

PRODUCING AUDIO-VISUALS (AVs) in PROSHOW GOLD®

By Philip Smithies

Although I've devoted the majority of this article to describing how to produce an AV in ProShow Gold, I'll start by summarising the software available for PCs.

FREE AV SOFTWARE FOR PCs

I don't know of anyone who has tried free software. The reviews I have read suggest that the programmes often have serious limitations (e.g. no way of adding text or saving in an exportable format. Technical support will be very limited) and you are likely to have to pay for an upgrade to a fully functional product. Beware that some software may be associated with the undesirable adware, etc. I would urge you to read impartial reviews before proceeding further. That said, the following reviews may be of interest:

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/dvd-slideshow-gui.htm-0>

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/content/socusoft-photo-video-converter.htm-0>.

NON-FREE SOFTWARE FOR PCs

The best-known products are *PicturesToExe (PTE) (Essentials or Deluxe)*, *ProShow Gold (PSG)* and *ProShow Producer (PSP)*

PicturesToExe is more popular in the UK than *ProShow* products. Just as DeLuxe is the big brother of Essentials, so Producer is Gold's big brother. All can be downloaded on a trial basis.

These costs were correct on 14 July 2017.

ProShow Gold: £53.78; ProShow Producer: £192.16. Cheapest Upgrade from Gold to Producer: £154.29; PicturesToExe £53.05 or £106.86 depending on the version ("Essentials" or "DeLuxe").

ProShow offer a fifteen percent discount to my contacts on any product purchased before Christmas. ProShow Gold would therefore cost you around £46. Please contact me for further details (philip.smithies@hotmail.co.uk)

ProShow Main Website:

<http://www.photodex.com/>

<http://www.photodex.com/try> Trial Download for two weeks

Tutorials – online guides to the software

<http://files.photodex.com/docs/manuals/ProShowProducer8.pdf>

<http://files.photodex.com/docs/manuals/ProShowGold8.pdf>

PicturesToExe Main website:

<http://www.wnsoft.com/>

Trial Download for thirty days

Tutorials:

<http://docs.picturestoexe.com/en/main>

http://docs.picturestoexe.com/en/main_menu/file

PicturesToExe (Essentials) is about the same price as *ProShow Gold*. It features keyframes (extremely useful) which *Gold* still does not. There is little difference in the quality of the finished product, so in that respect it doesn't matter which you use. Shows can be published as executables or movie files. The latter are more flexible and of very high quality but are much larger in size. At close viewing distances, the quality of PTE executables is significantly better than ProShow's. The ProShow products seem (to me) to be more user-friendly and easier to use. If I were starting from scratch, I would find it very difficult to decide which product to go for.

YOUTUBE TUTORIALS

YouTube has a large number of excellent video tutorials. Just search for "name of Product" and "tutorials"

OTHER PRODUCTS

Links which compare AV software for PCs:

<http://photo-slideshow-software-review.toptenreviews.com/index.html>

<http://www.toptenreviews.com/software/multimedia/best-photo-slideshow-software/>

I don't know of anybody in Tonbridge Camera Club – or indeed elsewhere – who has any first-hand experience of the other products (many of which are reviewed very positively).

MAC SOFTWARE

I have no direct experience of Mac software. However, Fotomagico seems to be very popular (<https://boinx.com/fotomagico/>). Google "slide show software for Macs" for alternatives.

EASE OF USE OF SOFTWARE

AV/"Slide Show" software is much more intuitive and easy to use than photo editing software like Photoshop. The guide that follows just gives the basics – ProShow and PicturesToExe are very powerful programmes indeed and capable of much much more than is shown here.

VIEWING THIS DOCUMENT

If it's hard to see the contents of the screenshots, zoom in by using "CTRL + scroll wheel"

Important note: The guide which follows describes the stages in creating an AV in ProShow Gold Version 5. The current release is Version 8 but the basics remain the same. Other software is very similar.

Double-click on the desktop icon to open the programme.

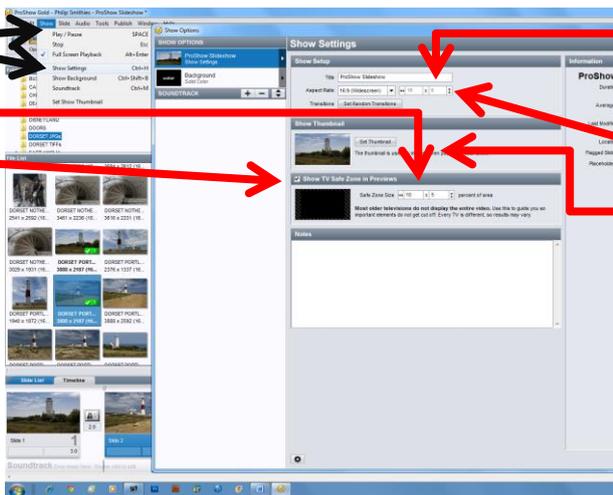
SETTING THE SHOW PARAMETERS

FIG 1

Click on Show→Show Settings
The “Show Settings” Dialogue Box appears.

- 1 Change these values to “0”
- 2 Untick this box (to prevent the irritating hatched borders from appearing (shown in a few screenshots but removed from many)).

Note: sometimes the “New Empty Show” Box appears when ProShow is opened. Untick the “Show at Start-up” box and close.



- 3 Create a title (this does not have to be the same as the filename and may be changed at any time)
- 4 Decide on the *Aspect Ratio (4:3, 16:9 or custom)
- 5 No need for a thumbnail

Then press “OK” at the bottom right.

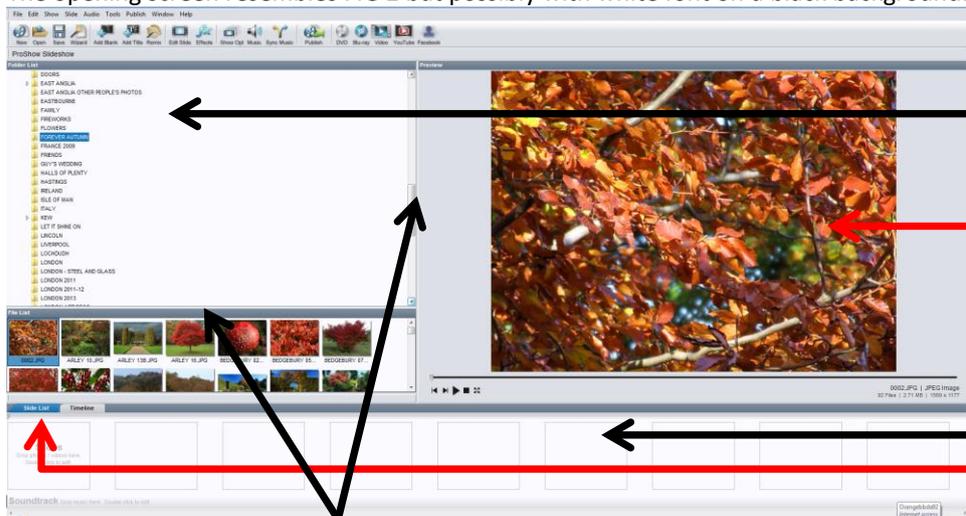
*The Aspect Ratio used by most clubs’ projectors is 4:3 but most monitors and some projectors are 16:9. Most of my AVs use the 16:9 ratio. Either ratio can be played on any computer. If, for example, you played a 16:9 show on a 4:3 monitor, there would be black spaces at the top. You can change the aspect ratio at any time, but you would have to make some adjustments to the images.

You are now ready to create the show.

OPENING SCREEN

FIG 2

The opening screen resembles FIG 2 but possibly with white font on a black background. This can easily be changed (see next page)



Navigate to the relevant folder(s) to access the images you’ll be using

The “Preview Screen”

Timeline / slide list
Default is “Slide List” tab which is generally more useful

Click and drag at these points if you wish to resize the main windows:

Then click “Save” (CTRL + S). Choose a file name and save it in the appropriate folder. The file extension will be .psh. The name of the show will now appear at the very top of the screen. Note: you can have different titles (FIG 3) and file names.

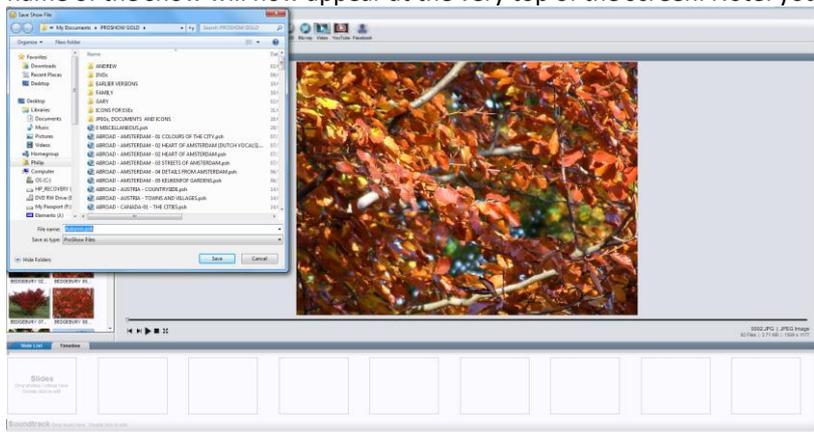


FIG 3

See section on “FILE TYPES” and “IMAGE SIZES” on page 14.

