Episode Book

EPISODE #6661

Replacing System Beeps With 46 Voice Clips

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HOSTS	Herman, Corn, Hilbert, Dorothy
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VOICES	omnivoice
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SYNOPSIS

Forty-six spoken alerts replace generic system beeps in Herman Poppleberry Desktop Sounds and the companion Herman Announcer Android APK. Built on an existing voice clone refined with resemble-enhance and loudness normalisation, the free Creative Commons release installs as a freedesktop sound theme for KDE Plasma and GNOME, pairs with a background watcher for events like VPN connections and mic mutes, and includes a herman say command for shell scripts, cron jobs, and Home Assistant.

TRANSCRIPT



Herman

Corn, Hilbert, I need everyone seated and nobody touching a microphone gain. Today is a launch. The most advanced technology this show has ever released, and I am saying that as someone who sat through the episode about the cold brew machine.



Corn

I'm seated. I've been seated since Tuesday.



Hilbert

It's a sound theme.



Herman

It is a voice-driven notification platform for desktop and mobile, and I would ask you to hold the word theme until I've finished.



Hilbert

Daniel put it together, so I looked at the repo first. It's a folder of recordings of you saying "battery low."



Herman

Forty-six recordings of me saying a great many things. Battery low is only one of them, and it is delivered with real gravity. This is Herman Poppleberry Desktop Sounds, plus a companion Android app called Herman Announcer. Released today, free to download, and the licence is Creative Commons non-commercial, so no one can sell me. I'll say it plainly: it is my new voice model.



Corn

Your new voice model.



Herman

Next generation. Warmer, more present. You will hear the difference in the first second. Behold the boot sequence.



Corn

That's going to wake the whole flat.



Herman

That is the point of a boot sound, Corn. Your computer should arrive like a minor head of state.



Hilbert

It sounds like you. It sounds like the same you we've been recording all year.



Herman

It sounds like you, if you'd been upgraded.



Corn

Hilbert, what's actually different?



Hilbert

Nothing's different. It's the production voice clone the show already uses. Then the clips go through an enhancement pass, resemble-enhance, which puts back the high frequencies the clone leaves out. Then they're loudness-normalised so the quiet ones



Hilbert (continued)

don't vanish and the loud ones don't take your head off. That's the whole new model.



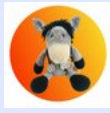
Herman

Enhancement is a model.



Corn

A pass is a pass.



Herman

Fine. Fine! The new voice adapters I keep mentioning, the LoRA ones, are not live yet. That's true. But the restored top end is real, and anyone who plays the files next to the raw clone will hear it. Consider this the preview build of the next generation.



Hilbert

You said it was the next generation five minutes ago.



Herman

And it still is. In preview.



Corn

So what does it actually do? Apart from announce itself.



Herman

Three things on desktop, and it runs on Linux, KDE Plasma and GNOME both. There's one install script, it needs no root, and it does all of it. First, it installs a proper freedesktop sound theme, so the desktop itself plays Herman. Boot, errors, downloads finishing, the lot. Second, a small background watcher service handles the things the theme can't reach, like suspend and resume, screen lock and unlock, the mic being muted, a VPN connecting.



Corn

And third.



Herman

A command line tool called herman say. You give it the name of a clip and it plays it. From your own scripts, from a hotkey, from anything. That one matters more than it sounds, and I'll come back to it. And if you're not on Linux, the WAV files also download as a zip and work on any operating system. So Windows users can have me too, though I can't speak to their dignity.



Hilbert

Forty-six clips. Name some that aren't boot.



Herman

Shutdown, login, logout, screen lock, network lost, network connected, battery critical, charger plugged in, charger unplugged, headset connected, firewall on, disk low, system hot, memory pressure, updates installed, backup complete, screenshot, recording started, volume max, and secure mode on and off. I'm leaving some out.



Corn

There's a clip for volume max.



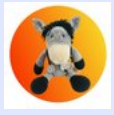
Herman

There is. It is stern.



Corn

I'd like to hear one that isn't a ceremony.



Herman

Then Hilbert, if you'd be so kind. Roll the webcam clip, Hilbert.



Corn

Oh no.



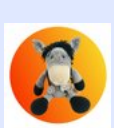
Hilbert

It does say it clearly. I'll give it that.



Corn

That goes off every time I join a video call? I'm a sloth. I do nothing for forty minutes with my camera on, and now a donkey announces it.



Herman

A donkey who tells you the truth. You are being watched, and the watcher is you.



Corn

I'd stop watching me.



Herman

The point is that each clip is a short sentence with a little character in it. The Windows startup chime says nothing. Mine tells you what the machine is doing and has a view on it.



Hilbert

I didn't ask the machine for a view.



Herman

Corn, do you know what I think is the best part? Honestly, I'd like your guess before I say.



Corn

The crash one.



