

BOOK REVIEW

Sound FX

Reviewed by Ed Simon

More money is spent on toothpaste each year than on professional audio equipment. That makes us a fairly small community. So it is a bit unusual for me to get a new book and read two dozen or so names in the acknowledgment section and personally know only one of them. OK, so some of the names are family and the book is on the edge of the work I do, but, still, only one common source is rare.

Alexander U. Case has written a book titled *Sound FX, Unlocking the creative potential of recording studio effects*—a clever title, considering that there are so many “complete” recording books that picking one area where most people just past novice would want to improve their skills will help sell books. The book contains much more than the title implies.

COVERING THE TOPIC

The author has an excellent grasp of what audio starts from, where it can go, and what he wants to do with it. In many ways, this book shares some important characteristics with the film cartoons of the late 40s. It can be enjoyed as a basic work, but those with more insight will be amazed at how much more there is.

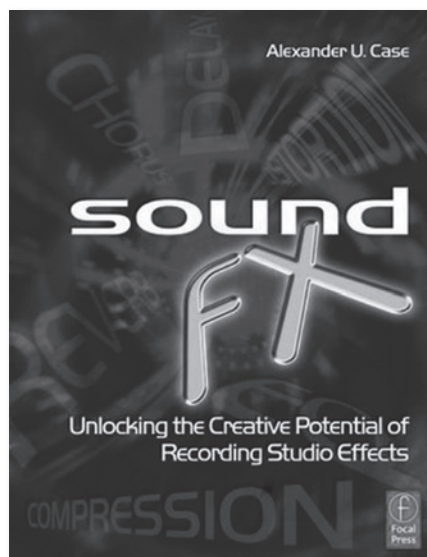
Case approaches his presentation a bit differently than I would expect in an introductory book. He first presents the cold, hard equations, even if it is the type of math that I would not expect to see until after at least one or two calculus courses. Then he presents the explanation in language and images that allow the beginner to grasp the concept.

The book also assumes that the reader has knowledge of how things really work and so skips what many basic books would address. For example, he doesn't mention microphones until chapter 13. He assumes that once you know how air is modulated in chapter one, you can figure out how this gets into the signal flow of chapter two.

This undoubtedly is because Case is really teaching this subject. He understands

what the student needs to add to his/her knowledge to do useful work.

The first section of the book includes three chapters about the basics. The first—how air is transmitted by sound waves—is represented graphically and mathematically, and explains why these principles concern us musically. The author then details how this is handled in the mixer and multi-track recording process. Concluding the introduction section is a chapter packed with information on how we perceive these sounds and can use this to advantage. This is the best single explanation I have ever seen of this material!



The next section of the book is on what he terms amplitude effects. The presentation in the fourth chapter on distortion is the start of this title material. The chapter is too short from an audiophile's point of view, but does offer insight into the recording artist's deliberate use of distortion for musical effect and some of the problems to try to avoid. A nice feature here and throughout the book is the listing of specific musical selections to illustrate the written examples.

The next three chapters cover equalization, compression and limiting, then expansion and gating. Although presented from a recordist's point of view, these

are a quite complete and understandable explanation of the technologies, the actual devices, the limitations of these processes, and how to use them for both recording and, to a lesser extent, for live work. Specific examples given of where and how to use the processes are clearly based upon the author's actual experience. This gives a much more hands-on feel to the book.

ENTERING THE STUDIO

Chapter eight on volume controls is probably the single most important chapter in the book. You would have expected the explanation of what a volume control is and how to use it to be much earlier in the presentation. It begins with an explanation of the types of controls and how they work. This material contains a brief explanation of how to mix music in a contemporary pop style. This chapter makes very clear to the journeyman the difference between older styles of recording, live recording, and current studio practice.

The next section deals with time-based effects. The three chapters cover delay, pitch shift, and reverb. A musical theory approach is taken to many of the explanations of how to use these processes. There are some charts relating tempo to time in chapter nine that will undoubtedly be a constant reference for some of the folks who work a mixing console for fun or profit.

Chapter 11 on reverb is aimed squarely at recording technology, devices, and techniques. But it will give most readers an insight into what the still emerging digital technology will do to live performances and the performing space.

Section four, which covers the basics of mixing, is where this work really becomes a more complete studio book. It explains very well why there are both pre-fader and post-fader sends on mixing boards. The basics of where to assign which signal and how to get started are reasonably

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