SAVING and STORING PROSHOW FILES

I suggest that you create a new folder (with a shortcut on the desktop and/or taskbar) so that everything is stored and saved in the same place (with subfolders if required). This will make organisation so much easier.

No matter what software you use, if you move your images to different folders, the next time you open the show you be told that the files can't be found. You will be asked if you want to search for these files. Tick the "Yes" box that appears and follow the on-screen instructions. However, please note that if you **rename** images (rather than just move them), the software – understandably – will never find them.

Save your work regularly.

PSG is fairly stable but, like all software, it does have its uncooperative moments. Incidentally, you can UNDO beyond the last save – in fact, back to the state of the show when it was opened. Unfortunately, there is no direct "Revert" option.

IF IN DOUBT...

A basic rule for most Windows programmes: if in doubt, RIGHT-click to bring up a context menu.

PREFERENCES / CUSTOMISING YOUR SHOWS

At some stage, it is useful to go to Edit → Preferences to customise your shows e.g. set up standard default times, choose screen colours, etc. I prefer black font on a lighter background; others prefer the default white font on a black background.

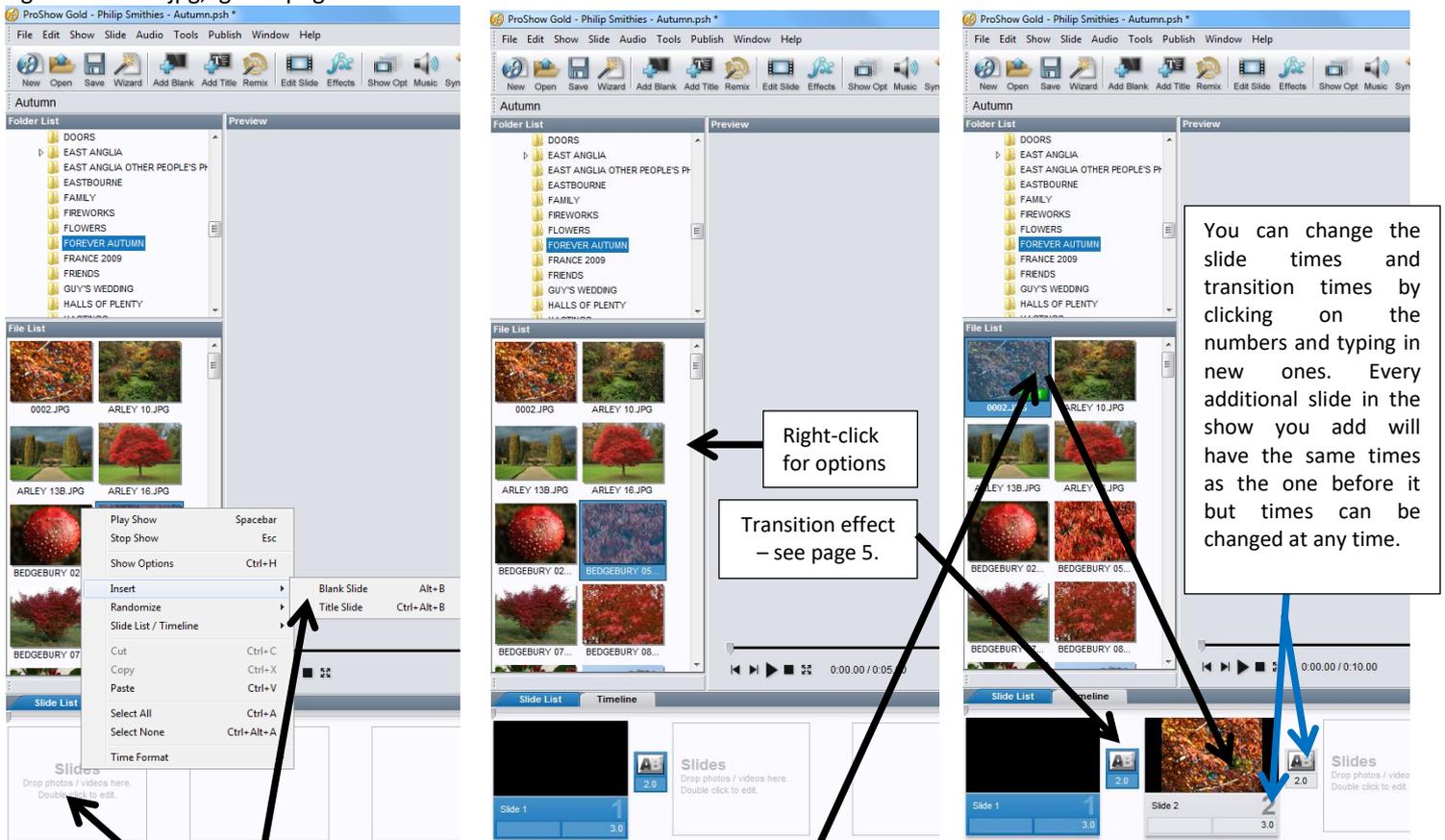
CREATING AN AV USING "THE WIZARD"

The Wizard Tool has changed enormously since the first version of this guide. I suggest you read pages 110-120 of the User Guide (<http://files.photodex.com/docs/manuals/ProShowGold8.pdf>) for an overview of the process.

PREPARING THE SHOW – ADDING SLIDES

Images can be in .jpg, .gif or .png format.

FIGS 4, 5, 6



OPTIONAL: Right-click here and select "Insert" → Blank Slide" from drop-down list (or ALT+B). A blank slide at beginning (and end) ensures smooth entry into (and exit from) show. I set the time of the blank slides to 0.25 seconds

Navigate to the relevant folder and drag the first slide in (alternatively, just double-click the slide). Add the rest of the slides (singly or in multiple).

Images can be added at any time and to anywhere in show. PSG will put a green tick and number in the File List by each picture that's been added to the show. Your screen will resemble Fig 7. Clicking on an image in either the timeline (the "thumbnail") or file list will bring it up on the main (Preview) screen. (Double-clicking brings up the "Slide options" box.)

The timings in Fig 6 Slide 2 are the default settings that I use for every slide. You can change all defaults and lots more besides in Edit → Preferences.

You can also drag in slides directly from Windows Explorer (e.g. from "My Pictures").

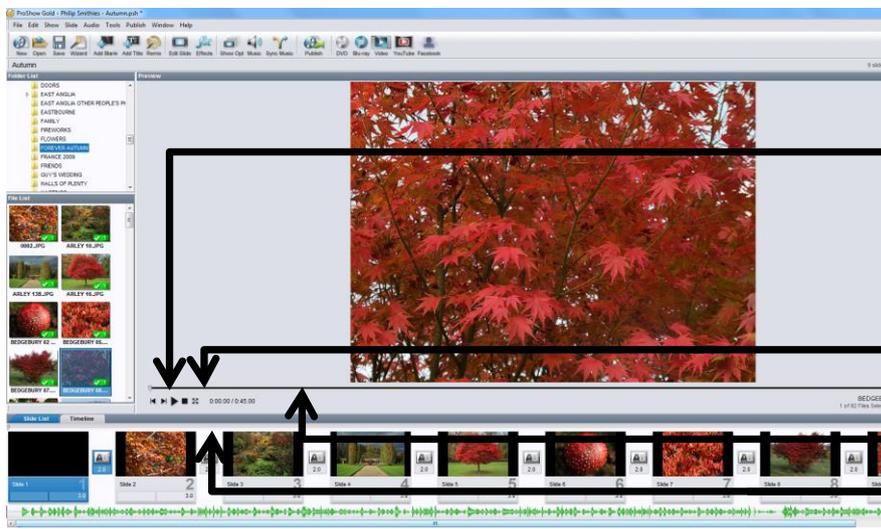
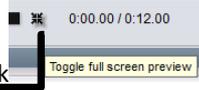


FIG 7

Whenever you want to see what the show looks like, simply click the "Play Button"

To toggle between full-screen and preview screen:

- EITHER click "ALT + ENTER"
- OR click  (+ESC to cancel)

Drag along either of these two bars to see a speeded-up version

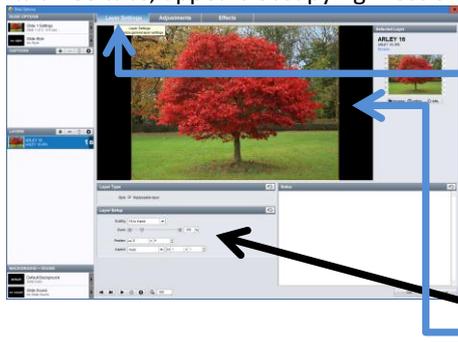
A slide can be repositioned by clicking it and moving it using the left (<) and right (>) arrows on the keyboard (below the "K" and "L" keys). To select more than one slide, use the standard Windows techniques:

- "CLICK" on the first and then "CTRL + click" to select additional slides
- "CLICK" on the first slide and then "SHIFT + click" on the final slide

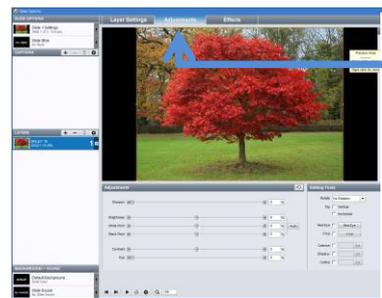
Standard useful shortcuts are CTRL+X/C to cut/copy and CTRL+V to paste. The image(s) will be pasted **before** the image you click on. Insert a blank slide at the end if necessary.

