



MPSE WAVELENGTH

WINTER 2026

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MOTION PICTURE SOUND EDITORS

**BUILDING A
UNIVERSE
WITH SOUND**
**ORIOLO
TARRAGÓ**

THE MUSIC
OF SOUND
TIM PREBBLE

SOUND MEASURED
AGAINST SILENCE
AKIHIKO OKASE

THEY PARTIED
LIKE IT WAS 1985!
**BACK TO THE
FUTURE 40TH
ANNIVERSARY**

MPSE, SAE INSTITUTE
MEXICO &
TONEBENDERS HOST
MEXICO CITY

THE LAST FOOTSTEP
C5 INC.





Building a Univ

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RIOL TARRAGÓ MPSE is one of the most prolific voices in European sound design. Tarragó has contributed distinguished work on numerous acclaimed features like *The Orphanage*, *The Impossible*, and *Society of the Snow*. His filmography is impressively diverse, as is his list of multiple award wins—he won the Golden Reel Award for both *The Orphanage* and *Society of the Snow* and has been nominated twice on top of that. He was born in Barcelona and is still based there where he's doing most of his work. *MPSE Wavelength* got hold of him while he was busy mixing the upcoming season of *The Night Manager* and he talked enthusiastically about his background, his creative approach to sound design, and his work on several wonderful films.

Oriol Tarragó taking a rest and feeling the stillness and loneliness of the heights. March 11, 2022, Sierra Nevada. Film: *Society of the Snow*.

A man wearing a grey jacket with "HELLY HANSEN" on the sleeve, orange pants, a white helmet, and sunglasses is sitting on a metal folding chair in a snowy mountain landscape. He is holding a red can. In the background, there is a yellow and grey piece of machinery, possibly a snow machine or generator, and some equipment on the left. The ground is covered in snow.

erse with Sound

BY PETER ALBRECHTSEN MPSE

Peter Albrechtsen MPSE:
Where does your interest in sound come from? Do you have some kind of special sonic memory from your childhood?

Oriol Tarragó MPSE: In Spain, the sound designer profession actually never really existed when I was younger, so that kind of work was unrecognised by me. But I suppose I was always a sound designer instinctively, without knowing it. When I was playing games as a kid, I was always making lots of noise and sounds. I was born in 1976, so I grew up with all these amazing films: *Alien*, *Terminator*, *The Goonies*, *Gremlins*, *Blade Runner*, *Star Wars*, *The Never Ending Story*—a plethora of science fiction and imaginative pictures. It felt like every weekend we watched a fantastic and creative movie. I truly loved that and I was spending practically every weekend in the cinema—I went with my family and I went alone. I was born in Barcelona, but I was raised in a small town with a cinema complex that housed several screens. I would sneak in and move between screenings, consuming films from afternoon until evening. Sometimes they caught me at the end, but they knew me, so it was okay. I was also waiting there on Friday when they changed the posters, as I wanted to collect them, to keep them. I was in love with filmmaking; it was my passion. I preferred being there instead of going to the clubs or going out with friends. I felt that place was where I wanted to live.

At that time, cinema studies didn't exist at Spanish universities. But just when I finished my high school, the University of Barcelona started film studies for the first time in



Oriol Tarragó

“I strive to create a sound quality that is inherently musical.”

Spain. Everybody in my family are architects, all of them, so I grew up in a profoundly creative environment. But I said to my family, “Listen, I want to study film.” I thought I would be a production designer, since my family were architects, or maybe a director or director of photography. I didn't know at that point. But then at the university, after a couple of years, we were doing this exercise with these Russian cameras without sound, and you had to explain your story in three minutes. I shot and edited a chase sequence, but I felt something was fundamentally lacking. I wrote down all the timings in the film, went home, and took a cassette. I recorded music from the first *Mission: Impossible* from Brian De Palma and made the music edits fit with the timings. So, when I had to show the exercise to the teacher, I put the film on the projector and the cassette on the stereo and played them at the same time. The exercise was a hit, save for the instructor who said that this should be a silent movie exercise.

And I told him, “I don't understand film without sound.” At that moment, I realised I couldn't do anything else. So, since that moment, when I was like 19 or 20 years old, I realised that I understand the cinematic language primarily through its aural component.

