THE INDIE FILM SOUND GUIDE

SAMPLE CHAPTER

by Daren Smith

THE EDIT
OR, WHAT NOT TO DO

It's every editor's dream to be awesome enough to *also* handle the sound post on a project. I know, I know. Look, I get it - it's not you, its the software that you're using that is preventing you from being able to do a good job. Editing software, while it has some basic audio editing tools - like cut & splice, the ability to

delink an audio file from it's linked video, the ability to overlap the audio from one shot to another, and basic levels and fades, to name a few - they severely lack the ability to do a proper dialog edit and sound mix. On the other hand, I have delivered professional audio to paying clients from Final Cut Pro X, so I'm not saying it CAN'T be done, just that it takes more effort and really good audio to start with in order to make it work.

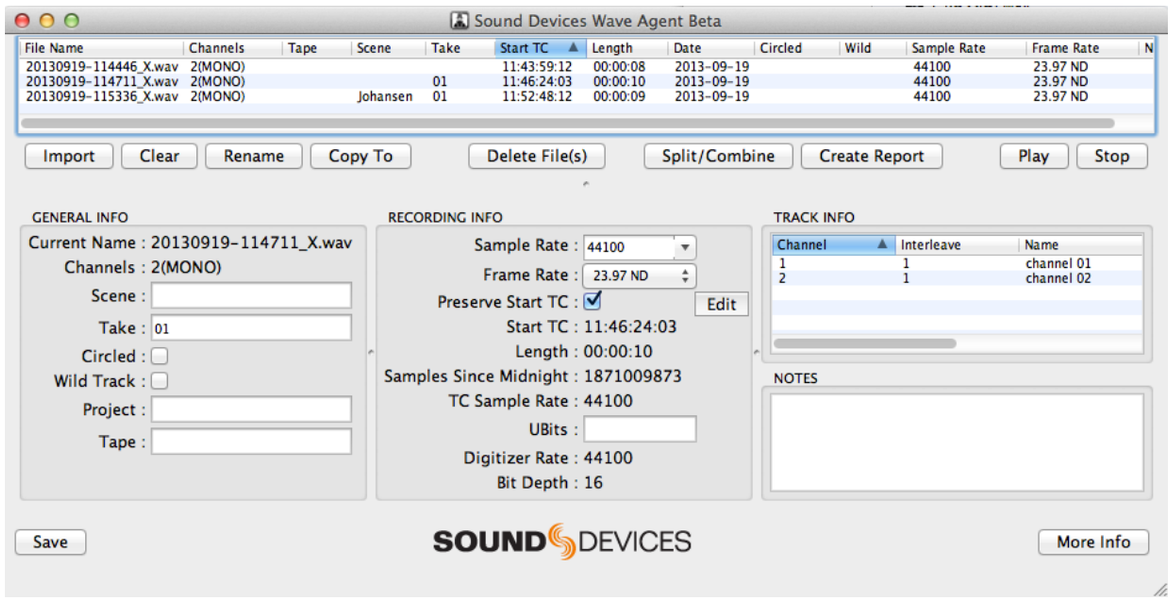
This section will mainly deal with what NOT to do in the edit as it pertains to sound, rather than covering how to do a proper sound mix in an editing program. Also, we won't cover Final Cut Pro 7 in this section, as FCPX is the current editing software provided by Apple and is widely used by independent film editors.

STEP 1 - LOGGING AND CONFORMING AUDIO

Often, as the editor, you'll receive audio from the sound team where the files have some long string of letters and numbers that don't correspond to anything helpful, like scene and take numbers. The incorrect thing to do in this situation is to import the files anyway and leave it for the sound post team to deal with. That's just messed up. I'm going to teach you how to be the hero.

One great tool to help quickly get you from files called something like AUDIO004-1A3BNFJ3IS0000_1A to a name that is actually useful, like SC1A-T1(Scene 1A, Take 1) is to run all of your audio files through a program made by Sound Devices called Wave Agent. You'll want to do this *before you import the audio into your editing software*. Yes, before the editor - whether that's you or someone else - brings it into final cut. The files need to be called what you *want* them to be called, because it's really difficult (I haven't found out how to do it yet) to change the metadata in an audio file that comes in with an exchange file inside the audio workstation.

To do this is really simple. First, go and download Wave Agent, it's free.



