



GoCompare.com,
Comeback

is for JINGLES

From five-note mnemonics to extraordinary live experiences, the way brands use music and sound has progressed far beyond the humble jingle. But crafting a strong sonic identity is harder than it sounds, finds *Selena Schleh*

Love them or hate them, there's no denying that when it comes to memorable audio branding, jingles do the job. Whether it's Mentos' minty-fresh melody, the ever-impressive bellow of the Bodyform lady (all together now: "WOOOAAAAH, Bodyform!") or the hokey strains of "Just one Cornetto..." these earworms wriggle deep into our aural canals from the first listen, proving impossible to dislodge. Which explains why, more than 25 years on from their 80s heyday, jingles are still around. They've just evolved.

For proof, look no further than price comparison site GoCompare.com, whose irritating ditty, belted out by opera-singing mascot Gio Compario, plagued audiences for a tinnitus-inducing three years. Gio was resurrected this year in *Comeback* - which saw the signature jingle re-imagined as a huge recital in front of adoring crowds. "It's testament to how music production and real musicians can give adverts a new lease of life," says Paul Cartledge, director of Yellow Boat Music, who created the arrangement.

Comeback also neatly illustrates a shift in how advertisers are using music and sound: instead of being a blunt instrument to bludgeon the message home, or a hastily tacked-on afterthought, it's now a subtle emotional tool. "Sound no longer plays second fiddle to the picture, it has transformed into a major force in storytelling," states Carole Humphrey, founder and MD of Grand Central Recording Studios. Dave Hodge, partner and creative director at Finger Music, agrees: "Music and sound design is not an afterthought. It's exactly half the experience [of a spot]. Brands who put more emphasis on the audio experience have much more effective campaigns."

Thinking outside the musical box

Whether through licensing (sync) or original composition, the use of music in commercials is key to building a distinctive brand 'sound' and few brands have fused the two as successfully as Levi's under the stewardship of Sir John Hegarty and BBH. From the late 80s to the noughties, the brand built an enviable reputation as a hit-maker through spots such as *Laundrette*, *Space Girl*, *Mermaids* and *Flat Eric*. "It was at a time when music videos were becoming more and more important as a means of communication for the music industry," remembers Hegarty. "We were slightly smarter than ▣



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music videos and gave the music a meaning. We took a great song, and we wrote a story that the song seemed to add value to, and in turn the story added value to the song. Everybody won.”

Eschewing a formulaic approach (“not just looking up ‘water music’ and ‘mermaid’ references in the file [for 1997’s *Mermaids*]”) in favour of more leftfield choices was why the music worked, says Hegarty. A prime example is the distinctly un-rock’n’roll Noel Coward-penned song, *Mad About The Boy*, in *Swimmer* (1992). Another factor was the luxury of time; often months were spent auditioning different options. Ultimately, the music “needed to find the rhythm in the film”, a peculiar alchemy best demonstrated in 1988’s *Refrigerator* where the decision to swap the logical first choice, *It’s A Man’s Man’s World* by James Brown, for Muddy Waters’ *Mannish Boy* transformed an initially “awful” ad with “crap acting” into another hit.

Fast-forward to the current decade, and the baton has passed to British retailer John Lewis, which, helped by its agency adam&eveDDB, has also

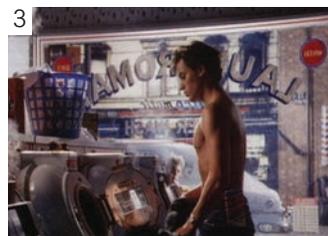
coined a highly distinctive sound in its advertising. From Ellie Goulding’s version of *Your Song* (2010’s *A Tribute To Givers*) to Gabrielle Aplin’s take on *The Power Of Love* (2012’s *The Journey*) and Lily Allen’s cover of the Keane classic *Somewhere Only We Know* for *The Bear And The Hare* (2013), the formula takes classic crowd-pleasers and gives them an acoustic reboot by up-and-coming (or, in the case of Allen, career reviving) female artists.

This distinctive, stripped-back sound has been aped by others, but none has owned it so definitively. As chief creative officer Ben Priest explains: “We’ve developed a musical handwriting as we’ve gone along. There was never a master plan: we’ve picked the best track for each ad and when something has worked, we’ve held onto it.” Echoing Hegarty, Priest puts the success of the campaigns down to music that complements, rather than overwhelms, the narrative. “There’s a simplicity to what we do – it’s not overblown or complex. It sits gently on the picture and allows the story to be told.”

