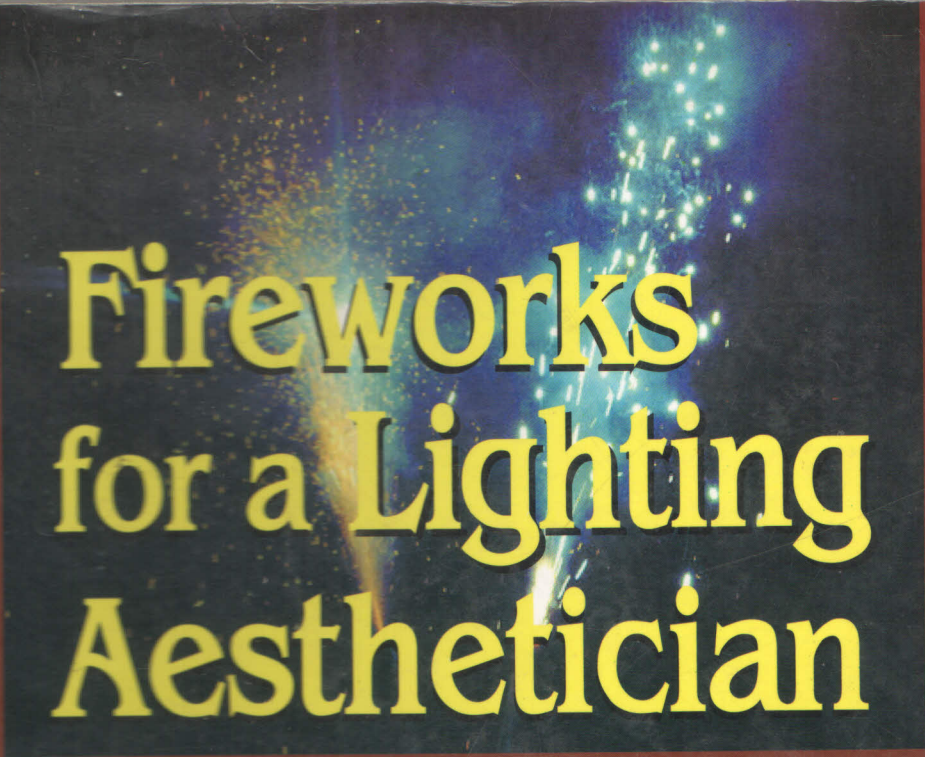
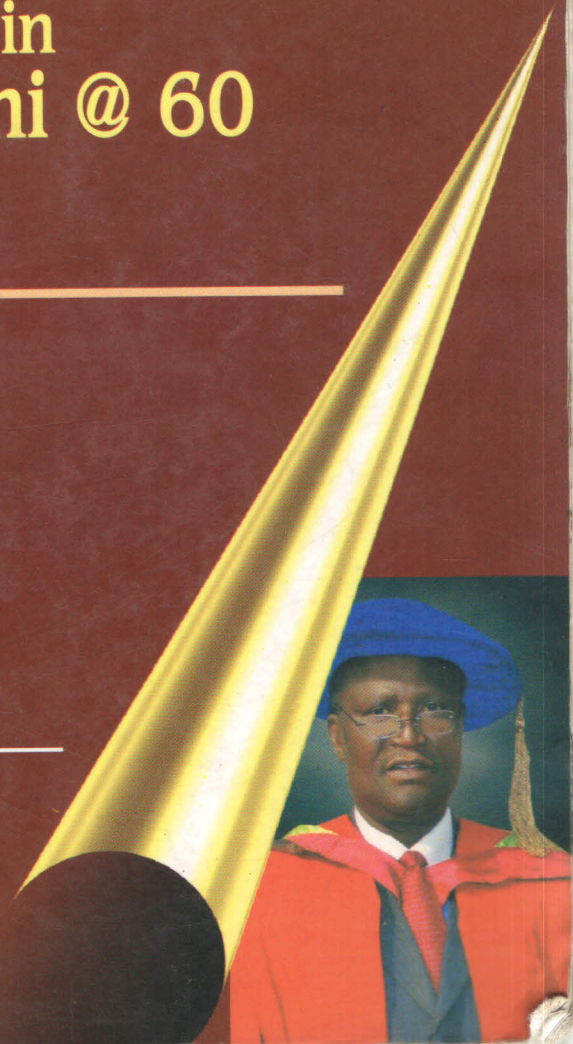