1. Open Wave agent

2. In a separate Finder window, or Window's Explorer window, navigate to the folder where the audio is located.

3. Drag the whole folder into the window inside Wave Agent.

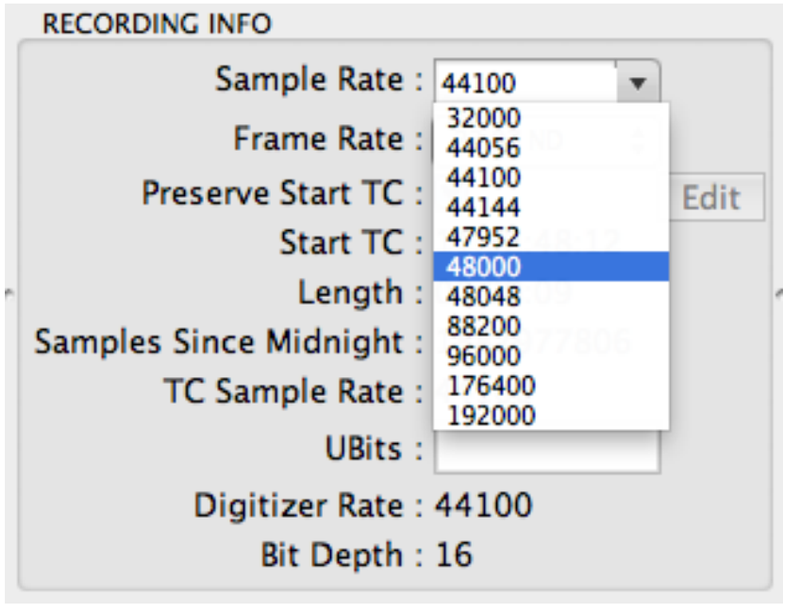
4. Watch the awesomeness happen.

Now, you're going to have to go through each file and listen for the Camera Assistant to slate the scene in order to add the correct metadata. In the General Info pane, you see a field for Scene and Take. Enter the info here based on what is slated. Then just above this area there is a button called Rename. Click that, click OK on the

window that pops up, and your audio has been renamed to something like Sc01T01. Rad!

Even cooler is the ability you have to conform all of the files to the same frame rate and sample rate. Say the camera on set was filming at 23.976, a common frame rate for digital video, but the Mixer didn't care to check the settings on his recorder and recorded everything at 30 fps. Whoops. This isn't going to work out great in post.

On a project I just worked on, day 1 of filming was recorded at 48k sample rate and 16 bit depth, which is the correct sample rate but not the optimal setting for bit depth. Day two was different, for some reason, and was recorded at 44.1k sample rate and 24 bit depth. Not sure what was going on there, but neither was technically correct. You won't benefit from trying to "upscale" the audio re-corded at 16 bit, but, using Wave Agent, we *can* conform all the files to be at the correct sample rate for video. Lets do this all right now using wave agent.



1. Select all of your files in the top window of Wave Agent

2. In the Recording Info section in the bottom middle of the screen, click on the Sample Rate drop down menu and select 48000

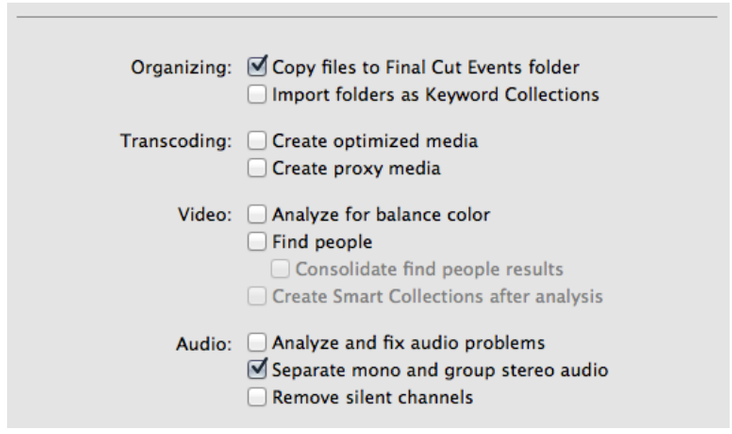
3. Just below that, for Frame Rate select 23.97 ND (ND stands for Non Drop).

4. Click the Save button in the bottom left corner of the screen. Boom. All of your files have been conformed so that when you get them through the editing process, combined into an exchange file, and imported into your audio workstation, they're all at the same sample and frame rate.

