

# Behind the Sound: An Interview with a Film Sound Designer

## The Sound of The Photon Effect

By Lisa Horan

Crashes. Sizzles. Explosions. Typical sounds you'd expect to hear in a superhero film, right? Well, surprisingly enough, the sounds featured in *The Photon Effect* go well beyond what most people would associate with films that fall into the genre. Instead, the film is driven by sounds that transcend the “cool” factor. The choices were culled from a much deeper place that reached right into the depths of the story and into the heart of the filmmaker. Jonathan Krintz, one of the sound designers at Baltimore, MD's Studio Unknown, explains just how.

**Before we delve into the specifics of your role, let's talk about what *The Photon Effect* was about.**

**Krintz:** *The Photon Effect* is a film centering on two cousins – Derek and Jay Powers – who obtain different super human powers. Derek gets the powers through an antenna accident, while Jay gets his through a man-made machine designed by “the bad guys.” This machine lies at the center of the story, as does Jay's battle with alcoholism and Derek's desire to help him.

**What was your role?**

**Krintz:** Kevin and I worked together on the sound for the film. What I did included dialogue editing, sound effects, and Foley, and we'll be completing the final mix in a few weeks once all of the FX shots are finalized.

**Tell us about some of the specific sounds that you created and why.**

Coupled with his battle with alcoholism, the “machine” serves as the source of Jay's ultimate demise, and I wanted to illustrate this somehow through sound, so I came up with a mechanical, organic heartbeat that almost gives the impression that the “machine” is alive and has a rhythm. There are derivatives of this heartbeat sound throughout the film in locations that are supposed to feel oppressive or sinister. This not only gives each scene with a menacing overtone a sense of movement, but also keeps you in that dark world. The sound is loosely modeled after the machine in the book *A Wrinkle in Time*, which features a rhythm that the characters within the story can't get out of their heads even when they try to break the cycle. In *The Photon Effect*, the sound helps illustrate the vicious cycle of alcoholism that a person can fall back into again and again.

**What about Foley?**

I created Foley for a number of the scenes to provide authenticity. For instance, Jay and Derek are antenna engineers who carry a bunch of different tools in their tool belts. Dan brought in the actual gear, itself, and I recorded the different tools clanging around. I also hung and recorded some other items, from random hammers to wine bottles, which added more depth to the sound. Some of the most interesting sounds that I got to create were for

the super powers that the cousins obtain. I didn't want to go for the *Star Wars* kind of mainstream Hollywood sounds that would be pulled from a library. Because both characters obtained their powers in different ways – one through the machine and one serendipitously through an antenna accident – I really wanted to dig a little deeper and illustrate the powers in a way that would be truer to each character. For Derek, who got his powers accidentally via exposure to electromagnetic energy, I took a metal tube and slid multiple objects through it, including pennies, gum balls, and other objects with a bit of weight to create a more organic sound. It was a trial and error process, but I eventually identified objects that created an electric shock type of feel, like you would hear if you stuck a fork in an electrical socket. The sounds associated with Jay and the other villains in the film are more manufactured and processed since they have been obtained via a man-made source.

**How did you work with the film's creator?** Dan and I worked in a very collaborative way so I could really understand what his perspective was. I felt like before we nailed down any sound in the film, it was important that I not only get a good sense from him what his expectations about sound were, but also what the real, underlying story of the film was. I asked him, for instance, what he thought of the sound in the older *X-Men* films, since I had been studying them and relating them to what could work in *The Photon Effect*. Beyond that, the questions I got pretty specific and wound up going beyond just what Dan wanted to *hear* and began delving into issues like the relationship between the two characters and the underlying meanings within the story. It was basically a big smorgasbord talk that covered everything from his favorite Spider-Man comic book to the motivations of characters Jay and Derek. It definitely wasn't a business-as-usual experience.