The agency works with specialist music consultants Leland Music, but their ears are open to all suggestions. “When I was in hospital, in the theatre with my wife [who was] giving birth, a track came on the radio which I thought would be ace for *Monty’s Christmas*,” remembers ECD Richard Brim. “When I told her, she went mad, but what ensued was a conversation with every member of staff – even the surgeon – about what would make a great John Lewis track. People can really identify with music, and any opinion is valid.”

At the other end of the audio branding spectrum is the sound logo – or mnemonic, as it’s known in the trade. Admittedly, a three-second audio clip is unlikely to bring a lump to the throat (or inspire a debate mid-labour), but it can be equally effective, as McDonald’s, British Airways and Audi have all proved. However, as Simon Robinson, co-founder of London-based ‘creative noise makers’ Pitch & Sync points out, “it’s a really tricky space. The shorter amount of sound you have to play with, the more complicated it becomes.”

While some industry folk take a dim view of mnemonics (see box opposite), Robinson argues that, in our increasingly techy world, the notification bleeps from our mobiles or the start-up sounds of switching on a laptop offer opportunities for brands to be creative, playful and, yes, memorable. “It’s all about trying to work out what the brand stands for, what its values are, and distilling them into sound,” says Robinson, referencing





Moronic mnemonics

Hugh Todd, creative director at Leo Burnett London, on why sonic logos are so hard to get right

It was a few years ago I first came across the term audio mnemonic. “The dab of shit” was how we politely referred to it back then. Three seconds of audio gunk ruining the previous 27 of lovingly crafted writing.

The account man informed us the client had spunked £4m on getting the rights to the five-note ditty, so it was a mandate.

Our baby was ruined.

Not only was it a dab of shit, it was the last stinking thing the listener heard. A bit like going to see the Stone Roses and on your way out, the PA plays Rick Astley, the aural odour staying with you all the way home.

Things have moved on a bit since then. But not necessarily for the good. Sonic logos are big business. Those three to five seconds at the end of your commercial could apparently make or break a brand.

It seems everyone should have one. It's not just big blue-chip

clients that crowbar them onto their ads. Estate agents, plumbers et al seem to want a sonic logo in the hope it'll get more custom.

Do they work?

Creatively, I'd say not often.

Imagine this. You've just penned and shot the latest Nike extravaganza. It's a two-minute masterpiece, £4m budget... is there something missing? How about five totally random notes played on a kid's xylophone? Yep, that'll do it. Look out, Cannes.

To date, I've not spotted Nike or VW or Harvey Nicks with one concluding their Grand Prix-winning spots. Granted, there are ironic ones – the Old Spice whistle comes to mind, but they are few and far between.

If you really have to have one, it's got to be right for the brand.

A man who knows a bit about sound is the award-winning sound designer at GCRS, Munzie Thind, who says: “Audio mnemonics have

a place in advertising. As humans we can identify a brand from just a few notes on a piano, e.g. the Intel bong or McDonald's whistle – so in some cases if it's done right it can be as good for a brand as any visual branding like the golden arches for McDonald's or the Nike tick.”

But it is incredibly hard to get right. Adds Munzie: “It can go horribly wrong. Mazda's ‘Zoom Zoom’ or Ford's terrible guitar mnemonic from a few years back weren't the finest. I actually helped get rid of the Ford one and replaced it with something more pleasing to the ear.”

The McDonald's whistle and Intel bongs seem to work because they're hard-wired to the brand. Intel is a huge tech company, so the futuristic four-note sequence (created by Walter Werzowa, who apparently updates it every year) feels right. And likewise for McDonald's, the chirpy five-note whistle perfectly reflects the brand's populist personality.

Of course, some audio mnemonics are utterly brilliant. They're just not on adverts. The *Close Encounters* five-note sequence. The phone from *Our Man Flint*. John Williams' ominous theme from *Jaws*. All evoke powerful memories, not just of those key moments in the movie, but also bringing back the true essence of the film and the era in which you watched it.

My mate's mum used to sing three notes up the stairs, which always meant only one thing – dinner was on the table. A happy childhood memory.

One of the most famous (and amusing) briefs was given to Brian Eno. It apparently included a list of around 150 adjectives that the company wanted to convey, and ended with “...and no more than 3.8 seconds long”. The resulting sonic logo for Windows was a bit meh. And that's being kind.

If Brian can't nail it, maybe let's just leave it alone?

“Sonic logos are big business. Those three to five seconds at the end of your commercial could apparently make or break a brand.”



