

SOUND RECORDING IN FILM

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In movie production, **sound recording** is the application of dialogue, music, narration, sound effects, and other aural elements to the film. Before the emergence of digital technology, there were two ways of recording sound. One was the **optical method**, which refers to recording sound on sound film stock. The other was the **magnetic method**, in which sound is recorded on 35 mm magnetic tape and the final mix (dialogue, music, narration, effects) is transferred to film negative.

In the optical method, the key factor in shooting sound and film together is **synchronization**. If the picture negative and the sound film do not move at the same speed in relation to each other, lip movements and dialogue will not be coordinated and the film will be “out of sync.”

One of the most important activities in the second method is **post-sync dialogue dubbing**. Here, the sound track recorded at the time of photography is used only as a guide and is referred to as a **cue track**. The scenes are projected silently on a big screen and the actor watches lip movements carefully while listening through headsets to the audio track. The film and audio track are played over repeatedly until the dubber can repeat the lines into a microphone at the speed and timing of the original recording, in effect matching the original track. The new recorded dialogue, now free of extraneous sounds or noise and corrected during the dubbing, becomes the dialogue track of the film.

Carefully controlled ambient sounds or other background sounds go into the special effects track. Music goes into the music track. The **sound engineer** or designer must consider the relationships among these different tracks when, together with the film director, he or she judges the relative value of sounds to be heard in each scene. When all sound tracks have been edited and cleaned, the final creative task—the **sound mixing**—begins. The mix is the artistic and skillful blending of all sound tracks into a single track, a process that is accomplished with the use of 35 mm magnetic tape recording. This is done in a special sound recording studio equipped with interlock machines to run many separate sound tracks synchronously with the projected picture. The sound engineer sits at a large console with controls and adjusts the volume and quality of each track.

In the past, the most common accusation mistakenly directed against the sound engineer is that of poor synchronization of sound and visuals. This responsibility is actually shared by the film editor, the negative matcher, and the laboratory technician doing the optical transfers. A more serious offense was the industry’s dependence on dubbed sound, which resulted in a lack of realism.

When sound was first used in Philippine movies in 1932, studios were equipped with sound booths and re-recording facilities, which merely refined what had already been recorded during photography. Seldom, if at all, was dialogue reproduced in the picture’s entirety. Songs were prerecorded in the studio by singers whose voices matched the actors’ to the accompaniment of a group of musicians. The finished compositions were played back during the shooting so that the actors could “lip-sync” the songs as they performed before the camera. Since this was done without sound, the shooting would proceed at a faster pace, and after photography the playback tape was dubbed into the sound track of the film.

The first Filipino sound recording engineer in Philippine cinema was Isabela-born William Smith, who worked on *Ang Aswang* (The Aswang), 1932, the first Filipino talking picture. He set up the studio sound systems of Parlatone Hispano-Filipino in 1935 and Sampaguita Pictures in 1937. Another Filipino sound pioneer, Charles Gray from Tacloban, Leyte, trained in Philippine Films under American sound engineer Louise R. Morse. Gray set up the sound studio of X’Otic Films in 1941 and later organized Movietec for Lebran Studio after the war.

During the days of the studio system, each major studio had its own sound engineer who supervised the work of recordists and technicians hired as regular employees. They were Joseph Straight at Sampaguita, July P. Hidalgo at LVN, Demetrio de Santos at Premiere, and Angelo Larraga at Lebran. Others who followed in their footsteps were Nestor Tanquintic, Flaviano Villareal, and Gaudencio Barredo at Sampaguita; and Juanito Clemente at LVN with the father-and-son team of Luis Reyes and Ramon Reyes.

A major change in sound technology in Philippine cinema occurred in the late 1960s when all sound recording studios were equipped with interlock machines and projectors. This was the transition from field-recorded sound to magnetic film recording. The entire film production was shot with guide sound and dubbed in completely with entire tracks of dialogue, music, narration, and effects. This innovation allowed the director greater creative freedom as he worked side by side with the sound engineer and the film editor in the postproduction phase of the film. The effect of sounds,



Sound recording studio at LVN Pictures, ca 1990 (Mike de Leon Collection)

like dogs barking offscreen or a plane's wheels touching down when landing, heightened the sense of urgency or realism and added mood or atmosphere to the film. The overdependence on dubbing resulted in a kind of artificiality in some films. In this period, some of the movie studios specializing in sound recording and re-recording activities, like Magnatech Omni and PM Studio at Sampaguita, were set up to provide postproduction services to movie producers.

Sound mixer Rolly Ruta, an electronics engineer who managed Magnatech since its establishment, is a Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS) Hall of Fame awardee for *Bukas Luluhod ang mga Tala* (Tomorrow the Stars Will Kneel), 1984; *Paradise Inn*, 1985; *Lumuhod Ka sa Lupa* (Kneel on the Ground), 1986; *Saan Nagtatago ang Pag-ibig?* (Where Does Love Hide?), 1987; and *Chinatown*, 1988. He is the only sound director who won the FAMAS for five consecutive years. Other outstanding practitioners are Sebastian Sayson, Ramon Reyes, and Luis Reyes for Mike de Leon's *Itim* (Rites of May), 1976; Gregorio Ella for *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* (You Were Weighed and Found Wanting), 1974, and *Bakya Mo Neneng* (Your Wooden Slippers, Neneng), 1977; Gaudencio Barredo for *Pagputi ng Uwak, Pag-itim ng Tagak* (When the Crow Turns White, When the Hero Turns Black), 1978; Teddy Ramos and Vic Macamay, who worked with Rolly Ruta in the Ishmael Bernal episode of *Bakit May Pag-ibig Pa* (Wherefore Love), 1979; Cesar Lucas for *Ang Panday* (The Blacksmith), 1980; Rudy Baldovino for *Broken Marriage*, 1983, and *Scorpio Nights*, 1985; Gabby Castellano for *Sumuko Ka, Ronquillo* (Surrender, Ronquillo), 1983;

Rodel Capule for the "Banga" (Jar) episode in *Halimaw* (Monster), 1986; Joe Clemente for *Tiyanak* (Changeling), 1988; and Joe Climaco for *Shake, Rattle & Roll II*, 1990. As in other fields of filmmaking, many sound practitioners in Philippine movies are related to each other, as in the case of Reyes, de Santos, and Clemente. For purposes of upgrading their craft and profession, the sound engineers banded themselves together into the Sound Technicians Association for Motion Picture under the Film Academy of the Philippines in 1981.

The coming of digital video technology in the late 1990s altered the process of sound recording. In digital audio recording, the digital recorder processes and stores the sound that comes through the microphone. The recorder measures the level of electrical signal and records those measurements in binary codes. Digital recording offers high quality in its small, lightweight package. It provides longer, continuous recording with the sound stored in a small memory card. It is timecode-capable, index-ready, and easily accessible to mark and quickly locate the takes at any point of the recording.

In the new millennium, a new breed of sound engineers emerged who are remembered for specific movies. They are Ditoy Aguila for *Baler*, 2008, and *Tiktik: The Aswang Chronicles*, 2012; Emmanuel Nolet Clemente for *Serbis* (Service), 2008, and *10,000 Hours*, 2013; Albert Michael Idioma for *Feng Shui*, 2004, *Kinatay* (The Execution of P.), 2009, and *El Presidente* (The President), 2012; Mark Laccay for *Tribu* (Tribe), 2007, and *Puti* (White), 2013; Mark Locsin for *Dinig Sana Kita* (If I Knew What You Said), 2009, and *Bwakaw*, 2012; and Addiss Tabong for *Emir*, 2010, and *Amok*, 2012. ✨