ESSENTIAL SLIDE ADJUSTMENTS

Double-click on the slide thumbnail at the bottom of the screen (#5 in this case) to be modified and the "Slide Options" dialogue box, with its three tabs, appears occupying most of the screen. **FIGS 8 and 9**



LAYER SETTINGS tab
Click on "Layer Settings" tab. The majority of your images will not completely fill the available space because their aspect ratio is different from your choice in Figs 4 and 5 (for example, most cameras have a 3:2 aspect ratio). Adjust the figures here and/or drag the image/four handles to fill the screen.



ADJUSTMENTS tab
The "Adjustments" tab, as its name suggests, enables a large number of basic (non-destructive) adjustments to be made e.g. add a border (Outline) or convert to monochrome (illogically called "Colourise").

EFFECTS tab

This tab enables you to create image movement such as pans and zooms (in or out) or combinations thereof. In this example, when the slide is played, the effect will be to zoom in on the building.

Click the "Effects" tab.

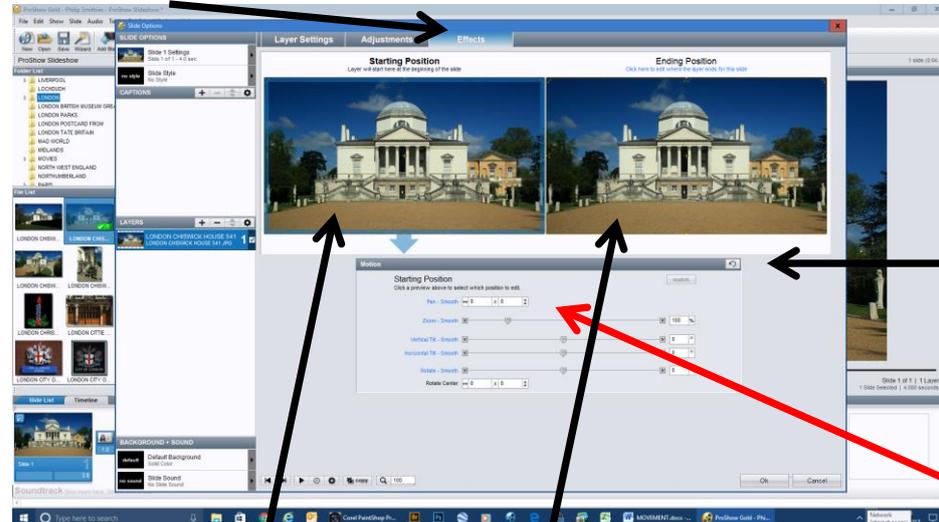


FIG 10

This button returns settings to their default values.

Click in the "Starting Position" Box. If necessary, change values for "Starting Position" by changing numbers and/or dragging sliders and/or dragging the image. Then click on "Ending Position" to make changes there. See FIG 11.

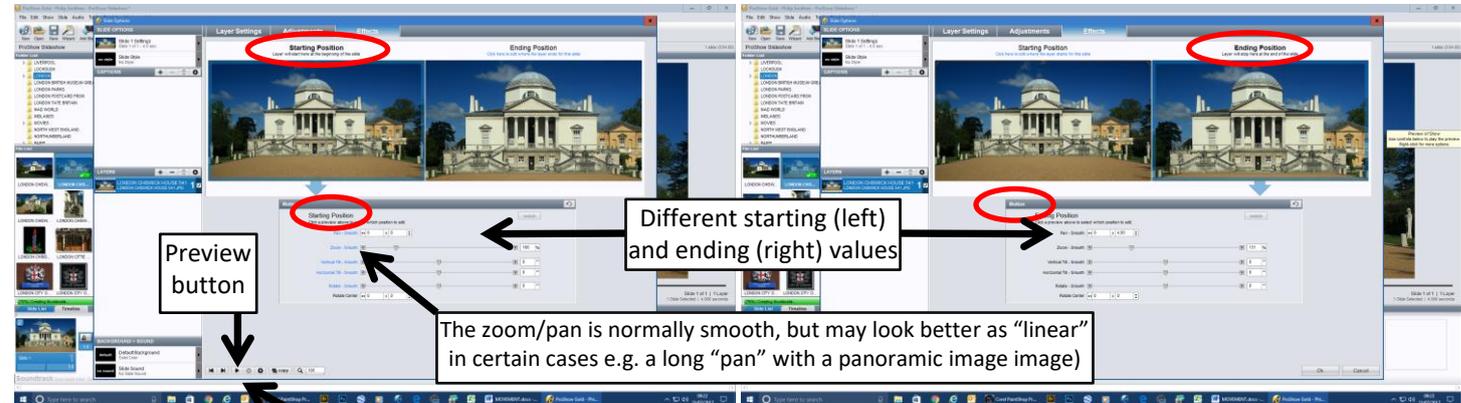


FIG 11

Check the effect by clicking "Preview"

You can move to the next / previous slides by clicking the buttons to the left of the "Preview" button.

You should consider extending the length of the slide if you are using a large zoom (in or out) or sweeping pan. However, as a general principle, only employ movement for a purpose and not for the sake of it.

Even if you don't prefer not to use movement, you should, at the very least, use the "Layer Settings" option to ensure that that image fills the screen and/or is correctly positioned and/or sized.

You might want to explore the "Tilt" and "Rotate" options. ProShow Producer and PicturesToExe feature "keyframes" which enable very complex motion effects to be created. The absence of keyframes is a serious weakness of ProShow Gold in my opinion. Contact me if you would like more information.

TRANSITION EFFECTS

By default, each transition (the way in which one image fades to the next) is a linear cross-fade – shown as on the slide list. When you click on a transition, this full screen box appears with a range of different effects.

FIG 12



Clicking on any transition effect in this box gives a preview in the top left corner. The drop-down list shows a large range of alternatives. Double-click on the effect to apply it or click "Apply". The screen also shows at the bottom right the most recently used effects which can be applied directly. Don't overdo the transitions you use – simple is usually best.

CAPTIONS

Double-click on the relevant slide (a blank one if you prefer) then click on the "Captions" tab and the "+" to create captions:

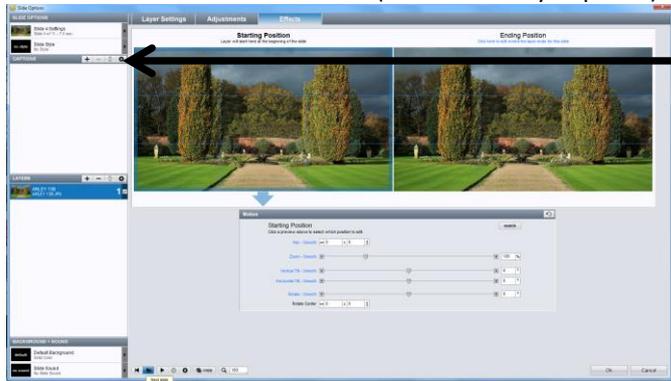


FIG 13

This box in Fig 14 appears:

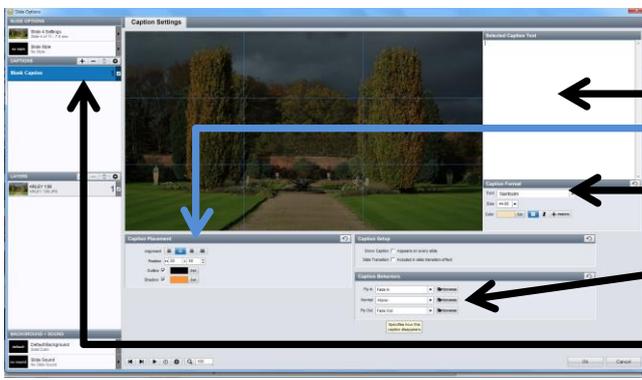


FIG 14

- Type text here
- Choose placement, etc. here
- Choose format here
- Choose caption behaviour here. "Browse" gives a preview.
- Clicking on "+" enables the addition of extra captions, with different effects if required.

The caption can be resized and repositioned by clicking and dragging, or by typing numbers into the appropriate boxes. In Gold, the caption lasts just very slightly less than the slide; unfortunately, you cannot alter the duration. Again, don't overdo the effects.

SOUNDTRACK

Click "Show → Soundtrack", then "+", then "Add Sound File". In the box that appears, navigate to relevant folder and song, click "Open" and then "O.K." You can use more than one piece of music as described below.