PA: The first time I really remember noticing your name was on the Spanish horror film *The Orphanage* from 2007—that movie became a big international phenomenon back then. The director J.A. Bayona is someone you've worked with often since then. Could you talk about your work on that film?

OT: I was actually studying together with Bayona. We liked a lot of the same movies, which led us to attend the Sitges Film Festival together. It is a festival happening close to Barcelona that has a focus on fantastic, horror, and sci-fi films. We liked the same directors and the same music composers, and it felt like we started sharing a world. I did one of his short films previously and it was a great experience working with him. When we did *The Orphanage*, I had already made three or four features, but for Bayona, it was his first. All of us on the film really committed ourselves entirely because of our deep enthusiasm for the project. Bayona told me, “I want the film to sound like wood. I want everything to sound like wood.” So, I understood that he wanted a very grounded, clearly realistic film. That was how I approached it. We never expected the success of that film. We had a lot of fun making it, and I learned a lot from Bayona.

PA: Afterward, one of your next films was *REC*, which was another Spanish horror film that achieved massive global resonance. It was a terrific early example of the found footage genre with really creative audio design.

OT: Actually, I have to confess that these two projects were made at the same time. Not 100% overlap, but, you know, quite tight, and I was pretty stressed about this. Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza were the directors of *REC*, and they said, “Listen, we’re going to do this movie on an extremely modest budget,” and I loved the idea for the film. I thought it was so wild. The idea was to not have any score and just employ noise and distortion as the film’s primary audio element. I gained profound insights into the dual nature of sound design—both diegetic and non-diegetic—and how to manipulate the audience’s perception to make something feel real and not real at the same time. The directors were open to everything. I remember one scene with the police shooting a gun in a woman’s corridor, and I was struggling to find the appropriate sound. At that time, we were mixing with DFC Neve equipment, and while mixing, I inadvertently routed the sound to the external reverb. I was

using TC electronics, the one with the faders. By mistake, I sent the sound to the reverb, and it totally overloaded and sent back a super distorted sound, and they said: “YES! We like that!” So, this huge distortion of the shot is now in the film. As there was no score, I utilised noises and low-end vibrations instead of music. It never felt fake with all these crazy amplified sounds, plus I used animal sounds for the zombies. I’m so happy with that film, it was just so much fun. There are four *REC* films, and I did three of them.

PA: The next film you did with J.A. Bayona was *The Impossible*, which is the story of a tourist family in Thailand caught in the tsunami back in 2004. Once again, the sound was a very big part of the storytelling of the film. How did you approach this?

OT: For me, it’s always crucial to not just understand the story but also understand the director’s perspective, because any story can be told from different points of view. For the big tsunami sequence in *The Impossible*, Bayona told me that he didn’t want music. He wanted it to achieve authenticity and instil genuine fear. I met the actual survivors, and I met Maria Lidón, the character behind

Naomi Watts. I remember her telling me one thing that inspired me a lot. She told me, “Listen, I didn’t understand what’s happening because we didn’t know what a tsunami was back then.” So, she was telling me that she didn’t understand what she was experiencing. She was lying down in a hotel and suddenly, she’s in water, drowning. Her mind was incapable of processing the unfolding event for several minutes. That chaos, the feeling of being lost—that concept really hit me. But it was immensely hard to tell that story with sound. It was so difficult, and at one point, I actually suggested that we should go with music instead of audio effects. But then one day on the TV, I saw a programme about an earthquake in Spain, and a woman said that her memory of the experience felt chopped up and fragmented. At that moment, I understood that I could recreate that chopped-up and fragmented experience aurally. Every shot in that sequence has a different audio signature, and that’s how I made this long sequence work. Different sounds for each shot, sometimes the water was low, sometimes loud, sometimes wide. Lots of different textures. It was like music, a rhythm—I made it work that way. With this scene, I discovered how



Oriol, talking to all the team after a turnover during the final mix. *Society of the Snow*, Barcelona. August 3rd 2022.



Oriol with Marc Bech sound designer, playing back a scene of *Society of the Snow*. Barcelona. August 3rd 2022.

to imbue raw noise with interest. How to give emotions to the absolute roar of a wide range of water and how to make it musical, rhythmic, dramatic, and narrative. Sound can be all this at once!!

PA: Actually, I remember that the airplane crash from Bayona's latest film, *Society of the Snow*, has the same kind of thing, where every little shot, every little moment, has its own signature moment in a way.

