



Interview with Sound Designer and Composer Jamie Robertson.

Jamie how did you first get involved with 'The Casebook of Eddie Brewer'?

"One of the producers contacted me back in 2011 when the film had just entered the post production stage. Ian Brooker got in touch because of our shared connection with Big Finish, a producer of audio adventures of Doctor Who. Ian had previously acted in many audio dramas for them and I am regularly involved in scoring their music and providing sound design."

You've worked a lot for Big Finish, composing original music, how do you approach scoring for audio?

"Pretty much the same as TV and film. However, you have to visualise a scene in your head, allowing for beats and stings in the music where you feel a character will jump a cliff or a monster attacks. All this is done by listening carefully to what the actors have already put in with their own timing etc..."

What differences are there with film scoring as opposed to audio?

"Audio drama is mostly dialogue. Of course with film scoring it's not only audio stabs. You get to visually stab and sting the film with the soundtrack. The dialogue as well can be more spaced out with a film or any visual production."

What do you enjoy most about the process?

"I always get excited when I see a run through of a film for the first time. I'm seeing it in the editing stage, and most of the time, this means just dialogue. I then visualise in my head the route the score or sound design could take. If we're in a creepy old house on our own, it doesn't mean the audio has to be saying you're on your own. You can add in some really eerie FX to help drive your senses, like an odd creak or the thud of footsteps upstairs."

What is the hardest part of the process?

"I'd say: making sure you don't lose your audience. Many films fail with poor sound design and foley FX (the reproduction of everyday sound effects which are added in post-production to enhance the quality of audio for films, television, video, video games). This is also the same with music scoring. You don't want to overuse music and the wrong FX. So this, in fact, could be the hardest thing about the whole process: keeping your audience captivated and engaged. Films can also fail with poor use of music and incorrect instrumentation. I'm not keen on much American sci-fi music where the horns and strings are layered. It's just wrong. It's also lazy of a composer if he/she uses droning strings when there's an opportunity for a nice little sting or a change in the music."

So yeah, rather than employing a particular sound FX or music cue, I'm going for the whole thing in general, the polished finish. With regards to The Casebook of Eddie Brewer, many people think the music is quite minimal. This is misleading. Embedded in the sound design, there is quite a bit of music throughout. It was important to keep the music nice and subtle at certain stages because in this film we're constantly moving between documentary and objective mode."

Recently I've seen many films failing in the "found footage" genre because they are copying other films. One in particular wrecked its entire production because, while they wanted it to look real, the composer had written some cheesy piano lines over the top of some pointless footage, when we could already see the characters were attracted to each other. With Eddie Brewer, I could have done the same



obvious thing. I could have had really mournful music in one scene when Eddie is talking about his wife to the director on camera. But no. Because I know that in order to maximise the effect later in the film, we couldn't do the obvious route of composing here."

You've written a special piece of music for the film 'Eddie's Theme'. Tell us a little bit about that?

"Eddie's Theme was just a short orchestral piece for the start of the film. Normally with character themes you hear them a lot throughout the film, but, in this case, it's used sparingly - in the opening as the titles role on the documentary. You hear it again later, but I think you should see the film to find out where.

There are a few other little themes throughout: one with a choir - when we are in an objective perspective. Listen out for a very subtle eerie theme that recurs when odd things are happening. It's there but not too intrusive. Hopefully you should still be thinking it's a real documentary."

You also created the fabulous sound design for the film. How did you come up with the sound-scape for the film? How collaborative was it?

"Well sound-design-wise, I had done short films before. Ian Brooker sent me a detailed breakdown of each scene of Eddie Brewer with suggestions for music and sound FX. I found this very useful. When the film first came to me it had a very basic sound design added by the director/editor (Andy Spencer): some temporary droning music I'd created for something else. This has been added to make the editing nice and smooth. It also had the occasional spot sound FX pre-done by the director/editor. Most of these I removed and replaced in studio with foley and suitably sound designed FX. In fact I'd say that ninety per cent of the sound design you hear in the film came from my studio. It's only the ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement - the process whereby an actor re-records lines spoken during filming in order to improve audio quality or reflect dialogue changes) and breathes etc, that remained to be recorded.

