

The Artwork of Video Editing in Signed Music
Jason Begue and Janis Cripps

INTRODUCTION

In this video, there are four parts to the presentation. First, we'll be looking at the experiences that commonly occur between the Deaf community and music. Secondly, we will explain how to get involved in and start editing signed music. For the third part, we will offer an explanation of what signed music is, what it takes when video editing signed music, and examples will be given. Then we will do closing remarks.

For the first part, I will be explaining my own experience with music. There are various articles out there that discuss the Deaf community's experience with music, and these articles mention that the Deaf community rejects music and call it a 'hearing thing.' However, there are deaf people who disagree, as there are many of them who enjoy music. This disagreement has gone on, back and forth, between both sides. This actually applies to my own experience.

Growing up, I was always fascinated with music and still am. For example, on YouTube, there are many different music videos with background dancers dancing to the music as someone sings. There were videos where different colors and shapes would pulsate and dance across the screen, as a visual, fluid cue to sound. These videos always captivated me. There were also videos showing people interpreting songs for singers and these just didn't quite do it for me. I struggled with this method of receiving music, so I just disregarded them.

Then as time went on, I started as a student at Gallaudet University. I noticed at different kinds of events I attended, such as weddings, birthdays, a gathering at a friend's house, and more, where there would be music blasting, I would get into it. I would join in on the dancing, I would be completely immersed in the music and the beat, I would find myself signing to the music, and just feeling it.

Several friends would come up to me and let me know that my signing didn't match the music. To this, my response was that, of course, it didn't match. The music would just bounce off of my deaf ears, so the most important thing was what was inside of me, how I felt, how the rhythm came into me and out through my signing. My friends would disagree and it would become a back and forth debate between us. I realized that for my friends and most people, if you're deaf, music is automatically out of the picture, because it is for hearing people. I would resist this assumption and explain that music comes from within and I can feel it, and enjoy it thoroughly. I can feel the rhythm and

connect with it, and from that comes my signed music, which I like. They would continue to reject this idea and I would eventually back down and drop the subject.

Once I went to teach at Towson University, I met Dr. Jody Cripps and the subject of music came up in our conversations. I was intrigued. He told me about his article, which talks about how most deaf people in the community are confused about music. The reason is because many of the signed music they see out there are based on English to ASL translations. People would read the songs in English and copy them word for word in ASL, or they would listen to songs and translate it from that into ASL, and call them signed music. In Dr. Cripps' article, he points out that those songs are translations, which is different from signed music. The two are entirely separate concepts, and we have signed music, which comes from within deaf people and has its own criteria. This helped me realize that music can apply to all humans. There are many different cultures out there and music applies to them all.

EYES MUSIC

Back in 2003, I made a music video, Eyes music, which was an experimental video. This idea first started a year before the video was created. I wanted to do something, but struggled to come up with an idea. I thought long and hard, and as I tried to come up with an idea, I started to film short clips of anything related to water. I filmed clips of rain, the ocean and the waves, water dripping off of leaves, and more. Then one day, my cousin, Jason Cripps, who was studying music in school at the time, sent me a school project and asked me to check it out. I listened to it, and suddenly something clicked, and I had an inspiration for my own project. I told myself to just do it! It took me twelve straight hours, from morning until night, to make it—my video, “Eyes.”

Why did I want to do this? I wanted to show what music, or sound, looked like. I decided to use my hands to represent different beats. The reason why I picked the title, “Eyes,” is because of the value it holds in Deaf Culture—our eyes see everything; it's visual. Also, why did I choose water, Mother Nature, and flowers? It's really water that's the focus here. Water by itself has no sound, but you can see water. You can see its movement, like when it drips or when waves are coming down. A wave makes sounds, yes, but water itself doesn't. It is silent. There was so much interconnection between all these things and I just needed to get it out there and the result was 12 hours, nonstop, on the video.

I brainstormed with Jody Cripps and we decided to go ahead and start filming his performance about rain and rain-related subjects. Once we were done filming and it came time to edit the video, I got sidetracked by my kids, my family. I didn't have time to do it, but it always remained on the back of my mind. I've been wanting to get back to it since 2008.

EDITING PROCESS

In the second part of this presentation, I will discuss how I got into editing videos about signed music. Time went by, Jody and I went about our lives, up to when Jody became the chairperson of the Society for American Sign Language conference in 2015. It was interesting because before he became chairperson, he had asked me if I'd be willing to help him edit his video projects and I accepted. We sat down and went through his huge collection of different clips of signed music from years before, starting in 1902 up until now. There were so many clips in all and while there were a few song translations, most of them were signed music.

As I went through the clips and watched them all, I was able to gain a clear understanding of the differences between song translations and signed music. From that, my enthusiasm for signed music increased, and I started asking Jody questions and discussing signed music with him. He told me about his sister, Janis, and how she had a project about signed music that needed editing, and asked me if I'd be interested in working with her. I was, so he gave me the video clips and I got to work.

Now, for the third part of the presentation, I will explain the concept and the process of editing videos of signed music. When I got Janis' video clips and sat down to start editing them, the first thing I did was upload them onto my computer and put each of them in order. These were all clips of Jody signing music, and as I watched them, I realized I needed help. So I asked Janis, who was an experienced video editor and knew how to edit signed music videos. I asked her how to get started on the process.

EXPERIMENT

JB asked me how to show the beat of the music in the editing process, since there was no sound to follow, nothing at all, so we needed to figure out a way. I suggested we use a metronome, and transfer its rhythm into the editing process. First, we needed to decide on the speed of the metronome that we wanted to use—did we want a quick rhythm or a slow, deliberate rhythm?

