



# silence is golden

WHEN IT COMES TO cinema sound, it's not always about who makes the biggest bangs. Sometimes the best way to manipulate the viewer's emotions is to turn down the volume for a moment, if not the entire movie.

A case in point: Universal's "The Bourne Ultimatum." Stealthy agent-in-exile Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) and his CIA operative opponents brandish firearms that discharge with hyper-real clicks, blams and silenced whooshes that are borderline erotic in their sonic sleekness. But in the scene where Bourne flashes back to the moment when he pumped three bullets into a bound and hooded captor, effectively surrendering his identity and

embracing a new life as a CIA assassin, supervising sound editors and Oscar nominees Karen Baker and Per Hallberg of Soundlux wanted the gunshots to sound raw, real and decidedly unglamorous.

"That particular gun is meant to be big and brutal with nothing stylized or sexy about it," Baker says. "You just needed the bang, and then it's done."

The less-is-more aesthetic plays out through the entirety of Miramax's "No Country for Old Men." With only a bare, minimalist music score by composer Carter Burwell, the sound design is given a spartan backdrop to revel in subtle sonic specifics, from the clink of the coin Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem) flips to decide the fate of his victims to the succinct *thwump* of the cattle gun he uses to blow out the dead bolts on their doors, as well as their brains. The film also effectively amps up the suspense with artful uses of sounds, such as the creaking floorboards and scuffing boots Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) hears outside his hotel room door as he sits on the bed, waiting for Chigurh to burst through the door and shoot him.

In an age where the soundscapes of Hollywood films are typically built in post-production, "No Country" supervising sound editor/sound rerecording mixer and Oscar nominee Skip Lievsay took the unusual step of relying on the sounds recorded on set by production sound mixer Peter. F. Kurland.

"We tended to sweeten the production sound that we had, because it was fully integrated with the action and matching the dialogue and so forth," Lievsay explains.

Sound designer Steve Boeddeker took it one

step further in Paramount Classics/DreamWorks' "The Kite Runner." For the scenes set from the 1970s to the present day in Afghanistan and Pakistan, he tracked down hours of footage of the region from the past 30 years and cherry-picked sounds to use as building blocks for the film's aural backdrop.

When it came to the mix, sound rerecording mixers Lora Hirschberg (dialogue and music) and Michael Semanick (sound effects) did their best to preserve the rough-hewn integrity of the location sound.

"Often we take out all the noise of the dialogue track and then spend hours trying to get the sound effects to sound like the noise we had in there, trying to re-create that reality," Hirschberg says. "So we were very careful to keep all of that reality to begin with."

Sometimes the job of selling reality sonically can boil down to a key aural element or two. In Paramount Vantage's "There Will Be Blood," it is the sound of the oil derricks that pop up, one after another. Director Paul Thomas Anderson wanted the sound to be unpolished and authentic. But while a day of field recording at the West Kern Oil Museum in Taft, Calif., produced a wealth of sounds used in the film, the vintage derrick motors there did not provide a cinematically satisfactory sound. Eventually, sound designer Chris Scarabosio of Skywalker Sound found the derrick's signature sound in his own backyard: his children's wooden swing, which had rusty metal fittings.

"I pitched it down, so it almost became more of a groan, a growl that gives it this kind of ominous, lonely, dangerous vibe," Scarabosio says.

Sometimes less  
is more when  
making a cinematic  
impact with sound

Sound departments focused viewers' ears on the gunshots fired in Universal's "The Bourne Ultimatum," above left, and the discharges of the cattle gun in Miramax's "No Country for Old Men," above right.

By Todd Longwell