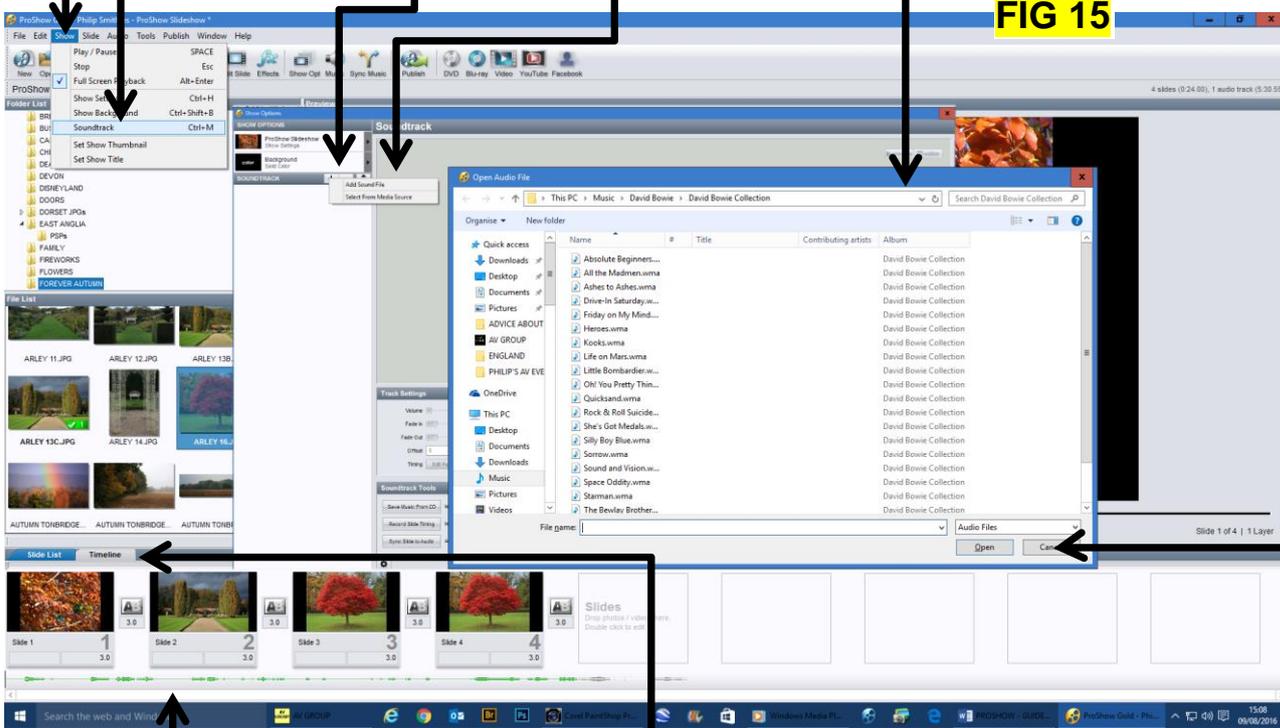


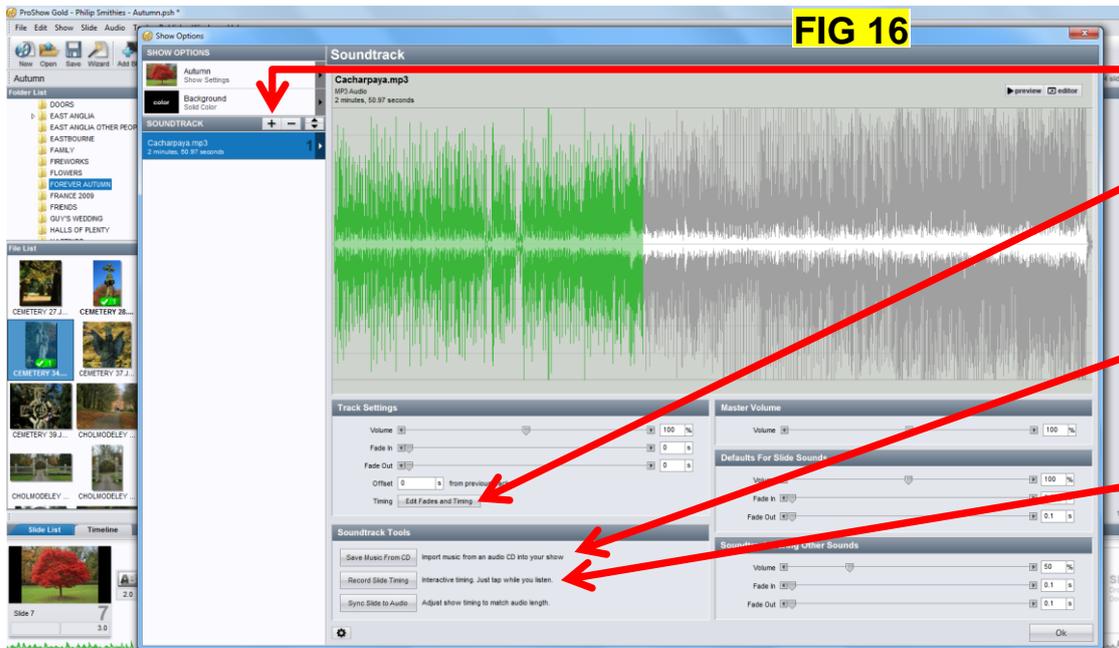
FIG 15

This is the waveform for the music track. Switching to "Timeline" enables additional changes to be made to the sounds. Many sound formats can be used but .mp3 is preferable.

(Note: if the song is visible in the folder/slide list on the left, you can just drag it to the timeline)

After you click open, the "Soundtrack" box will appear as shown in Fig 16.

BASIC SOUNDTRACK EDITING

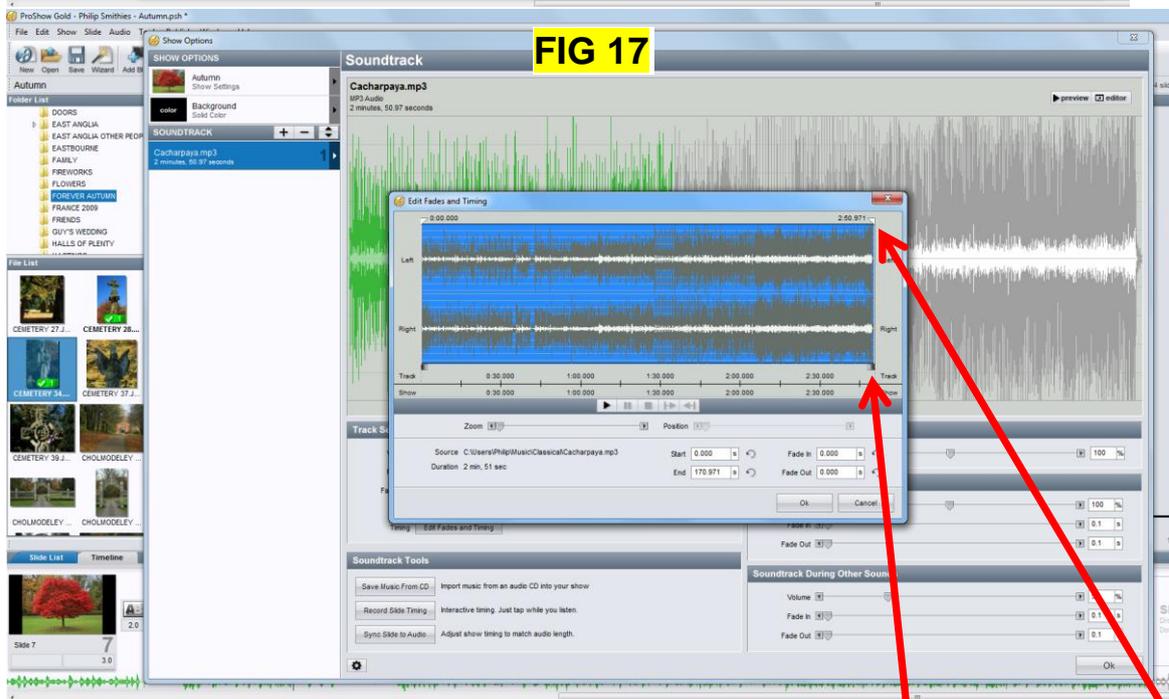


Click on the “+” and navigate to add additional music.

You can make some basic edits by clicking “Edit Fades and Timing” which brings up the dialogue box (Fig 17) below.

Importing music from a CD is not recommended as the quality isn't as high.

Explore this option when you want to match the “beat” of the music exactly with the duration of the slide.



Hold the cursor over each icon to see what it does. For example, you can fade out music, or cut it short using the sliders or entering values in the boxes. However, it's normally far more effective to edit music properly. “Audacity” is free downloadable user-friendly music-editing software which offers a huge range of effects as those in all AV software are very basic indeed. “Audacity” is available for both PCs and Macs. See <http://www.audacityteam.org/download/>. (This is one free software I have no hesitation in recommending)

Version 8 has a much-improved “Timeline” window and it is possibly easier to make changes there.

