

How to add sound effects and music to your game session

Imagine you've gone to see the latest horror flick at the local cinema. After months of buildup, you're finally sitting in the front of the silver screen, tub of hot buttered attercorn in your lap and soda in hand! Soon, the movie begins, only something is a bit off. It takes several minutes for you to realize the problem. There's no sound! No suspenseful music, or spooky background noise. It's just actors acting.

If someone told you that the movie you wanted to see would be without a soundtrack, would you go? I know I wouldn't. So, now let's take that same example and add it to your game session. Maybe you've never used music before. It could be you never thought of inserting cave sounds while your party carefully winds their way through the underground mushroom grove.

As a DM/Judge/ Storyteller you hope that your group will walk away from the table remembering something special about your session. I know I work very hard on making the encounters feel as real and creepy as possible. I can say that I have run sessions where everything is spot on, resulting in the players shaking their heads from being genuinely creeped out. Music, or sound effects were a big component to making that happen.

So, now you know why I dig throwing some sound out at the table for my group, so let me give you a basic tutorial on what I use, and how it's done! The process can be broken down into four parts

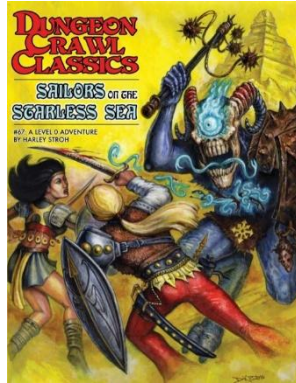
Equipment: To use sounds during your game you're obviously going to need a way for your players to hear the fruits of your labor. My choice method of delivery is the portable Bluetooth speaker. They're available in more flavors than Ben & Jerry's, and pricing makes them not so hard on the wallet. I tend to stick with the compact models that fit in the palm of my hand. Keeping it small means you can transport them more easily, plus they can be sat in the middle of the table without getting in the way.

The Bluetooth will have to have a pairing device that will play the music you choose, so make sure your devices are compatible.

Source: You can use just about any service to play your music. You could even use an old favorite CD soundtrack. Keeping up with the current times, most of us use some sort of streaming service. Pandora, iTunes, Spotify are just a few that are out currently.

I prefer Spotify, but mainly because I don't have Apple products, and Pandora is a little more random with what you get. If you don't mind occasional commercials, Spotify is free. The subscription model allows you to listen without pesky ads in addition to making your music available offline. Spotify also has an option that allows you to create and share your own playlists. This option is gold for the Judge who wishes to truly build his own "soundtrack" for his or her session. I recommend you try a couple and see what feels best for you and your group.

Playlist: What good is having that brand new spiffy Bluetooth, and a streaming service if you don't have a track listing ready to go? When I sit down to prepare for an adventure one of the things I do is break the encounters down. Whether it's a published adventure, or my own homebrew campaign I take the encounter and try to imagine what sounds I might hear if I were standing in the middle of it. I also look for a general "feel" of the encounter for possible music. Once I have those things in mind I hit Spotify and make two playlists. One for music and one for sound effects. In this example I'm using Harley Stroh's "Sailors on the Starless Sea".



Now, if you remember I said no service was perfect? This is where I get slightly annoyed with Spotify. The problem with making one long playlist is very simple. You are going to miss a cue to stop a song, or sound effect due to running your session. Spotify will automatically cue up the next selection. This can mean hearing the blowing wind you wanted the group to experience in the following encounter prematurely. The only fix I have for this issue is to make a separate "playlist" using only one song, or sound effect. This ensures that your music won't get ahead of you, and you can also loop the sound which is very convenient as most sound effects are short files.

If all of this has your eyes bleeding at the moment, and you want to keep it simple my suggestion is to simply use a service like Pandora and set it up for a spooky soundtrack you like. I have done this on occasion when running short on time and Spotify has the entire library of the wonderful gaming soundtracks made by Midnight Syndicate. Both Pandora, and Spotify can provide you with these gems, but you can also purchase the music direct (www.midnightsyndicate.com) Using the music this way takes less planning, and generally is still great for helping set the mood!



I'll leave you with one last option before we get to the final step. Another thing that bugs me about Spotify is that I can't stream from two separate Bluetooth devices while using it. The problem with this is that you can't play two different sounds at the same time (Howling wind + creepy music) the fix for this is to download the playlists you've prepared. This allows you to play the music offline, meaning you can now play two tracks at the same time (This is a subscription only feature at this time unfortunately)

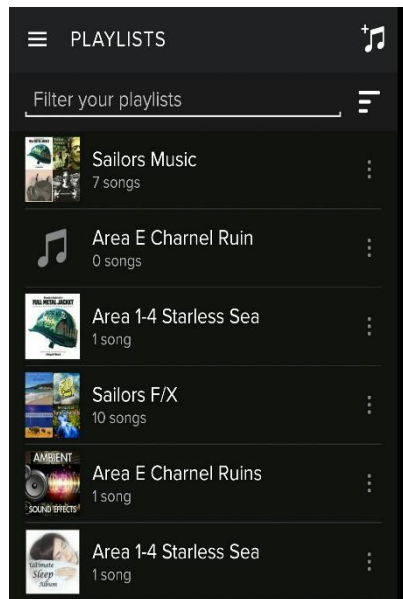
Showtime: Now that you have the first three steps together you're ready to unveil an added element at the table. I mentioned previously that I go through each encounter. One thing I use to help during this process are a healthy stack of Post it notes. I write down reminders of things like traps, important details, but I also make a note of what tracks I want to play. I'll take the time to allow the music to start and once the music, or sound effects are going I'll give it a second and begin my description. Generally, I'll allow the tracks to loop, or while the party contemplates their course of action I'll take a more direct role by manually playing the tracks. Feel free to follow the included links to playlists I've made for Goodman Game's "Sailors of the Starless Sea" adventure.

So, there you have it! Hopefully if you've never tried to add some ambiance to your sessions, you're up for giving it a shot now! Above all else, have fun and if it sounds like something your group might like give it a shot and start

out slow and easy. Feel free to write to us at _____ with any helpful suggestions on delivering sound to your group. We'd also love to hear about different things you do to add another dimension to your sessions!



Links to two premade "Sailors of the Starless Sea" encounter tracks. Be forewarned you will have to sign up for a free account to give this a listen.



Area E: The charnel ruins

Sound effect: <https://open.spotify.com/user/1217310146/playlist/5Q50dEK57yZlGaEXb6Fjhz>

Background Music: <https://open.spotify.com/user/1217310146/playlist/3xe52bRS7SYzCq9wyknhbS>

Area 1-4: The Starless Sea

Sound effect: <https://open.spotify.com/user/1217310146/playlist/0KeNYjpzPeoXYK36v7X380>

Background Music: <https://open.spotify.com/user/1217310146/playlist/6Cs9VmcZ2OPc6RsP9gVo1x>