SmartSound Music Editing Software

FIELD TEST

by **Barry Rudolph**

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Speed is everything in commercial music production. A three or four-hour booking for a 30-second spot doesn't leave a lot of time for final music tweaks. And, with the increased number of video changes at the last minute, timing music to video can sometimes be problematic. SmartSound (www. smartsound.com) Software of Northridge, Calif.--a provider of music soundtracks with a huge library of license-free music tracks and its flagship product, Sonicfire Pro 3.2--believes it has a solution.

Traditionally, needle-drop music libraries are sold via music CDs, where cuts at a set length are manually auditioned before users import and cut in a video editing system to the required length for the picture. All of SmartSound's library music has been pre-encoded using a patented technology that allows any track to be instantly rendered into a new and unique musical arrangement, featuring intro, main body and ending sections, and ranging in length that is anywhere from three seconds to more than 30 minutes. The resulting transformation sounds natural, musical and without digital artifacts, as neither pitch shifting nor time stretching is used. Music tracks retain their original keys, tempi and tempo variations (hard quantization is not a requirement for encoding), and legato, rubato or accelerando sections, grand pauses and key changes are kept intact after encoding.

Kevin Klinger, president and CEO of SmartSound Software, says, "Sonicfire Pro 3.2 is the most efficient way for commercial and broadcast media creators and editors to create a compelling, high-impact soundtrack, especially when there is neither time nor the resources to hire a professional scoring composer. Sonicfire does the work of an experienced music editor by creating a professional-quality soundtrack that is perfectly timed."

Sonicfire Pro is now bundled with Avid Xpress® Pro V. 4.5 and Media Composer®

Adrenaline™, and includes 40 tracks of pre-licensed SmartSound music tracks. For multimedia creators, Sonicfire Pro has advanced integration with Macromedia Flash. Recently, SmartSound entered a partnership with Megatrax, a music library production company, to launch a new SmartSound-enabled music library comprising more than 260 songs on a single, dual-layer DVD entitled *The Scene*. This marks the first time that a needle-drop music library has been encoded to work with SmartSound technology.

THE ENCODING PROCESS

During a three-step process called "blocking," SmartSound's proprietary software, Block Aid, encodes stereo music tracks supplied by SmartSound's network of professional composers. Music tracks can be in any format when they're submitted to a staff of in-house musician/ engineers, aptly called "blockers," who meticulously guide Block Aid through a four to five-hour session per two to five-minute music piece. All musical editing decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

First in the process is zero-axis crossing digital editing: slicing and dicing the music into blocks. Block length can be anywhere from a single 16th note to eight measures long, depending on the music, the demands of the song's arrangement complexities and potential variations. To accommodate length variations in sub-second exactitudes, the endings of songs are chopped up even more finely to ensure natural and smooth transitions to the very end of the song--even during a ringout after a shock ending.