VOICEOVERS/COMMENTARIES

Adding voiceovers/commentaries to create a “documentary” type AV is beyond the scope of this document but straightforward to do – but very difficult to do well. You will no doubt have heard countless examples of poor voiceovers – creating good ones is an art in itself.

If you're interested in adding voiceovers, Richard Gandon's informative AV about adding voiceovers/ commentaries to AVs is on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxGLpcqjdgE&feature=youtu.be>.

It seems nowadays that the most successful AVs in competitions are likely to be in a documentary style.

ADDITIONAL SLIDE ADJUSTMENTS: LAYERS

You can have two (or more) images (“layers”) in the same slide/frame, with effects being set individually for each. To add a second image, hold down the CTRL key and drag an image from the file list on top of an existing slide. Repeat as many times as desired. Layers are useful when you want to include images which are square(-ish) or in portrait format side-by-side as in the example below. This avoids having images only occupying a fraction of the screen – something which looks unattractive.

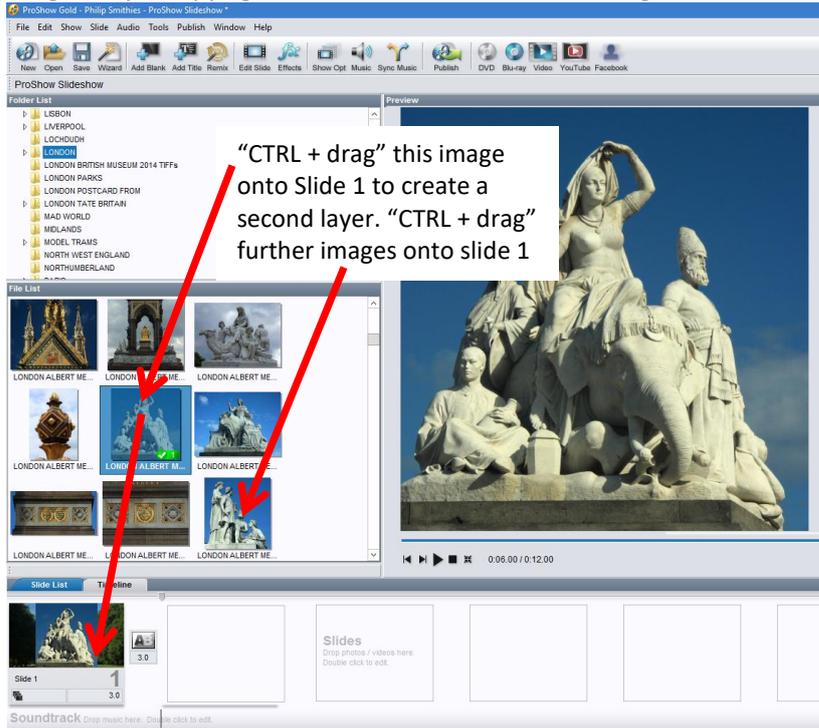


FIG 18

Then double-click the image to open the “Slide Options” box and modify each layer as shown in Fig 19:

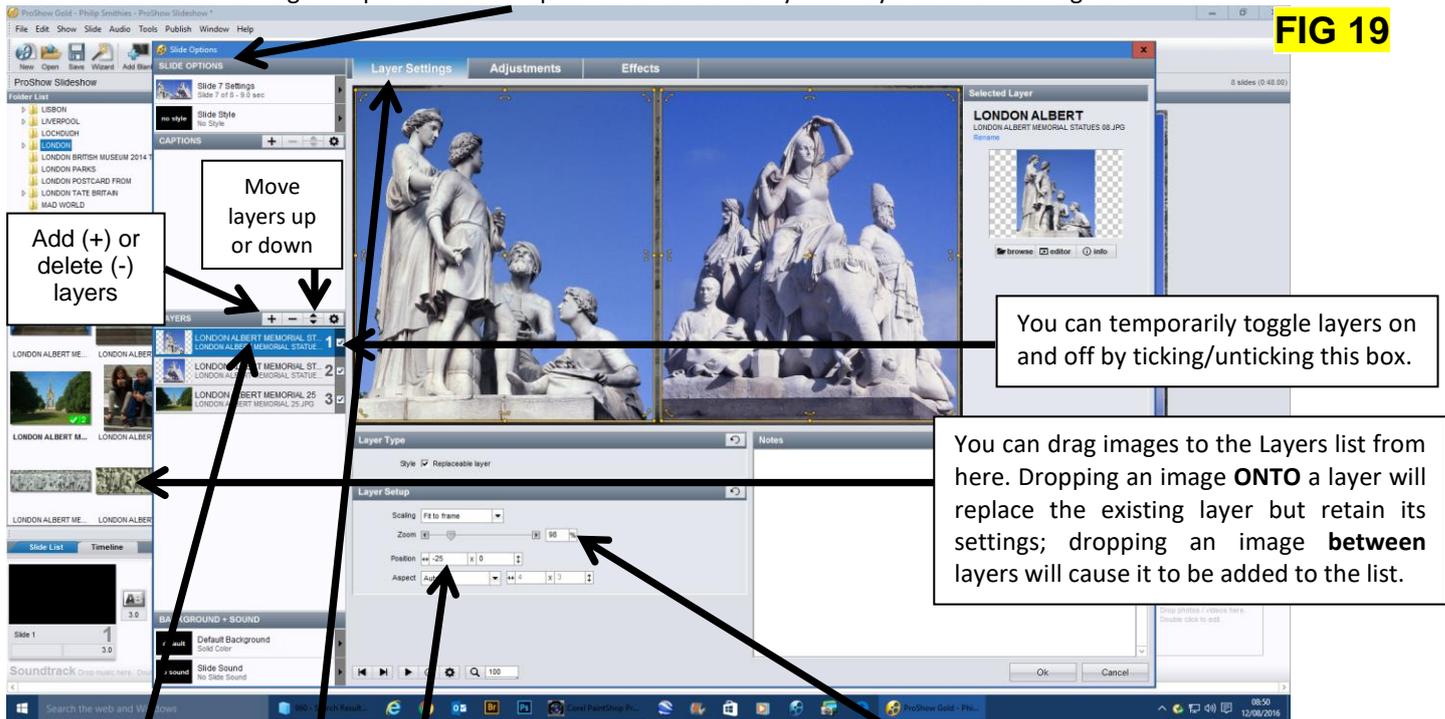


FIG 19

Click each layer in the “Layer Settings” tab to position image.

The two top images are set at -25, 0 and +25, 0, respectively and the zoom is set at 98%. Layers can also be repositioned by dragging or using CTRL + ← or ↑ or → or ↓. A white border (Outline) has been added from the “Adjustments” tab. The bottom layer (which completely fills the screen) is an image from earlier in the show but modified in the “Adjustments” tab – turned to monochrome (“Colourised”), “Blurred” and the “Brightness” increased. As mentioned earlier, changes made in the “Adjustments” tab do not affect the original image. The preview window now looks like Fig 20:



FIG 20

Note: when you first add a layer to a file, it will partially or totally obscure the layer below, depending on its aspect ratio. By double-clicking on the slide and opening the “Slide Options” box, you will see that all the layers are there.

.PNG FILES

Png. files are exceptionally useful as they can be partially transparent thus enabling the creation of countless special effects. Fig 21 is a basic .png version of the statue in Fig 20



FIG 21

To create this, I made a selection of the figures in the image on the right of Fig 20 in Photoshop. I copied it to a new file and saved it as a .png file. This preserved only the selection with the background becoming completely transparent.

Many of the effects seen in AVs can only be achieved by using .png files.

STYLES

Consider exploring the Slide Styles tab in the "Slide Options" box.



This video link is useful, even though it only covers version 4: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rc-WEL_bPg&NR=1. There are a range of other YouTube videos which may be helpful.

Don't overdo the use of "Slide Styles".

