

# Making



# Objects

# Speak

## Wisdom Paper: Finding Music and Background Sounds Tours 1 and 2

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Next to researching the various artifacts on my tours, choosing appropriate music for the tours was my favorite podcasting activity. I learned that music, as well as other sound effects, can enhance an audio tour in several ways. Chosen properly, it can help set or change the tone of a tour. Music can fill the pauses in a tour in which the listener stops to sketch, make lists, or do other slow-looking exercises, as well as to walk to the next object or site on the tour. Like quotations inserted in a tour in a different voice, music also breaks the monotony of a single voice, and together with sound effects, it can enhance what is being said. Finally, well chosen music, like the music in a film, can provide a tour with aural unity.

When I was writing my tours, I found myself thinking about potential musical background almost all the time. I attend many classical music concerts by both orchestras and chamber groups, and it seemed that every concert I attended when I was writing my tours provided one or more ideas for whatever tour I was working on. Because my tours concern the ancient classical world from which only a few snippets of music have survived, I was free to wander through later classical music at random. And because I was listening to music AS I was writing the tours, I had in mind the sorts of musical excerpts I wanted for particular tracks, for example, something martial and bellicose for a track discussing a battle painted on a Greek funeral urn, or something light and cheerful for a garden scene painted on the wall of a Roman villa.

Also, because I had almost no ancient music to sample, I decided for the Homer tours that I wanted non-melodic or unusual modern music that listeners would not recognize or associate with later historical periods (no Vivaldi, for ex.). But for my Roman tour, I decided to use excerpts from Ottorino Respighi's music inspired by Roman ruins—a sort of insider's joke, I guess. Bits of Respighi, for example, his musical imitation of a great fountain shooting up, struck me as very appropriate for the grandeur of some of the Roman galleries, especially the Metropolitan Museum's Roman Courtyard.

If you are making an audio tour that concerns a historical period from which we do have

musical materials, for example, the Renaissance or the American Civil War, you can easily sample musical materials from that period, for example, Renaissance madrigals or Civil War songs. When using songs, however, I found that a song's words could interfere with my own voice narrating the words of the tour, so it might be best to save sung words for pauses, such as when listeners are sketching or walking to the next stop, and to use purely instrumental segments as background for your own voice narrating the tour's script.

The length of an excerpt you could use legally without having to worry about getting permission to use it depends on the length of the musical piece. You can use two minutes or ten

per cent of the whole, whichever is shorter. So for a piece of music that's four minutes long, you could use 24 seconds free. While 24 seconds doesn't sound like a lot, if you consider that you can repeat an excerpt, perhaps with a short break in between filled by words, 24 seconds is quite enough to set the tone of a track and to enhance and unify the speaker's words. In several of my tracks, I inserted the music near the beginning of a track, stopped it after the allowed time, and then repeated the same excerpt near the end of the track, allowing the listener some walking music to the next spot on the tour. This technique of repeating a musical excerpt at different points of a tour can also unify the tour's various tracks. I found myself using some Respighi at the start of my Roman tour and then again at the very end. For walking music to take listeners to the next stop on your tour, about 20 seconds of music should be sufficient, but it's a good idea to walk your tour yourself to time these intervals.

In putting together my Homer tours, I was a bit timid about using sound effects because I wasn't sure where to find them or how to insert them effectively into my tours. But I discovered that the Internet is now full of sites on which I could access a wide variety of sounds for free. All I had to do is enter the sound I wanted into a search engine, and voila! I also discovered that a very short sound, for ex., six seconds of swordplay, can be repeated over and over to create the effect of continuous sound. By the time I was writing my Roman tour, I had learned that sound effects can easily be combined with musical excerpts to create a real mood or tone for a track.

For example, there are both the sounds of birds chirping and water flowing and music on the track of my Roman tour that describes an outdoor scene painted on a villa's wall. While I myself did not insert the music and sound effects, I watched our sound technician do a few insertions and could see that a program like Garageband makes this process relatively easy. The loudness of the music or sound effect can also be adjusted so as not to drown out or distract from the narrator's voice. As I put together the final versions of my tours before recording them, I made sure to time each track by reading it aloud as I would record it so that I would know exactly where the 24 seconds of music or the looped sound of swordplay or birds chirping should be inserted. I would indicate to the technician that the music be inserted at the start or end of a sentence as if the music itself were a new thought to be considered. In my Greek tours, I also used the sound of a reconstructed Greek lyre being plucked as the signal of the end

of a track so the listener would know it was time to walk on. Any sound would do as a signal, but I enjoyed using one appropriate to the tour itself.

While choosing the music for an audio tour is necessarily an adjunct to researching and writing the script of the tour itself, and an activity that has to come after the script has been drafted, I found it very rewarding to turn away from words to look for the sounds that I thought would best capture the mood of particular tracks. Like the research of the various ancient artifacts I highlight on my tours, listening for appropriate music is so far from my normal work that it gave me a great deal of pleasure. I had a good excuse to listen to music!