Again, Wave Agent is a free software you can download right now (recommended) at
http://www.sounddevices.com/products/waveagent/downloads/

FINAL CUT PRO X

There are a few considerations for FCPX when it comes to audio. First of all, upon importing, I strongly suggest NOT to select "Analyze and fix audio problems" and "Remove silent channels".



The reason behind this is that when FCPX imports the audio with "Analyze and fix audio problems" selected, it does a very liberal amount of processing. Yes, you might say that it's easy then to go back and finesse the amount of noise reduction and hum removal,

but I don't like the way that FCPX does this processing. I've never been able to get it to sound good to my ears using their algorithm. So, since you're "just the editor" (for now...), just stick to editing the picture, and leave the noise reduction process for later with a dedicated audio workstation.

"Remove silent channels" is used to quickly eliminate audio files that contain no audio. For example, say for one scene there were 6 people on lavalier mics, plus one boom mic and one mono reference mix, which equals 8 tracks. Then the next scene there are only 2 actors on lavalier mics, one boom, and one mono reference, which equals 4 tracks. But for continuity sake, the sound mixer left the reference mix on track 8 for both scenes. This really comes down to personal preference, but I like systems that don't change. As an audio engineer doing post, if you as the editor took out these tracks in FCPX, I would receive 7 tracks for one scene and 4 for the next, essentially moving the reference mix from track 8 to 4, and who knows where else after that. This can be frustrating and will cause extra time to be spent organizing the session in the sound edit, so for continuity sake, it is easier for the sound engineer to have everything always on the same track.

One aside, as is covered in the chapter on PRODUCTION SOUND, the reference mix is usually recorded on Track 1 of a multitrack recorder, so that there aren't ever any empty tracks. Before each new scene or setup, the sound mixer should change the settings on the recorder so that there aren't any empty tracks that are record enabled during filming. But in case your mixer didn't read this book, let's leave this info in.

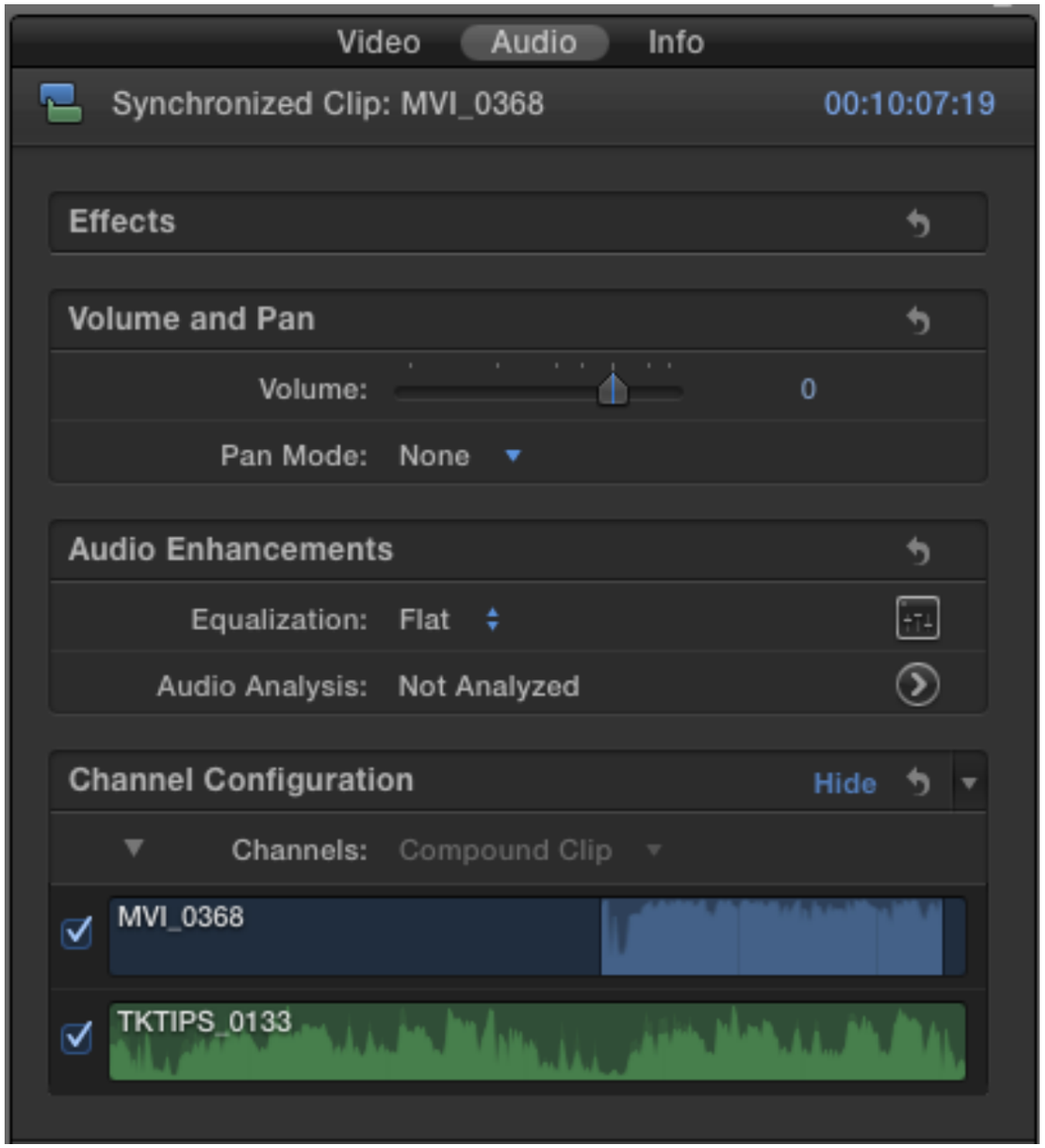
Now - you can choose to do it differently and remove the silent channels, but at least now you know why you would want to or not.

