Sound Sampling Practice

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Sound samples are powerful weapon in producer's arsenal. Some use them to design the parts later played by instrumentalists, while others make music out of the samples only. In the middle there are people who do not limit themselves to any of these methods and use the more convenient ones. But all must agree that sound samples play important role in music production. Sound samples are created in several ways.

The first thing that comes to mind is to record sounds produced by an instrument. You need to pay an extra attention to who is playing this instrument, as everyone knows that better musicians know how to get better sounds out of their instruments. The recording stage is absolutely the most important and should take the most time. If you have good quality raw material, you will need to spend less time mastering the recordings later.

Not only instruments ...

Many sounds that are on demand are not made by instruments. A sample creator records also vinyl cracks, the sounds of closing doors and many, many more. Sometimes you get the best results by recording the less obvious sounds. These kind of sounds are hard to be found, and the way of making them is being kept as a secret. The most popular use of such samples is in movies and films (animated ones especially). They are however also often used in musical productions. This is a field for sound specialist to experiment. For example, in Walt Disney Studios there used to be a special place in studio to prepare sounds used for animations. There you could find an old pair of Walt's boots and many other things which later became famous because of Mickey Mouse movies.

It is very difficult to record non-standard sounds. You have to use the right microphone setup and be familiar with where the sound comes from and in which direction. It is not always obvious. You also need a good imagination to see some ordinary everyday objects as the sources of interesting sounds. Again, very important thing is the proper microphone setup.

... And not only inside studio

Sometimes there is a need to record something that cannot be taken to the studio. For example, a crowded corridor or sounds of cars on a highway. This can be really complicated and if done, it is very often done by using several microphones to get a 3D surround sound. For that one of the most popular tricks is a set of cardioid dynamic microphones on stands about 1 meter above the ground level, forming a circle. Inside this circle it is a good idea to place additional condenser microphone(s) to catch all the surroundings at once. This works in a similar way as when you

record whole band in studio at once.

Field recording is even more difficult however when the sound comes from various directions at once. To produce good quality sound and not spend few months mastering, the microphones must have very similar characteristics to exactly place the source of sound not only in two stereo tracks, but in three dimensions. What does complicate the matter even more is the moving source of sound. These are the reasons of low popularity of such practices.

New out of old

Another way of getting sound samples is cutting them from ready records. This is especially popular among Hip Hop and Trip Hop makers. They listen to records of many different genres and produce new beats out of small pieces or whole melodies caught from source. Besides the copyright issue, this is a simple and powerful way of getting great new sounds for your project. That is followed by looping these sounds and changing them in many ways to get something new. There are several artists known for spending whole weeks in record stores in search for new source of sounds and you cannot tell that they are derivative anymore. They have crossed the border of creativity as their records are something completely new and they use whole records to produce single sounds as other musicians use their instruments.

What to do with the recorded sound?

The answer is simple: mess with it! As we all know from physics, even the most simple and short sound is complex. One of the first things to do with the fresh record is to clear it from unnecessary noise. Many attempts to include the noise in the musical projects proved only that it is a sound pollution and causes a hearing discomfort. After getting rid of noise it is advised to use the equalizer plugin again. This way you will split the sound into bandwidth based parts and work with them separately. To get an interesting sound that works well with other samples it is common to cut off the higher or lower frequencies. You will get more control over your particular tracks and the final mixing will be easier.

The shape of sound sample

Cutting the specific part of the sound is extremely important. Keeping the right timing of the sound sample helps to adjust it to the metronome. If the sound sample begins too early, you will have hard times to work with it further. What is more, constructing loops also requires the perfectly cut sounds. Keep in mind that overlapping similar sounds may lead to illegibility of whole mix. You need to keep some space in your mixes. Overloading the tune with various effects and additional tracks is a common problem preventing even the best composition to be heard with pleasure.

The sound sample manipulation

To create the sounds that no one has ever heard before, you can use plain, ordinary recordings. Play it backward and change its tempo. You can do it dynamically while the sound lasts to get different ascending or descending sound effects. Again, stripping the sound from some of its frequencies will help you in getting something new.

Another really useful effect is an octaver. To get gently flowing bass without the feeling of strings pulled somewhere, use flute sounds and downshift them more than once! Many exceptional and sometimes legendary sounds came out of experiments and sometimes, by accidents. To prove this, there is a story behind one of the classic sounds of Pink Floyd. One day their guitarist have plugged the "duck" effect the wrong way. It took many months for others to figure out how to get this thrilling, screeching effect in the "Echoes"!

Sample Packs

Everyone can make their own sound samples. The theory says that all you need is a recording device. When you download a Digital Audio Workstation software you get in most cases a large collection of sample packs. In addition you can download more from the developers websites. For those who prefer better quality and, what is also important, unique sample packs, there are professional companies that specialize in recording and providing sample packs. For example, you will find sample pack at Lucid Samples.

Here you can find many categories of sample packs. The sound libraries are divided among others, according to software compatibility, content type and music style. There are several sample packs types. Each type can be made differently. Some of them are made of others. For example you can get looped sounds sequences made from one-shot sounds.

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