OT: Yes, and the same goes for the avalanche sequence in that film. Again, this was a sequence where Bayona didn't want to use music. He knows what he wants, and he stays true to that throughout. He doesn't tell me technically how he wants to achieve something, but he gives me emotional directions. He affords you a lot of space and a lot of freedom. Sound design can be not just a tool for explaining what you see, but also transmitting emotions. Of course, Bayona gives me feedback along the way, but we just see and hear the movie the same way.

PA: You also did *A Monster Calls*

together with J.A. Bayona, which is about a boy who encounters an ancient tree monster that helps him cope with his mother's illness. The sound of the tree must have been a big challenge?

OT: This was also quite formidable. I connected deeply with the film's subject matter and was immensely invested in the process. Again, I just follow my instinct. It's a tree of 50 meters, so I started out recording vast quantities of wood. We were bringing furniture to the studio and recording lots of different pieces of wood. But in that film, I learned about the scale of sound. The size of an object is paramount to its sound—influencing its loudness, pitch, tone, and timbre. Small wood doesn't sound like huge wood, even if you pitch it down or treat it. It's more complex. So, one day I heard a programme on the radio about these people that take care of the forest after, for example, a fire or a thunderstorm or whatever, if trees are falling. I said, "Man, I have to talk with these guys." And this was before they even started shooting the film. So, I was following

them again and again. One day they just got two trees, and then another day we got five—I was following them for a year—and then later I added all the little acoustic elements that I recorded myself in the studio.

PA: Speaking of tackling big sonic challenges, your next major project with J.A. Bayona took you into the blockbuster realm: *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*. How did you navigate that scale, especially collaborating with the established legacy of Skywalker Sound?

OT: It was an absolute privilege, and a joy to work on a Bayona film of that magnitude. I had collaborated with Skywalker Sound previously on *Crimson Peak*, but this time my involvement was in a more significant capacity. My participation was possible thanks to Bayona directing the film, and specifically because Al Nelson, the film's supervising sound editor, thought it would be interesting to have me on board. This allowed me to work from my base in Barcelona—a tremendous opportunity—working on the *Jurassic* saga was a dream come true.

I decided to focus on the film's prologue, the creature's vocalisations. For the second part of the film, which primarily takes place inside the house and has a more genre-specific profile, I realised that the Indoraptor needed to be truly terrifying. Therefore, I put forward my proposal for the Indoraptor's sound, which was ultimately well received by the team. The Indoraptor is a beast, a genetically manipulated dinosaur designed to be a weapon of defense. We strived to imbue it with a very aggressive, impulsive, and precise personality, incorporating high-frequency screeches and a science fiction-like flavour. We finished the project by mixing it all in London with the legendary Chris Boyes.

PA: There's generally many rich textures in the sounds you're using in



Oriol Tarragó reading personal notes during final mix of *The Impossible*. Deluxe Barcelona. January 2012.



Oriol listening to the silence. Field recording day in the unique Jordà beech forest, La Garrotxa. March 14th 2014.

your work. It feels very musical. How do you collaborate with composers?

OT: Sometimes extensively, sometimes less so. Effective sound design necessitates anticipating the score and avoiding conflict with it. And it goes both ways—good composers also understand how to construct a score that has room for the sound effects. So, it's a collaboration. It's not a battle. I guess the reason you feel that my audio work is very musical is because I focus heavily on manipulating frequencies to sculpt the aural space. And it's not just about working with frequency ranges, but also with rhythm. A sound can possess an internal rhythm, and there can also be a rhythm created between different sounds. By combining rhythm and frequency among sounds, sometimes in an almost unconscious way, and other times in a more deliberate and intentional manner, I strive to create a sound quality that is inherently musical. On occasion, you might even try to break that rhythm to evoke a different sensation or to generate a change in the viewer's

perception. I did a movie with Denis Villeneuve called *Enemy*, scored by Danny Bensi and Saunder Jurriaans, which is one of my favourites where sound and music blended together in

special ways. Working with Michael Giacchino in *Society of the Snow* was also really special. I feel that movie was a great dance between music and sound design. That's how it should be.



Oriol recording and testing the 8-mic (bubble quad) BP3600 Audiotecnica at Circuit de Catalunya, Montmeló, during a MotoGP sprint race day May 26, 2024. Film: *IDOLS*.