Fireworks for a Lighting Aesthetician

Essays and Tributes in
Honour of Duro Oni @ 60

Edited by
Sunday Enessi Ododo



FIREWORKS FOR A LIGHTING AESTHETICIAN:
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Chapter 16

Application and Effectiveness of Sound in Nigerian Home Video

*Abdulmalik Adakole Amali

Abstract

Sound is a very important element in the final outcome of any film. It helps to bring the sense of reality and understanding in the final production. In the Nigerian film industry sound is being poorly used and it is for this reason that this study discusses the quality of application and effectiveness of sound in four Nigerian home videos as an evaluative process of the technical efficiency of the home video industry. The study came up with some key findings, some of which are: (i) Lack of proper attention to necessary details to bring out required results (ii) Professionals with creative minds and imagination need to go an extra mile to achieve results with the limited resources available or even when they are nonexistent. Suggestions and recommendations, however, are made that can help to improve the sound quality in the Nigerian Home Video industry.

Keywords: Application, Effectiveness, Sound, Nigerian Home Video

Sound for film

Television is an aural experience constructed to support the story of a narrative, documentary or commercial film or television effects program (Holman xvii). Therefore, sounds in films, in most cases, are post-production effects constructed by professionals with the combination of many pieces of sound to arrive at a complete whole. This process, according to Nda, helps to supply additional information which integrates many elements together and does not draw specific attention to itself (90). Sound is an essential part of any film production. Writers use sound elements in their storytelling, with suggestions in the script to provide moments for the audience to soak up the action, make scene transition and add interest to the film.

The Use of Sound in Film

Holman notes that "many kinds of sound have direct storytelling role in film

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making which has also greatly enhanced the value of performances" (xviii). In film production sites, directors need to be aware of the need for a proper sound coordination to produce good results at the end of the day. The need for an understanding of the role of sound and the blending of light, camera and sound in a scene is very important. This helps to bring about good sound quality. Apart from "enhancing theatrical communication and helping the audience to fully understand and appreciate the dramatic action" (Nwadiwe 83), sound in films helps to draw the characters' attention to an off-screen event.

Sound serves as a form of continuity for films when a point of view has changed and the music continues. This shows that the scene has not shifted, that we are in the same space as before, as the presence of sound helps to prove the continuity of the scene to the viewing audience.

Sound also helps to invoke feelings and mood in films. Certain sounds bring about horrific feelings and fear and the expectation that something bad is about to happen, while some sounds invoke the atmosphere of happiness. Sound could be exaggerated to get the message to the viewers as in the case of hippping the footstep or heart beat to create effect. The use of sound in films can help to inform the audience of current or upcoming events.

Sound, Picture and Camera in Film

In the process of recording a picture, there is a need to make sure that the volume and the quality of sound is reasonably consistent with that of the picture throughout the scenes, especially of shots that are recorded out of sequence. There is a need for proper filtering of sound for good output and consistent rhythm in the recording process in order to achieve sound balance in the various scenes, such that one scene does not have "sound acoustically "dead" in one shot and very reverberant in the next" (Millerson 72).

When film started in the late 1920's the processes to produce the sound track were very difficult. Camera movement was restricted by large housings holding both the camera and the camera man so that noise did not intrude into the set... Today, the technical impediments of early sound recording have been removed. Acting styles are much more natural, with it more likely that an actor will "underplay" a scene due to the intimacy of the camera than "over play" it (Holman xx). There is a need for a continuous background sound in order to give the film a good bridge from one scene to another and help to place the action and actor in the new scene.