- 1 Levi's, Flat Eric
- 2 Levi's, Creek
- 3 Levi's, Laundrette
- 4 Levi's, Odyssey
- 5 John Lewis, The Bear And The Hare
- 6 Honda, Cog

a past Pitch & Sync project composing a welcome sound for Intel's (now defunct) OnCue TV platform. “Intel stands for humanity and anticipation, and we interpreted those values [sonically] as a breath in. You expect a breath out to follow – that's the anticipation – and it also has that human element to it,” he explains.

When it comes to sound design, Anthony Moore, founding partner and creative director at audio specialists Factory, thinks it has moved on from “merely tagging a ‘catchy’ mnemonic onto the end of an ad” to a more holistic approach. He cites Honda and Lurpak as examples of brands that have created a definitive sound ‘style’: “You know exactly where you are with their soundscapes through the distinct feel of quality and craft. But they still manage to push into new areas of creativity by constantly evolving their style.” ▢



“And then there’s the brave new world of virtual reality, an as yet undefined channel for audio branding... It gives us so much more space to mess with.”

Honda has championed an experimental approach to sound design ever since 2003, when *Cog* brought a series of inanimate objects to life through clicks, whirrs and thunks, and that progressive attitude is still winning awards today with recent successes *Inner Beauty*, *Keep Up* and *The Other Side*. “As an engineering company, Honda spends a long time developing products, so we take the same care with our sound design,” says Wieden+Kennedy London’s ECD Tony Davidson.

Take *The Other Side*, where sound and music played just as important a role as the ‘mirrored’ visuals in the spot’s dual narrative. “We began noting sonic moments down in early storyboards: things like the school bell versus the alarm bell have a nice jump when you toggle between them,” recalls creative director Scott Dungate of the process. After toying with various music options – one idea involved recording two versions of the same song, while another employed opposing genres (choral music on the Civic storyline, heavy metal on the Type R) – they settled on different tones with a shared underlying DNA, to help the interactive element feel cohesive. “The constant beat [gave] flow to the experience, whereas sound design and musical flourishes gave the two sides contrast: menacing and edgy versus warm and friendly,” explains Dungate.

While film remains a powerful medium, there are plenty of other ways for brands to make a noise. “A brand today is not what it says it is to people through a well-placed TV ad, it’s what people say it is when they experience it in multiple touchpoints,” says Tommy Zee, creative director at MassiveMusic Amsterdam. “We encourage brands to be intentional and strategic about their use of music. Make songs, break new artists, take the trouble to create something new, build apps, create unbelievable live experiences with sound – this is what great brands know they need to do to be loved by their audience.”

Apps are one such touchpoint where brands can develop their audio identities. Finger recently created a sonic palette representing model Cara Delevingne as part of an augmented reality app by Beats Audio and *Garage* magazine. Brands have also moved beyond simply sponsoring concerts. Last month, Lexus teamed up with singer will.i.am to create a giant motion- and audio-sensitive laser game based around his hit track *#thatPOWER*, while Delta Airlines enlisted New York-based music studio Q Department to compose a soundtrack for its photon shower, created to tackle jetlag in frequent flyers. “It was the ultimate fusion of music and science,” enthuses composer Drazen Bosnjak, who transposed the specific light frequency used in the installation down to an audible range.

Now that’s what I call distinctive audio branding...

And then there’s the brave new world of virtual reality, an as yet undefined channel for audio branding, but one in which Bosnjak sees “a huge opportunity to explore [sound]. It gives us so much more space to mess with.”

One thing is certain: with the proliferation of content across channels – TV, online, mobile – crafting a consistent, distinctive sound has never been more important for brands, says Pitch & Sync’s Robinson. “You’ve got loads of music saying different things, which leads to some very confusing messages for your audiences. It’s a real missed opportunity to align, from an audio point of view, what you stand for as a brand.” Factory’s Moore agrees that developing a style of sound within defined parameters is key, but adds rules should be applied with care: “They shouldn’t be about limiting you, more about guiding and inspiring you to be brave with your sound design, finding new places to explore and own *your* sound.”

Ultimately, concludes MassiveMusic’s Zee, the solution lies in the context: “Who is this for, who is this by, and what do we hope to achieve?” he asks. “If you want your phone number etched in someone’s memory – do a jingle. If you want to move your audience – write simple, honest, powerful songs.”



1 Lexus & will.i.am, #thatPOWER
2 Delta Airlines, Photon Shower
3 Honda, The Other Side

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