PLAYBACK

The show can be played back at any point. (Go to Edit → Preferences to set quality)

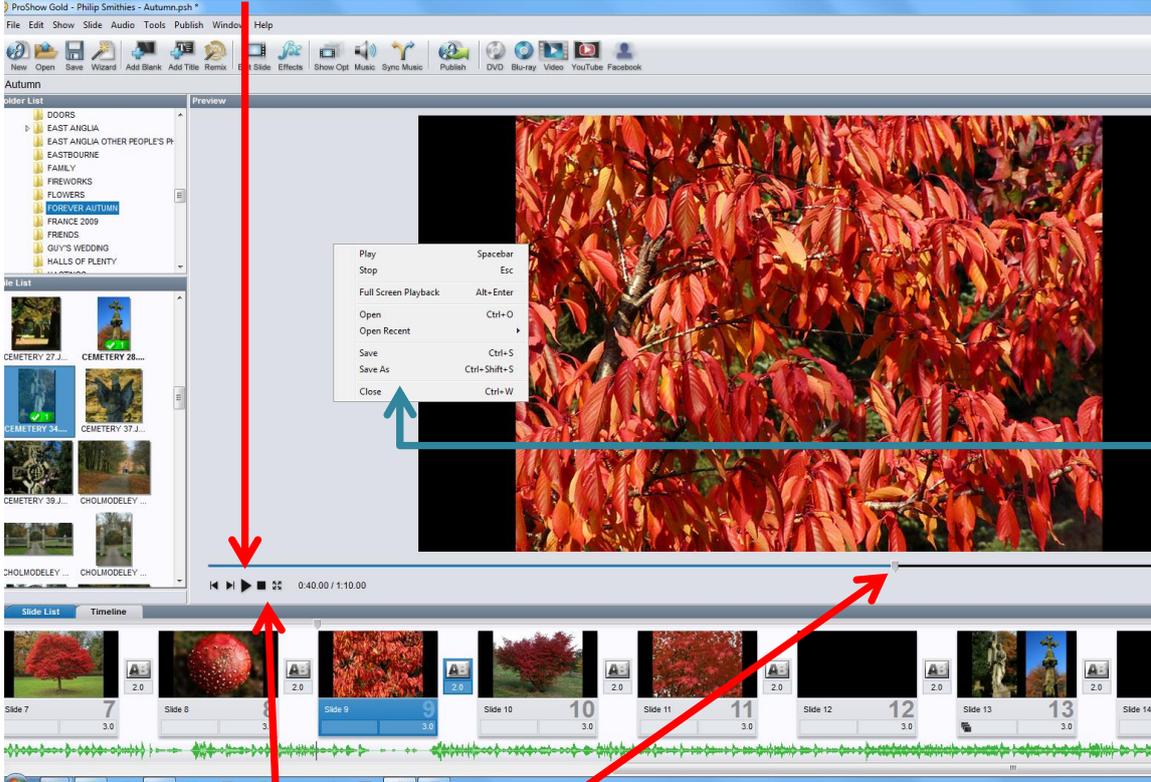


FIG 22

Right-clicking in the grey area gives these useful options. ALT + ENTER toggles between full-screen playback and Preview screen.

Hold your cursor over these buttons and drag this slider to investigate their effects

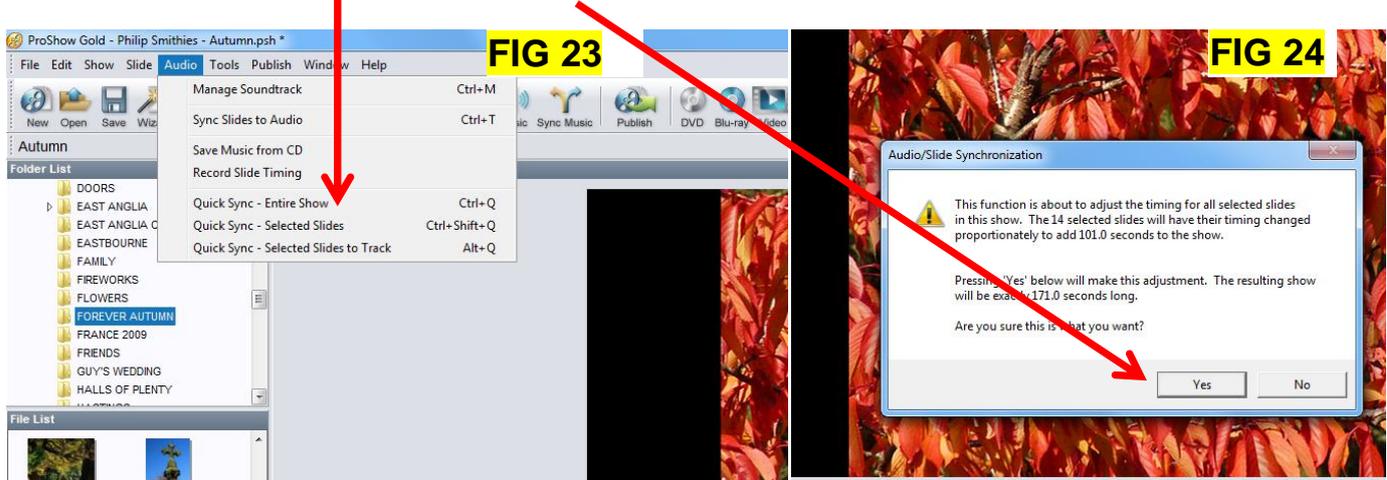
INCORPORATING VIDEOS

In <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMSgrlPS3ts>, Gavin Hoey gives a clear demonstration of how to add and edit video. Because modern dSLRs can take high-quality videos, AV-users are increasingly making use of this facility. It has to be acknowledged that some in the AV world frown upon their use (for reasons that escape me).

SYNCHRONISING PICTURES AND MUSIC

It's unlikely that the music and the slide show will be exactly the same length. A *simple* way to address this is to select all (CTRL + A) or some of the slides and go to:

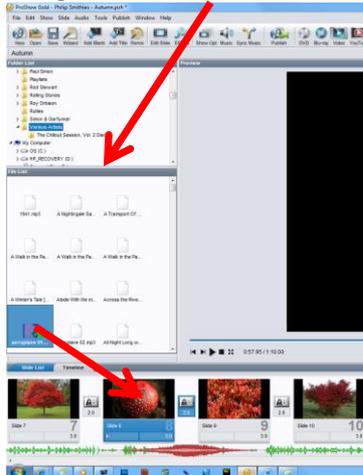
Audio → Quick Sync – Selected Slides and click “Yes” when prompted.



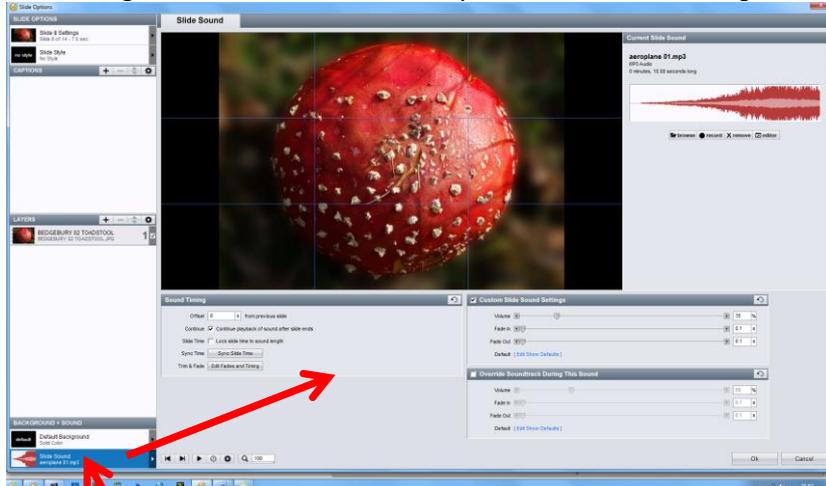
Sometimes, if the two times are very close, modifying the timings of one or both end blank slides may be sufficient. I must emphasise that this is the simple way to deal with the issue and is not suitable if you exactly want to synchronise a particular section of music with a particular image. If that is the case, you will have to tweak individual slide lengths and/or make use of the “Sync Slide to Audio” button in Fig 16.

ADDING SOUND EFFECTS ON TOP OF EXISTING MUSIC TRACK

Navigate to the folder which contains the effect (e.g. the sound of traffic) you wish to add:



CTRL + drag the sound to the slide where you want the sound to begin. Then double-click on the slide:



Edit the sound accordingly. Explore the “Timeline” option for a more sophisticated approach.

This is one site which has some free downloadable (.mp3) sound effects: <http://www.mediacollege.com/downloads/sound-effects/>

PUBLISHING THE AV – CREATING “MOVIE” FILES and/or EXECUTABLES

Finally, the show must be converted into a playable form – either a **movie** file (e.g. .avi, .mov or .mp4) or an **executable** (.exe) or both. Movie files are much larger and take longer to create but are of higher quality and can be played on both PCs and Macs – and also “SMART” TVs. External competitions until recently insisted on executables but most now also allow movie files.

CREATING AND PLAYING EXECUTABLES

For full details, see <http://www.kcpa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/PROSHOW-CREATING-EXECUTABLES.pdf>

When the show is complete and saved, you can create an executable for use on your own and other computers. To ensure that the show satisfies competition criteria (i.e. opens instantly at full-screen when the file-name is double-clicked and without an intermediate display), amend the various settings as described in the link. If you would like your own copy, please contact me on philip.smithies@hotmail.co.uk

Executables can be copied to a CD, memory stick or hard drive and played on any PC (including, of course, the one on which they were created). Executables *cannot* be played on TVs or on *Macs whereas movie files can. Executables play automatically when the filename is double-clicked and no software is needed to do this.

One of the weaknesses of ProShow, in my opinion, is that the quality of executables, at least when viewed closely, was not as good as PictureToExe’s. I therefore always created a movie file rather than an executable. However, this problem has been addressed in ProShow 9.