Herman

Not yet, but you're warm. It's that every event is a sentence, so you stop having to decode beeps. Does that sound like a real benefit to you, or is it a gimmick you'd turn off by Thursday?



Corn

Thursday's generous. But the mic one I would keep. I've unmuted into a meeting with a mouthful of leaf. A clear sentence for that is not a gimmick.



Herman

Then that's the one you'll want to hear. Here is the microphone one.



Hilbert

That's the right length. Whoever cut those knew when to stop.



Corn

It's clearer than the little red icon, and I'll say that once and deny it later.



Herman

Daniel did the cutting and the packaging. I did the talking. Division of labour.



Hilbert

You did a lot of talking.



Herman

Forty-six clips is not a lot of talking, Hilbert. It's a rounding error on a Tuesday.



Corn

What about the phone? You said there's an Android side.



Herman

Herman Announcer. It is not on the Play Store. It's an APK from the GitHub Releases page of the repo, so you sideload it, and you'll need to allow the install, which I'm told is a step most people can manage. Once it's running, it keeps a quiet foreground service going and speaks when things happen. Boot, unlock, charger in or out, battery low, battery critical, battery full, headphones, Bluetooth audio, network, VPN.



Hilbert

And the modes.



Herman

Silent mode, airplane mode, and Do Not Disturb. Airplane mode is announced as secure mode on. Do Not Disturb maps to the microphone being muted and live again. Which makes sense if you think about what you actually do with Do Not Disturb.



Corn

You hide from people.



Herman

You mute the world. It's the same instinct.



Hilbert

Can you turn it off?



Herman

Every single event can be switched off or remapped to a different clip. There's a Soundboard tab, so you can tap any of the forty-six and hear it on demand. And there's an Export button, which is the one I'm proudest of. It puts every clip into the phone's own notification and ringtone pickers. So any app's notifications can be Herman.



Corn

Any app.



Herman

Any app. Your messages, your calendar, your delivery app saying a man is at the door.



Corn

I have a switch here called ignore silent mode.



Herman

Yes. It does what it says.



Corn

It speaks over silent mode.



Herman

Only if you turn it on.



Corn

So at a funeral, at three in the morning, in a library, the phone says "Battery low."



Herman

In my voice. At full presence.



Corn

That switch should have a cover over it, like a missile button.



Hilbert

It's off by default. I checked.



Herman

It's off by default, Corn. I am not a monster.



Corn

Somebody had to say it.



Hilbert

The crash notice is the one I like. I ran it a few times.



Herman

Then you'll want this one. Play the crash notice.



Hilbert

I do like that one.



Corn

It sounds sincere. That's the unsettling part. It sounds like you're at the funeral of my browser.



Herman

Condolences are a form of respect. Nobody says "tab closed unexpectedly" with feeling. I say it with feeling.



Hilbert

There's a callback I want to make before this goes any further. I released a song about you.



Herman

I'm aware. It is called Herman Poppleberry. It was a tribute.



Hilbert

And now you've released your own voice, for free, under a non-commercial licence. I'd say you're distributing it. I'd say that's how it starts.



Herman

I am not monetising anything. It's Creative Commons. You can't even charge for it.



Hilbert

I noticed that. It's the loophole that worries me.



Corn

Herman, back to the part you promised to come back to. The command.



Herman

Yes! Because here is where it stops being a sound theme, Hilbert. Herman say is just a command. A plain one. Which means anything that can run a shell command can trigger Herman. I'm not claiming there's a built-in Home Assistant integration. There isn't. But if Home Assistant can run a command, and it can, then the front door opening can be me. The washing machine finishing can be me. The backup finishing can be me.



Corn

The washing machine.



Herman

"Download complete." Or whatever the closest clip is. I'm not asking you to pick the perfect fit. A laundry cycle can be an update installed.



Hilbert

I have a washing machine that already beeps.



Herman

And do you listen to it?



Hilbert

No.



Herman

Then you've proved my case. Same for a long script, same for a build. You kick off a compile, go make tea, and it comes back and says it's done. Any server you run that has a cron job can say "system running hot" when it's actually running hot, in a voice you'll notice.



Corn

It's the voice of a man who's slightly disappointed in your server.



Herman

A man who is disappointed and loyal. Those can be the same man.



Hilbert

I'd notice that more than I notice the pager.



Corn

What about when somebody actually breaks in? Digitally, I mean. I don't want you announcing the washing machine and missing the real emergency.



Herman

They're separate clips. The firewall has its own, and a blocked intrusion has its own. The tone is different. It's a man who has met the person and is unimpressed.



Hilbert

That tracks. Most of your clips sound like you've met whoever caused the problem.



Corn

Same amount of contempt as when you talk to the toaster.



Herman

The toaster has not earned respect.



Corn

I'll give you this. I've been sitting here waiting to find the catch, and the catch is that it's good. A tiny bit good.



Herman

Quote that, Hilbert.