For the spinning coin FX, Andy brought in the original tin and coin that he'd used on set to the studio. So it is the actual coins and tin sounds you are hearing, but re-recorded in studio. A sort of ADR for special objects I guess.

With the overall sound-scape, I felt the film needed a lot of sound content to help the narrative along. So at first, in order to differentiate between the two formats in the film, we had the sound design in stereo for the documentary elements and Dolby 5.1 for the objective viewpoint.

As the film continues, you'll gradually notice the sound becoming more intense. Pretty much nearly all of the sound design by the end is full surround sound-scapes. It's a common area that many indie films fall down on. I was very keen to deliver a proper movie experience for the producers and director, based on my own experience of film industry of twelve years. For instance, in my first sound design, the dialogue was mixed at normal levels with music and background FX, but if you want the audience to leap out their seats, I knew I could push those FX by nearly 20db. This might seem quite a lot but it's the normal mixing situation for most blockbuster movies. It's how we give a film that punch.

There are a lot of other sound design elements hidden in there too: sub frequencies to make your body feel the tension etc. I think it opened the producers' and director's eyes, or rather ears, when they first heard it in its new 5.1 form. Andy, who had never had a film previously mixed in 5.1, wasn't sure at first. I could understand him being cautious. I explained that when most independent film producers make their movies in stereo, they don't have the same sound levels as that available to them when mixing in Dolby. Needless to say, as soon as the big scares came along, a few smiles came on their faces as they nearly leapt out of their seats at the first sound run through."



Did the producers and director have some strong ideas how they wanted the film to sound?

“Both Ian, with whom I liaised over several months, and Andy, the director, were keen to show the difference between the objective side and the documentary. It also needed to sound natural. We all agreed that we didn't want to produce an over-the-top score. We all worked very closely on this film's polished effect.”

Was it a case of long sessions in a darkened room?

“It took about 2 months to do the sound design, as I was working on another production as well. I guess if I added it all up, it would be about 3 weeks, full time hours of say 9 till 8 every day.”

How much foley work was involved?

“Lots. In fact most of the footsteps in the film were replaced with foley design. In The Casebook of Eddie Brewer the only audio that survives from the shoot is the dialogue. This is another under recognised area that sound designers should get credit for. I was doing most of this myself with help, on a few days, from Ian Brooker and Andy for the coins etc. We had to re-record all the footsteps on the original sound design, to get the sound nice and polished. At Rookery House, one of the main locations of the film, the walls are cold and stone damp. This wreaks havoc with the sound design when walking around. It reverberated too much and didn't sound right.

So footsteps, mobile phones, doors, walkie-talkies are all new sound-scapes. With regards to the dialogue most of the shot footage was fine for the film. Sometimes with exteriors, when there's a lot of wind on the microphones etc, we'd normally need to ADR in the studio. But I think we were pretty lucky on this film because the majority of scenes were interiors. As we are dealing with a full surround-sound set up here, and the centre channel was sounding too mono, I used special processes to treat the dialogue and actually created a natural reverb for scenes in the cellar, or an office.”

Any interesting ways of creating sound effects for the sound design?

“There's a scene where lights are flickering. It took ages to do this one scene which only lasts five seconds on screen. Each light needed to flicker. So I recorded the sound of a tube light switching on. I then put it through a sequencer and played it on the keyboard, rather in the style of Morse code I guess. I had to do this several times, in different stereo positions.”

What are you most proud of in the film?

“The last ten minutes took a week to do with the amount of sound involved. I'm proud of the whole thing really. The fact that we don't go over the top with the music and sound. It feels just right. When you watch a cinema audience of 300 jumping on your every bang or crash means it is working. Every single noise and music cue in this film has a meaning. It's not just pointless crashes or footsteps. We do try and catch the audience out on a few occasions, but each sound FX has a logical reason for its existence.”

Thank you for your time Jamie.

Jamie Robertson's website can be found at www.jamierobertson.me.uk/HOME.html