

Silent Film Project

iMovie/FinalCut Pro

Early Film Technology

- Silent films were called that because there was no way of recording the sound and then matching it with the "moving pictures" that made up the film.
- The story of the movie had to be told through the actors' appearance, what they did and how they acted.
- Usually, the movie theatre would hire a piano or organ player to play the score that accompanied the movie. The pianist would have to watch the movie as it was being shown, and play along. If the pianist played too quickly or too slowly, he or she would have to "improvise" a transition whenever a scene change occurred.

Silent Film Music

- The music was composed to enhance the movie, and usually added to the overall emotion of the scenes. There was a variety of ways of composing the music: Sometimes the composers wrote music to match each of the main characters.
- Other times the composers wrote music that matched an event that was happening in the movie.

Old Time Music

- Most old time music is in MIDI format, piano type music. You must convert this (MP3 recommended) to be able to import into iMovie or FinalCut Pro. Use this online converter:
 - <http://www.zamzar.com/>
 - <http://www.hamienet.com/midi2mp3>
- Sites with old music instrumentals for silent films:
 - <http://www.perfessorbill.com/index.html>
 - <http://www.cinemaweb.com/silentfilm/bookshelf/>
 - Scroll down nearly halfway to "Sam Fox Moving Picture Music Volume 1" (1913) by J.S. Zamecnik (MIDI files)
 - <http://incompetech.com/m/c/royalty-free/silentfilm.html>
 - This one is already in MP3 format, so no conversion needed ☺

Silent Movie Title Cards

- Title cards were short sentences written on black cards that were filmed and included in the silent movie in order to express something that could not be otherwise related by the actors in the movie.
- In the old silent films, the cards were hand-drawn on black cards and then filmed. They were then cut and pasted physically into the correct part of the film.

Examples of title and subtitle cards

*Our story takes place high
on the shore of Lake Superior...*

"How am I going to
explain this to Helga?"

[Even earlier
that evening

THUG! THIEF...
KILBER!

Joseph M. Schenck Presents
Buster Keaton
IN
ONE WEEK
RELEASED EXCLUSIVELY THROUGH
METRO PICTURES CORPORATION
and Famous Players

The Duke
leaves the
Palace.

CHAPMAN DIGITAL THEATRE PRESENTS
presents
The Chappy Brothers
in
"Munchie"
A Chappy Showcase Attraction

SILENT SHADOW
of "THE BAT-MAN"

Fatal Flower

Opening and Closing Title Cards

- The first title and end title were usually prepared by an artist title maker. Some filmmakers sent all the cards to professional companies to be prepared; others hand-drew their own.
- The opening cards and closing cards often were fancier and prettier than the cards within the film. They usually had drawings, sketches or flourishes that were often hand-drawn and then filmed.
- At the beginning of the film: the name of the group or company that made the film, with their logo.
- At the end of the film, the following would appear: The End.
- Can create these in Photoshop, as Titles in Premiere, or even in PowerPoint (export the slides

Subtitles

- Cards within the movies were used to move the story forward. They were usually explanatory in nature, and were used to bridge time or give more information about a character. Initially, these cards contained long subtitles, but eventually filmmakers realized they had to keep them short so that moviegoers could read them quickly.

For example:

- A time lapse of hours, days or weeks:
 - "Two hours later..."
 - "Later that week..."
 - "Two weeks went by..."
- An important thought or comment by one of the actors that is critical to the plot (dialogue)
- An action by the character that is not in the film but is still important to the plot

Writing Your Script

Remember that ACTION is essential to tell your story—even OVER acting to help emphasize. Include a beginning, middle and end.

- **The Beginning:** Introduce your main characters, setting and conflict or point of difficulty early in the film.
 - Make it interesting! Capture the attention of your audience.
- **The Middle:** Give more information about the characters and the problem or difficulty they are experiencing.
 - The excitement, anticipation, mystery or suspense should build during the middle.
 - Add any “clues” that result in the climax or “high point” of the story. For example, actions that leads to the downfall of the villain, or the recovery of the hero or heroine.
- **The End:** This includes the high point or climax of the story.
 - The problem or difficulty is resolved; the truth is revealed

The Filming and Editing Process

Here's the process that the Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society used to shoot and finish their films, after the script had been written and the actors assembled:

- On the script, mark scenes as INT (interior) or EXT (exterior).
- Insure continuity by marking items that carry through from one scene to another.
- On the set, mark boundaries and inform actors of range of camera.
- Decide where the camera will shoot from i.e. the point of view of the camera. Decide if the view will be panoramic, close-up, zoomed in, action shot, left-to-right or right-to-left.
- Specify the background or setting required.
- On the script, mark any transitions – fading from one scene to another. This eliminates jerkiness and allows for easier editing later.
- Think about title cards and where they are required.
- Film the scenes.
- Physically cut out all defective or poorly shot footage. Splice the pieces together to create the movie.
- Color film – add tinting or toning to the film.

Research Questions

Individually, watch a silent movie from the 1920's or 1930's. You can search YouTube for them. Turn in the URL. (If you do not have internet at home, I can download some examples for classroom review)

1. Consider the following: What images appear on the opening and closing title cards?
2. Do the images match part of the movie?
3. What appears on the opening cards? Closing cards?
4. How many subtitle cards are there in the movie? What kind of information or commentary do they provide?
5. Do the subtitles move the story along? Do you think any of them could have been shortened or omitted altogether?
6. Did the music match or enhance the emotions portrayed in the movie scenes?
7. Identify some examples of "sad", "happy", "romantic" or "suspenseful" music and how it is used.
8. Movies today often have "bloopers" or "commentaries". Why did silent movies not have these?

Aging your Film

- Apply dust and scratches, desaturate, tint a brownish color, and add a strobe effect (see right for sample settings)

Try it out!

- Okay, you should have good info for starting your project! Decide what you want to do, plan for it, and edit your heart away!
- Be sure to use the scoring guide!!!
- Oh, and HAVE FUN!!!!!! 😊