



A compelling musical track is a very solid selling point for a promotional trailer. Music may have nothing to do with books, but if your trailer is going to raise interest in your novel, it helps for it to have attractive, moving music. And, of course, hurts to have obnoxious music.

This is getting far afield from writing, but relax: it's not that hard to create a soundtrack, and can be fairly interesting in itself. I will show you where to get legal music to use (or how to create your own, even if you are not a musician) and how to edit, shorten, enhance and convert formats of music using free simple programs.

Before scrolling down to ways to get free, legal music for your video, you should download and install a really great program that is extremely helpful for dealing with sounds: a free, easy sound editor/converter that can make an immense difference in the quality of your soundtrack and the ease in producing it.

AUDACITY SOUND EDITOR/RECORDER

This is one of those amazing programs you run into now and then: free, works on any operating system, childishly simple to operate, and yields professional results.

One thing Audacity does well and audaciously is very helpful to video makers: it can convert mp3 files to WAV files so the music can be used on Windows Movie Maker. How simple? Open the mp3 file, click the FILE menu, and EXPORT AS WAV. Ta da.

Another thing it does is merge tracks, true multi-track production. You can stack a drum track up with a recording of your canary and produce a file of birdsong over a rhythm track. One successful video soundtrack was just a simple, program-generated drum track with the author playing a sloppy, wailing harmonica. Sounds awful, but it worked well with the video for a book about hobos. And of course you can lengthen, shorten, and otherwise edit all the tracks to make it all come out right.

Another *hugely* useful trick you can do with Audacity is not only cutting music clips to the length you need, but also fading or feathering the ends so the music trails off to silence rather than just ending on a dime. This is extremely easy to do. You will be looking at the song displayed as a jaggedy volume graph similar to the waves between the headphones in the logo for this section. You use your cursor to highlight the portions you want cut off, the hit delete. How easy is THAT?

You can also highlight the first or last segment of the song, click on EFFECT in the menu bar to chose FADE IN or FADE OUT, and click. Immediately you will have a nice aural fade, as gradual as you want to make it.

You could also choose other effects such wah wah, echo, bass boost, repeat, phase shift, and many others. You can reverse a passage or entire song, change it's pitch or speed. There are sophisticated filters and analyses. You can generate passages of silence, white noise, a specified tone, or a click track (adding clicks to use for timing is very useful for close synchronization with images, especially in animation work: you can see the clicks as little spikes on the graph and line pictures up with them. Naturally, Audacity also removes the clicks when you're through with them.)

And if you want to record your soundtrack with the spouse on kazoo and you on your trusty musical saw, Audacity is also a good multi-track recording studio. Same goes for adding a spoken narration or making your own sound effects. Just turn on the recorder, snap your fingers or make your kid laugh or slam the door, then trim the results down to size.

You can also chop up music and reassemble it the way you want, using the simple copy and paste commands you use in other programs. I saw a video in which the author had

isolated a single cymbal clash from a symphonic recording and repeated it (with spaces between clashes created by generating "Silence") to accompany his title credits. There's a example of that at the end of the [IMAGINARY LINES video](#).

A musician friend used Audacity to change the pitch of a few flute notes, then stretch and warp them to create "whale songs" for his album.

This is really a program that almost anybody can get some use out of. Even if all you do is trim applause off the end of your live mp3 recordings. Like Movie Maker, it's so simple and accessible it can bring out qualities you never knew you had: might as well be the new Phil Spector while you're becoming the next Spielberg.

Download it from the site at audacity.sourceforge.net It's a very easy install on Windows, Mac, or Linux/Unix.

AQUIRING SOUNDTRACK MUSIC

Your first impulse when it's time to think soundtrack might be just to import a nice mp3 by your favorite artist. But there are a few problems with that: it's illegal, unethical, and self-destructive. It's fine for some kid wanting to do a Marilyn Manson video for YouTube, but if you are doing a promotional trailer, you're involved in a serious commercial endeavor and have to play by the rules, including copyright laws.

So the problem becomes: How to find original background tracks for free or cheap? Believe it or not, there are a lot of ways to do it, and I will lay them out for you.

If you're very lucky you are a musician yourself or know some guys who play at your local pub and have a nice CD of their repertoire. Record yourself or get permission to use a track and away you go. It's actually not that hard to get music from local bands this way, especially if you credit them in the video and give them a DVD of it. Remember, the SONG itself has to be original, not just the performance, in order to be legal to use. You don't own the reproduction rights to "Take Five" just because you played it on your ukelele.

If you're not that lucky, there are three basic approaches open to you:

--Buy "royalty free rights" to existing music. This doesn't mean "free", it means pay one lump sum instead of yearly royalties to use the music. This is totally kosher and tends to cost around \$30 for excellent music made by professionals with background use in mind from the start.

--Search for free music on the internet. Believe it or not, there is an enormous reservoir of original music out there to be had.

TIP: when searching for free sounds, clips or music include the google tag **-royalty** to avoid "royalty free" sites coming up from your use of the "free" tag.

--Create your own music using free programs. This isn't as unlikely as it sounds, either. I'll show you several free programs that can generate simple background music for you. As well as a cheap one that's worth having for other purposes. Also, registered Windows users have access to a program that can generate original music on demand.

A list of sites providing free and "royalty free" music is in the RESOURCES section, [here](#).

GENERATE YOUR OWN MUSIC

I promised this was going to be easier than you think: now it's time to come through. I'll quickly explore a couple of free download programs that can generate music, from simple beats to complicated symphonic tracks.

HAMMERHEAD

This name of this program is a dead give-away. It's not your choice for creating subtle string passages or soothing bossa nova for love scenes. It generates simple, powerful rhythm tracks with limited "instrumentation" and a definite bias towards punk/hip-hop, jungle, psychedelic type material.

That said, it's so simple to use that I've seen a five year old girl figure it out in ten minutes. Seriously.

I often use Hammerhead to lay down basic tracks, then add to them with other programs later.

Free download from threechords.com/hammerhead You can also check out a demo and samples at that site.

ANVIL STUDIO

This free program is in between rhythm boxes like Hammerhead and semi-professional music generators like Band in the Box.

It's not childish simple, but it's nothing you can't figure out in an hour. After which time you should be able to create not only complex rhythm tracks on multiple tracks, using any of hundreds of sounds from bongos to symphonic strings to gunshots, but also instrumental tracks employing hundreds of voices. You can pick out melodies on an onscreen piano keyboard or just put little dots on a "piano roll".

Examine and download at anvilstudio.com