Ideal Use of Sound and Sound Equipment in Films

The need for a proper sound harmony in film is of paramount importance. Sound should not be too loud or too low to be lost in the background of a production. Adegbite suggests "that both the visual and audio elements

must be carefully chosen and arranged to allow the audience understand more" (21). Therefore, the need to use specialist and proper sound equipment appropriately to achieve a sound balance is crucial in production. Microphones of various types used need to effectively meet up with various situations and location is important. The need to use personal microphone concealed in the body of the actors with other microphones on set will enhance a good output.

Types of Microphone

Long range microphones cover distances from 30 to 50 metres. They are useful in crowd scenes and wide space areas in film production. Short distance microphones should be placed on the floor, on a stand or wall for effective picking up of the sounds of actors on set. Having a proper detail of what the actor is saying is very vital.

The use of wireless microphones, which can be carried about without the actor being restricted in movement, is very important in home movie production. This will enable the actor to be far from the camera and yet be very audible to the viewers. A similar effect is attainable with the use of stand microphones for localized sound backup and a hanging microphone above the actor to pick-up the stationary sounds. The use of pressure zone microphone and shotgun microphone is very important for great effective sound pick-up for the actor on set in a movie production. Suspended microphones above the actor which are moved with the movement of the actors are necessary for effective sound balance follow-up in set recording of movies.

The proper use of sound mixers and a good after-recording sound editing is useful in producing a good sound result in a movie; it is also important to avoid the use of single microphone in a movie, especially where there is more than one person or many activities going on in a scene. In a situation like this, the louder or nearer sound tends to overpower the lesser one thereby impairing the message to be passed across. The sound technicians should properly check the microphone and make sure they are properly placed in the right places on set for effective results. Distracting noises should be kept away from set and wanted background sound should be given the desired prominence to create the needed effect.

Application and Effectiveness of Sound in *Keep My Will*, *Mirror of Beauty*, *Asunder* and *Omaba*

Application and Effectiveness of Sound in Keep My Will

In this film, the usual problem of weak sound coordination associated with Nigerian films is apparent in scenes like when Vivian and her boyfriend are discussing the distribution of assets between herself and her sister. Though it is a close-up shot, the microphone pick-up is very poor.

One can hardly understand what Vivian says. Poor sound quality is also observed when the two wives of Chief Dike and his daughters are eating at the table. Audibility wanes because it is a distant shot; we can hardly hear the first wife's speech. The same sound defect is observed when Chief Dike and his lawyer friend are discussing about his wife: Chief, who is closer to the camera from the angle being shot is ironically not very audible because of improper use of camera microphones and position.

There were various scenes of sound echoes because of lack of proper use of necessary microphones such as surround, body and table microphones to pick the voices of the actors. This is clearly noticed in the scene where the family are at the table eating. Their voices echo because of the wide space where the action is set; the microphones used are not effective enough to eliminate echoes.

The scene where Susan's boyfriend enters her office standing at the door has echoes in their conversation because it is a distant shot without adequate microphone deployment to check the echo. However, he echo stops when the characters are picked up on close-up shots and they become more audible. This signifies the correct adjustment of the microphone to get the appropriate sound quality and effects. But the echo returns when the boyfriend stands up to leave in another long shot. In the scene where Vivian's boyfriend comes back from the United States of America and asks her to marry him, we see the boyfriend talking with his back to the camera. What he says could hardly be understood from that angle, even though they were in a small room and it should have been easier to pick up the sound with less stress with both the set and camera microphone.

The scene where Vivian complains to her father about her share in the family business has very good sound results from all the angles (both close-up and distance shots) and the background music played at the end of the father's speech is very appropriate to the mood. There is a good sound pick-up in both distant and close-up shots in the scenes with Vivian and Susan in the lawn tennis court. Their dialogue is effectively heard in all the camera angles.