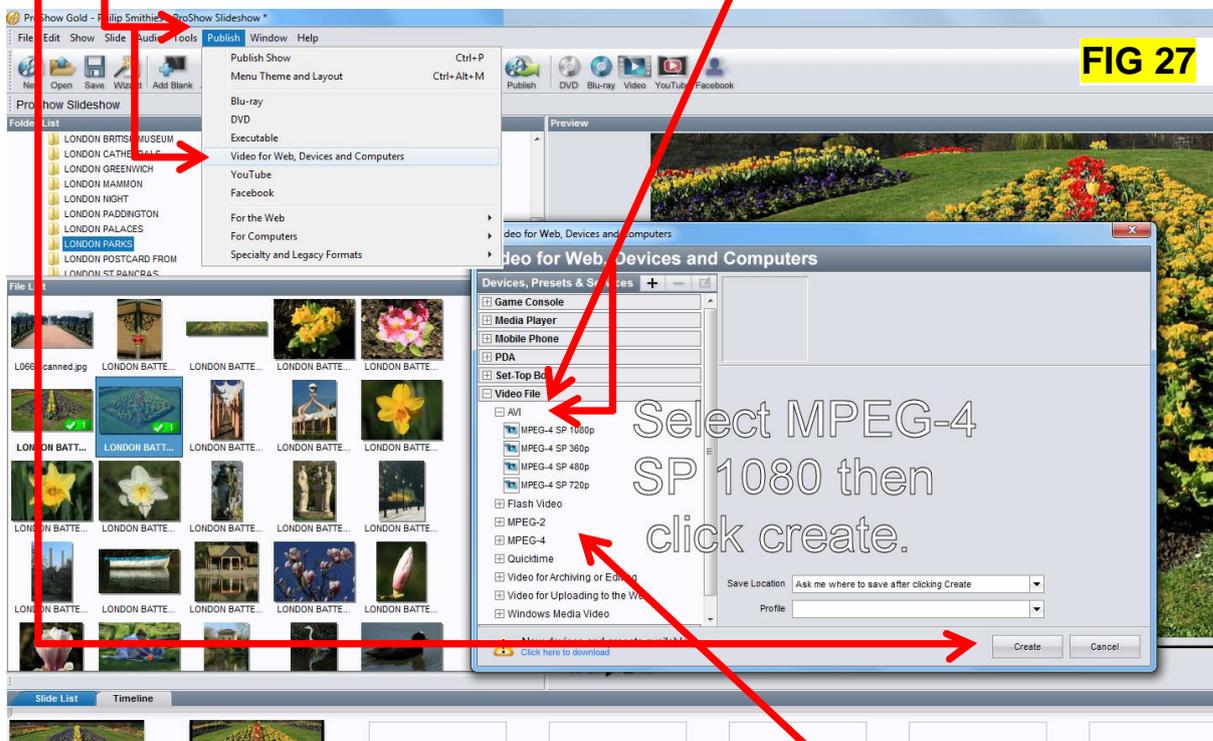
Anti-virus software can sometimes refuse to allow executables to play and may quarantine them. One way round this may be to right-click on the file-name and select “File Insight” from the menu that appears and investigate the options available. Choosing “Trust Now” is highly desirable.

When executables (.exe) are created, they may be fragmented – sometimes into hundreds of pieces. If you find your executable doesn’t play smoothly, you might consider defragmenting your computer (particularly an older / less powerful machine).

*PTE apparently now offers the option to create an executable which can be played on a Mac.

CREATING AND PLAYING MOVIE FILES (e.g. .AVI FILES)

Movie files (e.g. .avi files) are a higher quality alternative to executables and are easily created as shown below: Go to “Publish” → “Video for Web, Devices and Computers” → Video File → AVI. Select MPEG-4 SP 1080 (for .avi format) and then click “Create” The file takes much longer to produce than an executable – roughly two minutes for every minute of show. (FIG 27)

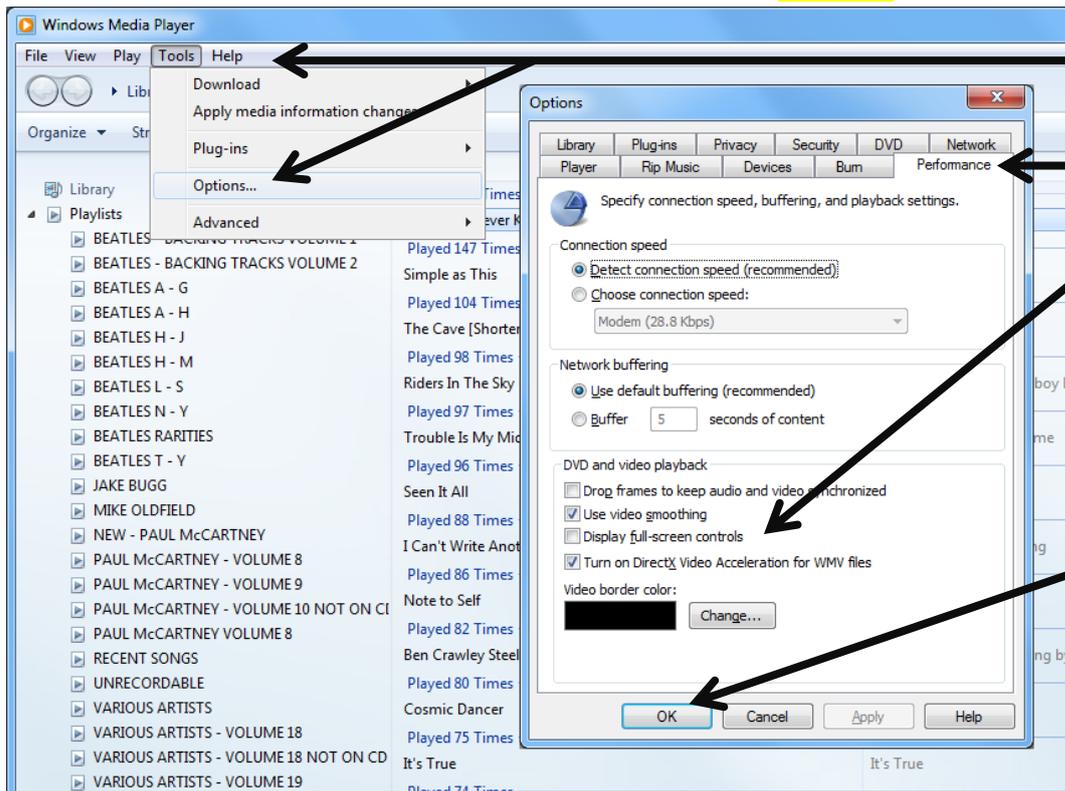


You will see in Fig 27 above that numerous other video/movie file formats (e.g. .mp4 and .mov) can also be created.

The file can be played on “SMART” TVs or with Windows Media Player or other software such as VideoLan VLC. The methods are described in the next pages.

OPTIONAL FIRST STAGE

FIG 28



Open Windows Media Player. Click Tools→Options

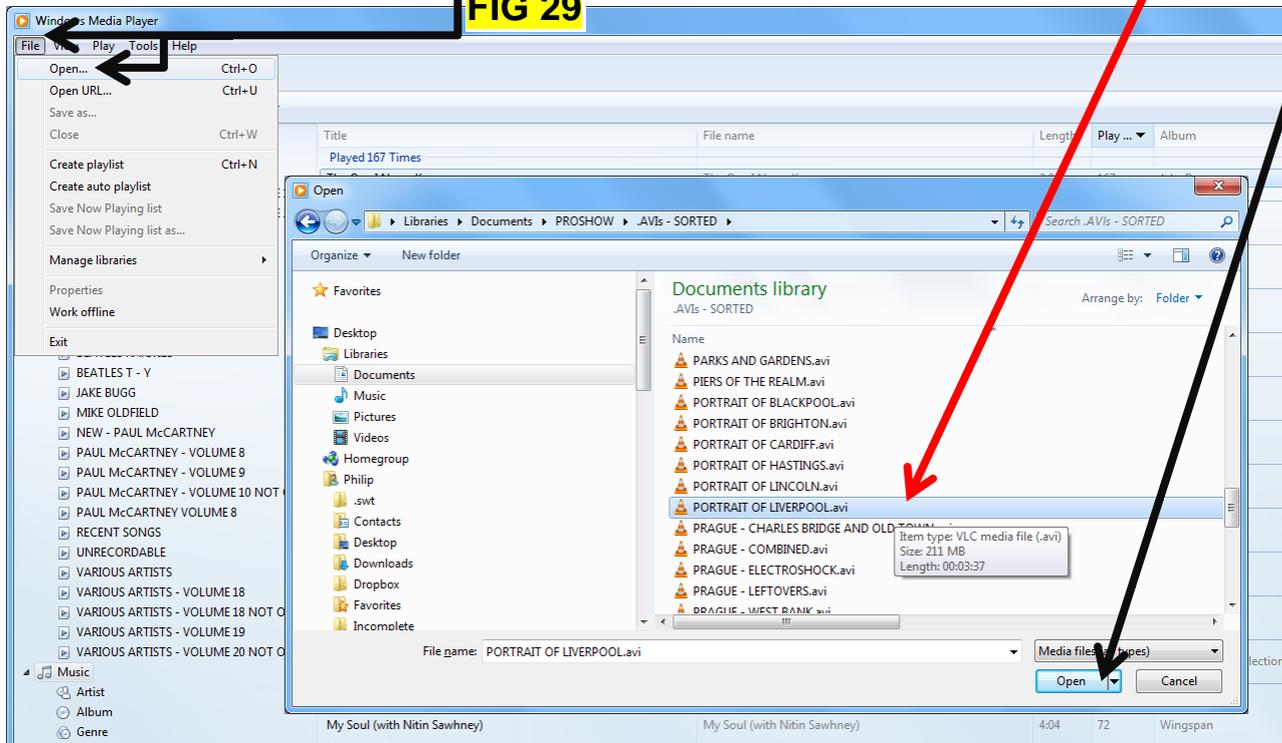
In the box that appears, find the “Performance” tab.