SYNCHRONIZING AUDIO

Now that everything is imported into your session, you're going to want to synchronize your audio. This is VERY simple in FCPX, and does not require any external software applications or plugins. You simply find an audio clip and a matching video clip, e.g. Scene 1A take 01. If you or an assistant editor or DIT hasn't yet gone in and labeled all of your clips with accurate scene and take numbers, do that first. Now, select both the video and the audio clip, and select CLIP > SYNCHRONIZE CLIPS from the menu, or press OPT + CMD + G. There you go! In very little time you now have a synchronized clip ready to be dropped into your session. If you have multiple audio tracks that should be synchronized with a single video clip, select them all, along with the video file, and go through the same steps.

Now, when you begin your edit, use these synchronized clips rather than the unsynchronized video clips when you add them to your timeline. If you click over to the Inspector (Window > Show/Hide Inspector, or CMD + 4), then click on the AUDIO tab, you will see a section for CHANNEL CONFIGURATION. Open the drop down triangle next to CHANNELS, and you will now see two or more audio clips, one from the camera/video file, and the other(s) from the audio recorder. You can now deselect the camera audio, so that you are only listening to the recorded audio in your timeline. (image on next page).

When you are editing and you experience large differences in volume, it's perfectly fine to mute, change the audio level, or add fades in your timeline. What is NOT ok is to DELETE audio files from



the timeline. It is extremely frustrating as an audio engineer to get a session from the editor with a bunch of missing audio files because they deleted them. If you don't want to listen to them, either deselect them in the inspector, or pull the volume down to –96 db, which is essentially ∞, or just press the V key with the file selected in the timeline. No sound will come from that audio file, but it is there for the sound engineer if they need to grab a piece of it as an alternate take, or listen to it for reference. It's still there in the session when you export the .OMF or .AAF.

One of my biggest complaints with FCPX is how it handles the organization of audio files in the timeline. I won't go into too much depth, but I do want you to put one process into habit - Don't Delete Audio Files.

There are times where you know you don't need a video clip because you're going to use a different angle, or because there were some issues with the clip, video or audio wise. But unless it's OBVIOUS that you would NEVER need the audio from that video clip, then you should use this process instead:

1. Select the video clip.
2. Right click and click Detach Audio, or click Control + Shift + S
3. Delete the video clip.
4. If you don't want to listen to the audio in your timeline, just click the V key to mute that clip.

This way, the audio stays in the session for the sound team so they don't have to go digging for alternate takes and room tone, it's all right there.

If for some reason you choose to do any audio processing, like EQ, Compression, or especially noise reduction, it is preferred that you deactivate or undo any of those processes before you export out the session for the sound team. While it's ideal that the dialog editor - the first person in the post sound chain - work off of the original audio from the files delivered by the sound mixer, sometimes that doesn't work out, and we need the original audio from your session.

If that's the case, we don't want any processing done to those files before we get them. All that and more is explained in THE DIALOG EDIT.

If you have added any audio effects, just disable them in the Audio Tab of the inspector.

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If you liked this sample chapter, be sure to check out the rest of the book HERE