Sonicfire Pro Screen
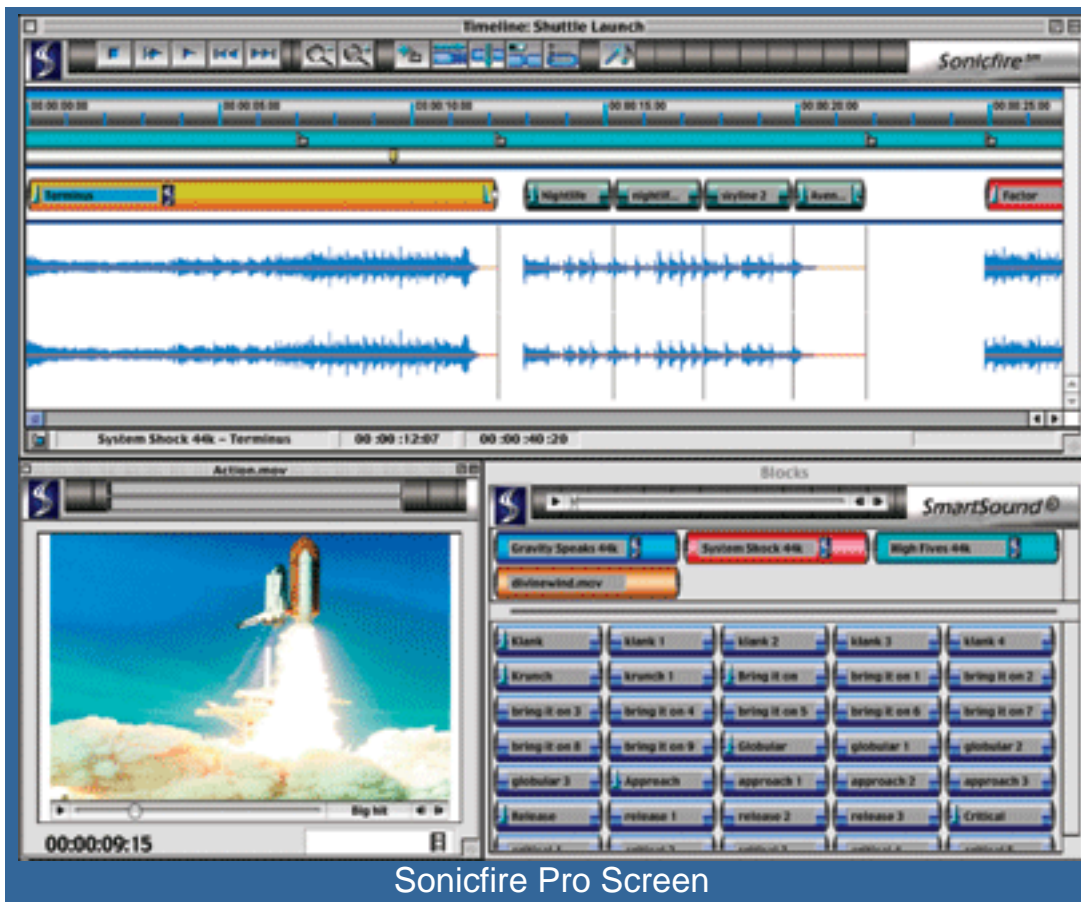
Once all blocks are determined, the blocker tags all possible begin blocks. A begin block is a section that can also serve as an alternative intro, giving an editor more than a single intro choice. Next is the assignment of compatible blocks. The most time-intensive portion of encoding, this is an auditioning process in which blocks are connected together and checked for musicality and sound quality at the moment of transition.

Both good and bad compatibilities are logged, with good compatibilities indicated in green.

Once all good compatibles are entered into a database, a list of possible variations is built and displayed in an onscreen matrix table. The power of Sonicfire Pro is that you can quickly audition all the variations without having to do any editing--just find one that you like and move on. Usually, there are at least three and up to six variations for each song. More variations are possible as you increase length. There may be only a single three-second variation possible of an originally four-minute song, but as many as 12 choices if you opt for a minute-long variation of the same four-minute song.

The encoding process is complete after the database is annotated with keyword names, block names, publisher and licensing data, and composer information. The files are outputted using a special SmartSound file format that can only be read by Sonicfire Pro. All SmartSound library CDs are arranged by style, with up to 26 different songs per style.

USING SONICFIRE PRO IN THE STUDIO

In the video editing bay, using Sonicfire Pro 3.2 (PC/Mac) and any SmartSound-encoded track, editors can load their video and drag out a timeline for the music and then select from several variations or arrangements of the selected song. Editors can freely experiment with substitutions, repeats, crossfades, fades and more using all of the familiar digital audio editing tools. Warning indicators will respond if you've selected the same block more than once in a row or if you attempt to join incompatible blocks.

Unique to Sonicfire is a comprehensive search engine to find just the right music for every clip. Considering that there may be thousands of songs in your library, you can search by style first and then drill down further using criteria search such as intensity, instrument or descriptive keywords. There is a Preview window to listen to a song snippet before loading its entire file.

You can preview new songs that are not in your library against picture by visiting SmartSound's Website. If you find one that works, it can be downloaded directly into a session. All billing, file capture, and reorganization and background processing is done behind the scenes without slowing down an edit session.

Once a song is at the appropriate length, you can output audio in any format and sample rate your project requires--including 22.05 kHz for multimedia applications. Available sample rates currently go up to 48 kHz, with higher resolutions coming soon.

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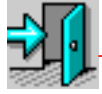
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