

Respire: Horror in the Script, Joy in Audio Post

By Lisa Horan

Maryland filmmaker David A. Cross knows a thing or two about horrors, both as a genre and as a consequence of capturing poor sound during production. He had the frightful experience of having to ADR large portions of his first two films. When it came to his latest film, *Respire*, which is set for release this October, he was determined to limit the most terrifying scenes to those appearing on the big screen.

Planning Makes Perfect

"Sound is something that I'll never think of as an afterthought again," admits Cross. "Since we operate in a visual medium, we tend to get so worried about what camera we'll use, we leave sound for the end of the process. The truth is, sound is just as important as the picture." With that in mind, long before *Respire* was shot, Cross met with Studio Unknown's Stephen Joseph to plan for sound.

Joseph posed a series of questions so he would know what to expect at the shoot. "I asked [Cross] about the location size and characteristics, the type of camera he'd be using, what potential outside sound sources there may be (such as camera noise), how many people would be in each scene, and what kinds of sound design elements would have to be added, such as explosions

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or car chases." These questions were key to helping Joseph prepare properly for the project.

As it turns out, this planning would prove to be vital, as roughly 70 percent of the film contained dialogue that was central to the plot, which revolves around a woman who is suffering from a terminal illness and turns to new age method for treatment. While the treatment cures her, it makes her fear that she's becoming a killer. "Almost everything the characters in the film say to each other is crucial to advancing the plot," said Cross. "It was extremely important that information about the treatment method be explained adequately and that dialogue pertaining to this be audible."

Beating Sound Challenges

Ingenious thinking can also help to beat sound challenges. "On the very first day of the shoot, we shot a scene in a restaurant, and right next to the table where the characters were sitting and talking was an air conditioning unit that we just could not get to turn off," explained Cross. In spite of the AC hum, sound for the scene ended up completely clear. How? Joseph hid a lavalier mic inside a flowerpot on the table. "Between the close proximity of the lav mic and working closely to get the tightest boom shot we could, we were able to capture good-quality sound in spite of the circumstances," said Joseph.

The sizes of the locations also presented challenges. Almost all of the indoor locations were very small, and fitting a DP, grips, actors, and boom operators into these small spaces was extremely difficult, and, in some cases, impossible. As a result, Joseph had to think outside the box.

"We had to come up with ways to creatively place and hide mics," said Joseph. "There was a fight scene, for example, that we had to capture with two lavalier mics because there was no way anyone could get in the space to hold the boom mic." Joseph said that roughly 75 percent of dialogue was captured with lavaliers (Sennheiser 500 series).

Using Extra Time for Creativity

"On my last film, roughly 85 percent of the movie had to be ADR'd," said Cross, who added that the crew on *Respire* was roughly four times that of his last films. "With this film, we only had to ADR about five percent, and we were able to complete it in one day."

The time that was saved gave Cross and Studio Unknown's Kevin Hill, who handled the audio post-production of the film, the chance to get creative. "We didn't have to worry about coming up with ways to cover up 'bad' sound," said Cross. "Instead, we were able to add Foley and other creative elements that we never would have had time to do if we hadn't captured good sound in production."

With this experience under his belt, Cross has a new appreciation for the sound collection process. "From now on, I would encourage filmmakers to make sound one of the first items that gets locked down. If you have clean sound to begin with, it makes the whole process that much easier."

For more information about *Respire*, visit www.respiremovie.com or contact Dave Cross at dave@respiremovie.com.

For more information about Studio Unknown, visit www.studiounknown.com or contact Lisa Horan at lisa@studiounknown.com.



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