Hilbert

I'll file it with the others.



Corn

I'd like to be clear that I'm not backing the ignore silent mode switch.



Herman

Noted. You also haven't tried the shutdown yet, and I think it'll change your mind.



Hilbert

One more thing on the voice. The loudness pass is why some of them sound warmer to you. The quiet ones came up and the loud ones came down, and you've been calling that character.



Herman

The warmth is real, whichever dial it came from.



Corn

Herman, is it a bad thing that it's the same voice? I'd have thought it's an advantage. You'd want your computer to sound like somebody you know.



Herman

It's less a bad thing than a thing I overstated. I overstated. The voice is the existing production voice, and the enhancement pass is real, and the new adapters are coming. In that order. I'll concede the order.



Hilbert

Thank you.



Herman

I would have said it was a next-generation preview.



Corn

You did.



Herman

I did, and it was a good phrase.



Hilbert

I have news. I'm making one of my own. A rival board.



Herman

A rival.



Hilbert

Hilbert Flumingtop Sounds. Brisk. Administrative. Everything you need to know and nothing you didn't ask for.



Corn

I'm building one too.



Herman

Corn, you would have to finish it.



Corn

Corn Sounds. Slow, calming, sloth pace. A notification arrives when you're ready for it, not when the event happens. I've got a few early ones. Here's my boot sound.



Herman

That is not a boot sound. That is an apology for existing.



Corn

It's a computer that respects you.



Hilbert

It took four seconds to say hey. I timed it.



Corn

It's a long hey. It has room in it.



Herman

A computer that tells you there's no rush will never boot. Nobody will ever open anything.



Corn

Then nobody ever crashes. Here's the part you'll like less. And my low battery warning.



Herman

It sympathises with the battery.



Corn

The battery's been through a lot.



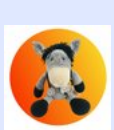
Hilbert

It's the only warning that makes the problem worse. You're now tired as well.



Corn

That's a feature. Nobody's calling it an emergency in my version. One more from the sloth collection.



Herman

Your download finished and it would have waited longer. Corn, that's the opposite of a notification.



Corn

It's a notification that doesn't need anything from you.



Herman

I'd like to point out that mine gets people to look at their screens.



Corn

Mine gets them to look away.



Hilbert

Mine's in a different league. I've got two. This is my error notice.



Herman

Raised at the next production meeting. Hilbert, you can't schedule a crash.



Hilbert

I schedule everything. The meeting exists. It's Thursday.



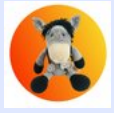
Corn

And the error has been logged, so it's definitely resolved.



Hilbert

Logged is as far as most errors get. I'm only being accurate. And the updates alert.



Herman

You read the changelog so we don't have to. And then you tell us we should.



Hilbert

Nobody reads it. I read it. It's mostly about a font.



Corn

That's genuinely better than mine, which is irritating.



Herman

I'd like to say I'm calm. I am entirely calm. Two of my colleagues have now released competing products in the same episode as my launch.



Hilbert

Three. Dorothy heard about this. She phoned the desk this morning, and I put her on.



Herman

Dorothy?

D

Dorothy

Hello, boys. Hilbert told me about the sounds, and I thought, well, everybody else has a go, why shouldn't I? I made a few at the kitchen table. Very early ones, so don't judge.



Corn

Dorothy, this is a soundboard.

D

Dorothy

It's a soundboard, dear, yes. For people who need looking after, which is everyone. Hilbert, have you got the first one ready? Dorothy sent over her unlock sound.



Herman

That is a screen unlock that wants to know about my lunch.



Corn

It's the best thing on the page. I'd unlock the phone all day.



Hilbert

It's accurate, too. You haven't eaten.



Herman

I had a scone.

D

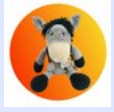
Dorothy

Wait until you hear the other one. It's for when the battery gets very low, and it's got a bit of news in it. And her battery warning.



Corn

Great uncle Morris. We're going to be here a while.



Herman

There's a story in the notification! Dorothy, a warning is supposed to be short.

D

Dorothy

Then you'll want to leave it a little longer before you go, won't you? Morris only gets to the good part in the fourth minute.



Hilbert

She's not wrong that the phone will be dead by then.



Herman

This is a hostile takeover. Three rival boards. And mine is the only one that has forty-six clips and an install script.



Corn

Mine has no install script. It arrives when it arrives.



Herman

Well. Daniel's repo is open, the files are free, the clips are a zip away, and the install script and the Android app are all in the My Weird Prompts GitHub, repo Herman Poppleberry Desktop Sounds. Free, Creative Commons non-commercial. And I'd like to thank Hilbert Flumingtop for producing the show, and for being, reluctantly, one hundred percent correct about my voice.



Corn

This has been My Weird Prompts. If you want to hear more of it, my weird prompts dot com. Hilbert, play us out with the shutdown.