My suggestion was to set the metronome at a speed we liked and cut the video clips to match the rhythm of the metronome, for instance, 1-2-3-cut, 1-2-3-cut, 1-2-3-cut. Then for the rest of the video, we would follow the timing, and figure out how many frames in a period of time. For instance, if we did 30 frames in one second, then we would use that to set the rhythm. Then if we felt we needed one and a half seconds, then we would do 45 frames in one and a half seconds. That would slow things down somewhat and create a halting effect. That was a place to start with, using a metronome to set up a beat for us to follow as we edited the videos. Then once we determined how many frames there were between the metronome's beat, we could just set it at that for the rest of the editing process and eventually discard the metronome.

That was an experiment; I just gave it a try. It's all about trying, it's ok if you fail. It just means it didn't work out, and you need to find other ways and keep trying until you reach that goal.

PROCESS

Once I understood how to use a metronome, I set it up and got the video ready to start the process. One thing about Jody's signed music is that there were no lyrics, just like Janis' video. So, as was mentioned in Cripps' group article, a signed note would be something like in Janis' video where she rhythmically signs 'wave' going forward and then going back. It is how she repeats both signs that makes them a signed note. Once I understood that, I was able to apply that concept to Jody's signed music video. I was able to identify many different signed notes about rain, such as *drip-drip-drip-drip* or ripples going out or rays shooting at a blossom. I identified the intervals that I would need to cut the clips at, using the metronome. I would watch for a signed note and once I found one, I would follow the time set by the metronome and edit the clip at that. Once I had the clips, I put them into order so they came together to make signed music.

Through the editing process, I made music. However, it was still a movie and I wasn't entirely satisfied, there wasn't enough to it. I started to wonder if I could overlap different signed notes and colors, so I asked Janis for her advice.

IDEAS

You have to. For instance, if you have a clip where the person is signing, *rain-rain-rain*, as long as you stay within the time frame, you can put as many as you want in it. One example would be, when the person is signing *rain-rain-rain-rain* you can overlap another clip of the person signing *splatter* in between the clips, turning it into *rain-rain-rain-splatter*, *rain-rain-rain-splatter*, *rain-rain-rain-splatter*. It can be done, it'd be like adding a third-no, fourth beat. It is possible, more complicated, but if you put your mind to it, it can be done.

I think it's best to start off simple and advance to more complicated and ending it with simple. You need to set it up so people will be able to follow the beat and get used to it, then make it more complicated, as long as you still keep the same basic beat. That is the key, to go from simple, to give it its bones, to complicated then back to simple again.

CONCLUSION

From her advice, I understood the importance of setting up the skeleton, the basics, because it shows the rhythm, shows the music. Once I established what the skeleton would look like, I set the metronome, identified the signed notes, cut them within the time frame, and looked at how many seconds there were in one beat, then set that up. Once I put the clips together in order, I chose a background, just one background, and put all of the signed notes that I would overlap onto one frame together and made sure that stayed as it was. Then I added another column and signed notes and made sure

that stayed. Another signed note went on top, and I set up the transition. This was made into one clip, with a skeleton. The result is this.

Those two clips, I did not change anything, and I copied the first one and put the copy after the second clip and added on signed notes. Then I copied the second clip and put that after the third clip, and added on signed notes to that, too. I continued doing this, creating a more complex piece, all the while keeping the skeleton intact. What that means is that I kept the background, I kept the colors, and the signing notes from the original two clips and just added on to them for the subsequent clips, making them more complicated, and it looks like this.

The layers and layers will fade away as the video goes on. Now, you have a better understanding of the concept of signed music, the editing process that goes into making the movie. Now, for the closing remarks. I have made a movie and edited it, seen it to the finish. At first, it was a challenge, I was somewhat inexperienced but the important thing is that I persevered. You should keep trying new things, experiment, play around with new techniques and ideas, and eventually it'll get better and things will go smoothly. Once I was finished with the video, I showed it to some of my deaf friends, and they came to the realization that signed music was something that they could enjoy—music, with signs...music. There are more and more people out there who are starting to understand, too. I want to show you some of my clips with our work, with the feedback and the edits we made.

REFERENCES

- Brown, S. Merker, B., & Wallin, N. L. (2000). An introduction to evolution musicology. In N. L. Wallin, B. Merker, & S. Brown (Eds.), *The origins of music* (pp. 3-24). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cripps, J. E. (2003). Eyes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YnwJsFHFebg>
- Cripps, J. H. (2015). Signed music: A symphonious odyssey. [film]. Towson, MD. A Cripps Production. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JjFCM8UZHM>
- Cripps, J. H., & Lyonblum, E. (2017). Understanding the use of signed language for making music. *SASLJ*, 1(1), 78-95.
- Cripps, J. H., Rosenblum, E., Small, A., & Supalla, S. (2017). A case study on signed music: The emergence of an inter-performance art. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 13(2). (<http://liminalities.net/13-2/signedmusic.pdf>)
- Cripps, J. H., Small, A., Rosenblum, E., Supalla, S. J., Whyte, A. K., & Cripps, J. S. (in press). Signed music and the deaf community. In A. Cruz (Ed.), *Culture, deafness & music: Disability studies and a path to social justice*. Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publishers.
- Cripps, J. S., Small, A., Rosenblum, E., & Cripps, J. H. (2015). Signed music: Rhythm of the heart. [film]. Toronto, ON: Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLazgI_phNQ
- Darrow, A. (2006). The role of music in deaf culture: Implications for music educators. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 41(2), 93-110.
- Hamm, C., Nettle, B., & Byrnside, R. (1975). *Contemporary music and music culture*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Leigh, I. W., Andrews, J. F., & Harris, R. L. (2016). *Deaf culture: Exploring deaf communities in the United States*. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing.
- Maler, A. (2013). *Songs for hands: Analyzing interactions of sign music and music*.