The scene with Vivian and her boyfriend in her office, with her boyfriend urging her to take action to defend herself against her sister having more shares in the family business, when her boyfriend says "come on, baby come on" and Vivian replies, "please, I am no baby. I get what I want" was very difficult to understand, though she is closer to the camera and also in a close-up shot with the camera microphone closer to her.

There is a sharp contrast and a variation of sound in the scenes where

Frank invites Chief Dike's family to his office and addresses them. The close-up shot and the long distance shot have distracting variations in the sound level. There is a general distracting sound variation and echo in the court scene in both long and short distance shots because of lack of proper use of microphones.

In the court scene where Vivian cross-examines Susan and complains to the Judge about Susan's unwillingness to answer questions, she says "I have no further use for the lying bitch". This statement is very difficult to hear and understand without replaying and straining one's ears. It is obvious there was improper placement of the microphone.

Similarly, the scene where Vivian defends herself in the court and narrates how her father distributed his assets between herself and her sister provides another instance of inaudibility. When she turns to speak to her sister, not a word is understood from what she says. The general court room scene has a lot of echo whenever there is a distant shot. It is glaring, however, that the proper microphone to pick up sound from long range and wide spaces are either not available or not put into proper use. It is clear that basic elements and rules of microphone usage have not been effectively applied here. Sound is an essential boundary element of all the other features in film production and must be handled with a sense of diligent coordination.

Application and Effectiveness of Sound in Mirror of Beauty

In the opening scene where the King and his family are being entertained in expectation of the arrival of the Prince, we see the effective use of sound effect to harmonize the background drumbeat with the various dancing steps and movements. We have the use of the flute sound (*oja*) which is very common with the *Igbo* in scenes like the opening scene when the sad news of the death of Prince Afamefuna is announced. The *oja* is also used to attract Princess Ugegbe to her "dream" husband, Ejem. The *Igbo* traditional xylophone and music in the background constantly reminds us of the setting and locale of the film. The pronouncement of Princess Ugegbe's refusal to marry the visiting arrogant Prince was accompanied with a high-tempo sound to convey the surprise and the temperament of the Prince.

Also, the scene where Ugegbe goes to bed crying before she starts dreaming is accompanied by a serene musical sound to transport her into dreamland. We see the effective combination of sound effect with lighting effect to announce the intercessory presence of unseen forces. This perfect blend of sound and lighting effects occurs where a spell was cast upon the King of Amamze when he embraces his daughter after a failed attempt to elope and when the spell is removed from him at the village square.

But there are few sound effects in scenes where the camera is far away from

the players and without the proper positioning of boom microphones to pick-up their voices. This kind of occurrence is discernible in scenes where Obiazo's father asks the King about his health: where Ejike goes to Obiazo's house to give him the game he got from hunting.

In all, the total output and technical quality of the sound in the film can be considered to be of very good standard.

Application and Effectiveness of Sound in Asunder

No doubt sound production is one of the vital elements that determine the reception a film receives. The communicative strength of sound is further reinforced by its signifying attributes. This means that things assume more intense communicative significance once they are a part of a theatrical event, even if such things in real life attract little or no significant attention (Chukwuma 47).

In the film *Asunder*, all the basic elements of sound required in a film are either nonexistent or poorly executed. Right from the opening scene where Obinna, his mother and wife are at the dinning table one is overwhelmed with bad sound utilization and effects. There is echo in the voices; the scene where Obinna and his mother are seen discussing before he leaves for work in the morning has a very faint audio quality and it is difficult to follow the dialogue between the two. The same audio defect is apparent in the scene where Obinna's mother engages in a discussion with her son and daughter in-law before going back to the village. One could hardly hear the conversation. The conversation between Kola and his girlfriend when he gives her a car gift is also inaudible.

