotion. Do you want them to be jolted into a perception or eased into a realization? Do you want them to feel uncomfortable or do you want them to feel content? The editor has this power to manipulate. Film as we know it is editing. The reason we love films and are engaged in the storytelling is because of the editing. A film that is not edited well and crafted with care is a film we may disregard or simply dislike.

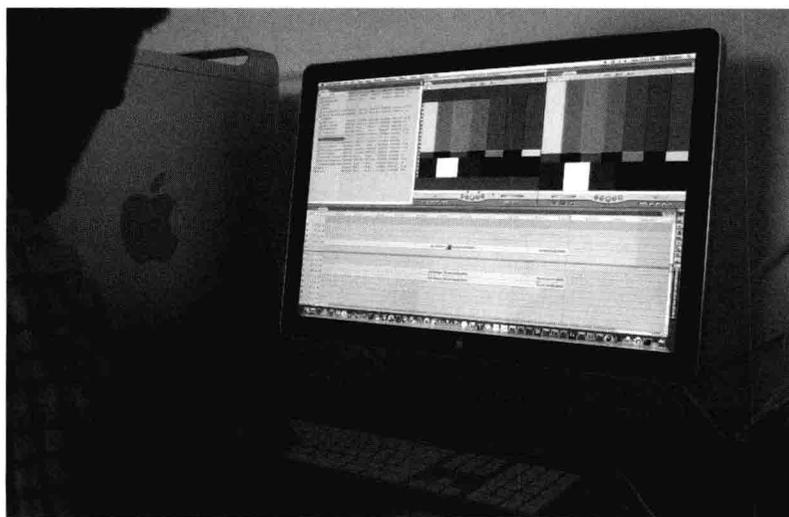


Figure 1-1 The video editor (photograph by David Liban).

But to have this sort of control and awareness of your audience means you must have control and awareness of the media at hand. The editor is usually given the material they are editing, so they must work within this world. I believe those people who have edited projects with mediocre or poor footage will be better directors and better editors because they have seen the problems and hope not to have to revisit them.

Know Your Material

Not only do you need an awareness of your audience, but you must really know your footage. I don't mean that you recall it when you see it, I mean you *know* your footage. The nuances of a moment; a meaningful glance; a train in the background. Having this sort of awareness is the difference between the good and bad editor. And, if you are like me, you don't have a photographic memory, so you must find a way to organize your media so that you can instantly access it. Spending time scanning the same footage over and over is also the mark of an inexperienced editor. Some of this practice is hard to avoid, but if you sift through your media and segment it into small bits, and categorize those bits into ideas that you place in folders with appropriate labels, you are on your way to a thorough edit. Even the most creative of filmmakers cannot imagine what they might have missed by not going through this task. It's this organization that provides for magical juxtapositions in the editing room. The script might have called for a particular edit from one shot to another, but because you know that one shot has the essence of a particular sound or image you can make connections far beyond what can be found in the script. This is why the edit is often called the 'third rewrite,' meaning the final delivery of the shooting script, then the result of what is actually shot, and finally the result when the editor has pieced together the story with those bits. This is what it means to be an editor.

Unfortunately, very little of the actual time an editor is working is pure creative work – there are loads of tedious and busy tasks to be carried out. The aforementioned organization, the client/director relationship, the cleaning of the image, and the sweetening of the sound are all aspects of the job. This is not a bad thing – it is just how it is, and I believe that it is all integral to obtaining the most effective final product. You need to know your footage and organize it; you need to know what the director/producer wants; you need to have the awareness of what constitutes

a good image and a bad image, and what can be used or not; and of course you need good quality sound. The audience will forgive a poor quality picture before they forgive poor quality sound, so you as an editor must be able to identify these problems. Then you need to address them either by collaborating with an audio specialist or learning the tools and doing the work yourself. We as filmmakers are really quite fortunate to have these wonderful tools at our fingertips. Just 15 years ago it was unthinkable to have a full editing system in your home.

So in short, you, the editor, are an artist, a manipulator, a technician, and a magician. It's all done with slight of hand, or a keyboard shortcut.

Workflow

The editor's usual workflow may vary slightly according to whether they are acquiring footage on tape or a media card. You will need to refer to your camera's manual in order to properly digitize and store its media on your computer's hard drive. But, assuming that you have done that, the workflow is as follows. Capture; organize; reorganize; subclip; identify theme; identify easy scenes to work on and work on those first. I would always suggest avoiding starting at the beginning of your story, because that is always the first thing to change. Start with the easy things first because often we need to get into the flow of editing. If you start at the beginning, it seems like a monster that you simply cannot handle. Just think in little increments, and you'll gain momentum and make natural transitions from scene to scene, given that you know your footage well. Do not get into trying to finish your film the first time around – that is not possible. Also, if you find yourself stuck on an edit for more than five minutes, move on. Come back to it with fresh eyes and you'll see obvious answers reveal themselves. Just lay down shots at a reasonable pace knowing that you are going to clean the sequence up later. There may be times when you'll have to focus on a cut to see if it will work, but most of the time make it quick and dirty. Do this with the notion of creating your 'first assembly.' This is not a cut you really want to show anyone, it's just the framework or outline of the project. From here you can start to fine-tune and begin to make it slick.

The next milestone of your edit would be the rough cut. This means the edit's more-or-less in place, but with little or no attention given yet to audio mix or color correction. It's the cut you'll show people for feedback. This is where you get ideas from others