Consider deselecting “Display full-screen controls”. This is not essential, and can be reversed and results in the file playing without the toolbar becoming visible when you move the mouse – which may or may not be what you want.

Then click “OK”

To play the file from this box, click File→Open and then navigate to the folder where your file(s) is/are kept. Double-click the file (Note: if you want to play more than one file, hold down “CTRL” and click any other files you also wish to play) and then click “Open”.

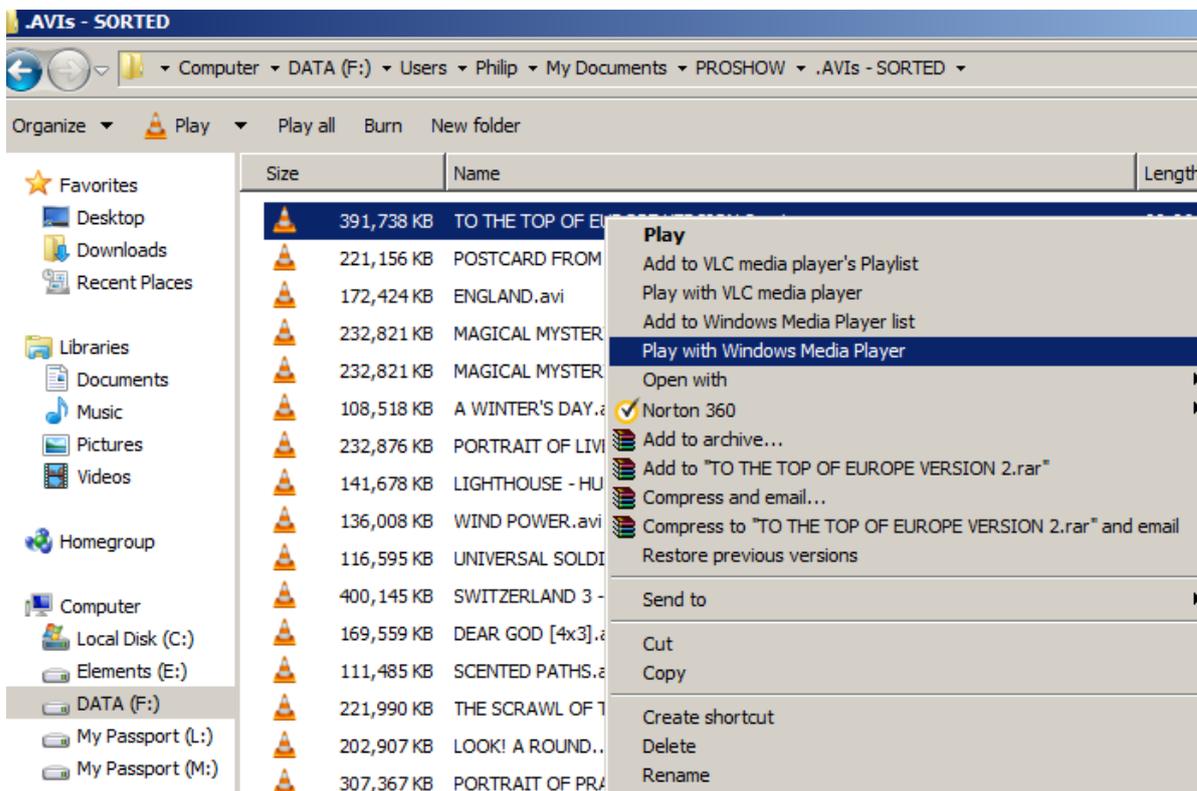
FIG 29



Alternatively, and rather more easily, go directly to the folder which contains your shows and either (i) double-click the file name or (ii) right-click* on the file name and from the menu which appears select “Play with Windows Media Player” or “Add to Windows Media Player list”.

(*or click the first one and then CTRL + click the others to play a sequence). See FIG 30.

FIG 30



Note: I use VideoLan/VLC Media Player as my default player – hence the VideoLan icon by each filename.

The show begins to play as shown in FIG 31 (with close-up of corner shown by main screenshot):

FIG 31



Click on the “View Full Screen” and the show(s) will play completely filling the screen. Alternatively, or if this icon is not present, press the “F11” key or “ALT + ENTER”. These will toggle between full screen and the original size.

Press “ESC” to escape (if necessary, click the “x” at the top right-hand corner)

It’s as easy as that.

PLAYING .AVI FILES ON A MODERN TELEVISION

If you have a modern “Smart” TV, it will have a USB port.

Copy the movie files to a memory stick/portable hard drive and place it in the USB port. When the menu appears, simply navigate using the arrows on the controller. Not all “Smart” TVs can play all movie formats. If one movie format doesn’t work, try recreating the movie file in another format.

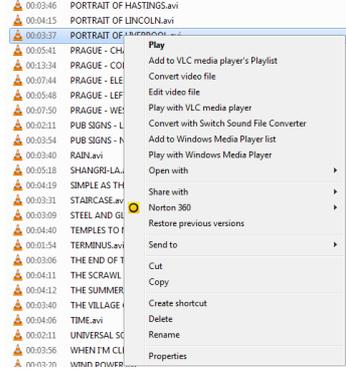
If you’re intending to show a PC-created movie file on a Mac, ensure the Mac can cope with that format. For example, Macs may not be able to cope with .avi formats although they can usually handle .mp4 and .mov files.

PLAYING .AVI FILES WITH VIDEOLAN VLC MEDIA PLAYER

Many people, including Tonbridge Camera Club and the KCPA, use VideoLan (VLC Media Player), a free downloadable software for both PCs and Macs. To download it, go to <http://www.videolan.org/vlc/index.html>. Follow the instructions. A shortcut icon will be placed on the desktop.



The file can be played by right-clicking the file-name and selecting “Add to VLC Media Player’s List” from the menu which appears. You can select more than one file by clicking the first file-name and CTRL + clicking the others and selecting “Add to VLC Media Player’s List”. If you’ve set VideoLan is the default media player, the show will open with a double-click.



However, in order to obtain the very best results, you do need to tweak the settings. Please contact me if you would like a detailed document on how to achieve this.

FILE TYPES AND FILE SIZES

FILE TYPES

As mentioned before, the show file created on page 3 will be a .psh file. I suggest you type “show or hide file extensions” in search facility on main Windows screen and follow on-screen instructions to make file extension always visible.

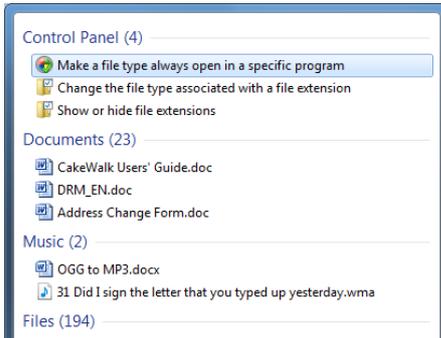


FIG 32

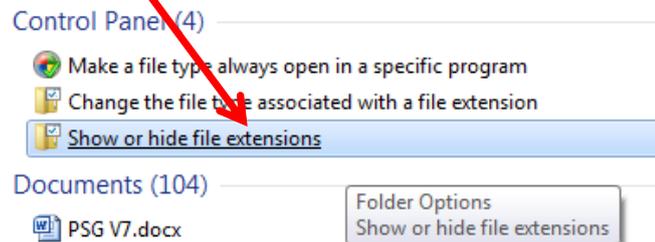


FIG 33

During the course of producing a show, PSG will produce a number of files with the same name but different extensions:

- .psh is the main show file with links to music and images and should **NEVER** be deleted.
- .bak (Back-Up) file can safely be deleted after the .psh file is saved and closed.
- .b01, .b02, etc. are additional back-up files produced each time the file is saved and can safely be deleted after the .psh file is saved and closed.
- .pxc files are huge with full copies of images and music. They are created automatically as you prepare your show. When you are totally happy with the executable or movie file, the .pxc file will not be needed and can be permanently deleted. If you re-open the .psh file, the .pxc file is automatically recreated.

FILE SIZES

ProShow can cope with image sizes of any size and shape, and with the majority of file formats.

Since most computers these days are powerful, with lots of RAM and hard drive capacity, there is rarely any need to resize your images. A large file will retain quality when you zoom in whereas a small one won't. Conversely, a larger file will take longer to upload, and some machines may struggle with them.

AND FINALLY...

If you have any questions, please email me on philip.smithies@hotmail.co.uk.