It is obvious that whenever there is a distance shot, one hardly hears what is being said. With the level of sound quality and lack of sound balance in the film, it can be deduced that the actors did not use personal body microphones and there were no nearby pick-up microphones to assist the camera microphone.

There is only one background music used throughout the whole film, which does not give the film the needed creative use of sound to emphasize emotion, dramatic moments and deployment of the basic entertainment elements that are associated with sound in films. Orok maintains that sound effect contributes to creating the overall mood or atmosphere for a production and helps convey a special illusion to the audience in order to succeed (37). It is often necessary to combine both sound and visual effects simultaneously (Taiwo 12).

Application and Effectiveness of Sound in Omaba

The film starts with a fast tempo rhythm of music to suggest the hasty and anxious mood of the locale in which the action takes place. The sound appropriately fits the circumstance at hand. Background sound of birds, insects and various forest sounds are fused together to accentuate the urgency of avoiding Black Death in the scene where a woman and her young son run away from the village. In the scene where the herbalist narrates to the elders the story about what led to the cause of the Black Death, we hear at the background a typical village sound of a cock crowing, a hen and her chicks with the visual support of the village hut to establish a typical village setting.

In the scenes where Oji gives a ram to Omaba and where Onyuke goes to Omaha's shrine with Omonagolom and Eze Aruwanyi, we also hear the use of natural background sounds of thunder, birds and other domestic animals.

This film handles very well the usual sound defects common with Nigerian films when it comes to long distance shots. Long distance-shot sound is very audible in scenes like Omonagolom's child naming ceremony; where the town crier announces to the villagers with a gong; when the king and his chiefs are in his palace discussing; where the king's guard comes to give Omonagolom a message that he is to stamp the Oji.

The clear sound registered in all these scenes shows that when the correct and required microphones are used in film recording, good results are achievable. In this film we see the combination of light and sound effects to emphasize the strength of audio-visual bonding in films.

The four home videos discussed in this paper sufficiently demonstrate that the application of sound and sound effects in the Nigerian movie industry demands specialist attention. While some producers are conscious of the ingredients of good quality films, others do not just care. This state of consciousness is certainly a major challenge to the growth of the industry in Nigeria.

Conclusion

"The art of performance is unarguably a collaborative one because of the vital input every sector of the production crew makes" (Ododo 88). If properly harnessed with professional creativity and determination, this effort will produce better results for the industry and the audience. As a result of this study on the application and effectiveness of sound in Nigerian Home Video, the following findings are made:

- (1) The Nigerian Home Video industry requires a strong partnership with advanced industries like Hollywood and Bollywood to improve its technical know-how.

- (2) The industry is still saturated with those who are interested only in financial gain or fame, especially in the technical aspect.
- (3) The Nigerian film industry has become commercially viable as more and more individuals, financial organizations and governments are investing in the industry to yield profit.
- (4) Nigerian films have become internationally accepted and Nigerian lifestyles and culture can be learnt through them.

However, in order to combat the worrisome state of sound in Nigerian Home Video, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed:

- (a) A special Technical Institute for the training of movie technical personnel should be set up by stakeholders to enhance good production, high standards and professionalism.
- (b) Cinematography, like any other aspect of theatre practice and human endeavor, is undergoing several transformations. Cinematography, therefore, is a special area of Home Video production calling for specialization, training and orientation which can be acquired through serious apprenticeship or concentrated formal academic and professional training in accredited relevant institutions.
- (c) Understanding and proper interpretation of the film with the perception of the writer.

In conclusion, the Nigerian film industry has come to stay and as such all necessary support should be given to its sustainability and continuous growth. Musa submits that "creativity is an exercise in Navigation and a reflection of the inherent difference in man's inspiration and imagination" (110). This is exactly what has propelled the Nigerian film industry; now it is time to pay greater attention to technical effectiveness.

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