

The Foley Grail

THE ART OF PERFORMING SOUND FOR FILM,
GAMES, AND ANIMATION



DVD
INCLUDED

VANESSA THEME AMENT

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The Foley Grail

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The Art of Performing Sound for Film,
Games, and Animation

Vanessa Theme Ament



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Foreword

When my then-future publisher asked me if I felt I could write an entire book on the subject of motion picture sound, I asked, “How many volumes would you like?” Frankly, every chapter of my own book could be fully expanded into a comprehensive book on its own. I have been practicing the art form of sound for more than 30 years, and I am happy to say that I still learn new things virtually every day. Nobody knows everything on a given subject—I mean *nobody*. There are few finite rights and wrongs in any art form. Certainly in the sound arts there is always room for discussion and the sharing of different points of view and techniques. Many readers and some professionals have graciously commented that Chapter 17 of my own book was arguably the complete word on the art form, technique, and disciplines of Foley. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

When I received an email inquiry from my publisher asking if I thought there was room for a dedicated book on Foley, I snapped back a reply without hesitation. I wrote that there absolutely *was* room for a book on Foley—but, in my opinion, only if it were written by Vanessa Ament.

As a veteran filmmaker myself, I am well aware of the lack of understanding among some producers and directors about how much value good Foley can bring to their soundtracks. I would like to think that my own chapter has opened many an eye and especially many an ear of both professional filmmakers and of the future producers and directors among our students. As an educator at North Carolina School of the Arts, I know the added value that Hollywood professionals can bring to college film programs around the world, so I always thought I would love to see a dedicated book on the subject of Foley. I had hoped such a book would delve into the many facets of the techniques, strategies, and recording disciplines that are so fascinating to anyone who visits a Foley stage. But I had also hoped that such a book could better inform those industry people who have the power to make scheduling and budgeting decisions for postproduction sound. It is common, but completely unnecessary, for simple mistakes made at this stage to limit the logistics and creativity that Foley artists are eager to contribute to our soundtracks.

The true mettle of a veteran Foley artist is the ability to create more out of *nothing* in less time than would be believed possible, even by experienced supervising sound editors. Such has been my personal experience through many movies with Vanessa.

I was once handed two pictures in a row that had been burdened with Foley budgets and schedules that could only be described as ridiculous—they were virtually structured for failure. I went to Vanessa hat in hand and knowing that there was no way to get any more Foley time into the budget. Both of these pictures should have had at least a ten-day Foley schedule to adequately cover the sound. Instead, each feature had only two days of Foley stage budgeted—only *two*!

I knew exactly what sound cues I could dig out of my sound library to add in. Vanessa and I sat down and quickly reviewed what cues could be recorded “wild” on the Foley stage, but which I could cut as if they were “hard FX,” and which other cues I absolutely had to have performed in sync on the Foley stage.

Motion picture sound equipment and software are changing every six minutes, but you cannot go to the store, plop your money down, and buy 20 years of experience. Here you have *the* book on the art of Foley, written by one of the industry’s best supervising Foley artists. Vanessa and the many veteran Foley artists, editors, and mixers she has interviewed for this long-awaited book have all generously shared their experience and the everyday details of their crafts with the reader. Expect to be empowered and inspired throughout this journey with everything Foley is capable of doing for a film, for a computer game, or for any animation project. Vanessa shows you how, in every movie, sonic reality is re-created on the Foley stage. Using imagination, you can take the simplest props to create audio magic and turn a prosaic moment on the screen into a delicious moment, finding the sound that so many directors are seeking: “The sound that nobody has heard before.”

I will be the first in line to buy and immerse myself into Vanessa’s book, which I know will be a wealth of great advice and artistic techniques.

Enjoy. I know I will.

David Lewis Yewdall

Supervising Sound Editor

Motion Picture Sound Editors (MPSE)

Film School Faculty, North Carolina School of the Arts

Author, *Practical Art of Motion Picture Sound* (Focal Press)

Introduction

This is a story about a handful of unusual people working in the arts. Not one of them planned on or expected to be where we find them now, in a profession that really didn't exist when many of them were born. To tell this story well, I want to introduce you to an extraordinary woman, who herself embodies a collection of the rare qualities enjoyed (in different combinations) by all the subjects of her writing.

The author sometimes thinks that she wears a lot of hats—perhaps too many hats to have real credibility in any single profession. But so, too, do the people she writes about. They are the many-hatted people of motion picture postproduction. Of Vanessa's many personal facets, the flamboyant and fashionable "Auntie Mame" part of her would probably say that what makes people interesting is, indeed, all the various hats they have worn in life.

But there is a point to be made regarding this multiplicity of figurative chapeaux: People in the arts count themselves lucky when they find paying work in some field that is even *remotely* related to their art of preference. I believe that these people most often have a surprising variety of skills, including the ability to creatively transliterate the disciplines of one art form to another. I tell my own students, for instance, that my experience as a visual printmaker has helped me learn to layer sound effects in movies.

While the movie business has always been unfairly derided as a magnet for narcissists, loonies, misfits, irresponsible flakes, crooks, and rascals of all kinds (no less than Washington and Wall Street, come to think of it), it is also an industrial magnet for smart, earthy, well-grounded, and very substantial creative people, and most of these will never be famous outside of their working community. This is a place where they can sublimate their artistry using specialized skills in the performing and the technical arts and discover a way to do so consistently as a professional worker.

Musicians, painters, actors, and writers are among the animators, editors, mixers, Foley artists, and sound designers with whom we have had the fun of working. A hairstylist may change an appointment because she has an audition. An independent producer may be delivering your pizza. I am not referring here to the ridiculous mythology about stars being discovered at Schwab's Drug Store. (This was the essential myth of fame for a couple of generations before *American Idol*.) Rather, Vanessa tells us about a population of real working people, middle-class people, who make a living in the film industry. There probably is not

any other business like the show business, if that is not too awkward a phrase.

Vanessa is the quintessence of these kinds of people. Whatever skills they possess, they work hard to improve and broaden them and then find unforeseen ways to target and apply their intelligence and artistry to some kind of work in the “Business.” Their myriad of talents and their boundless energy are just another part of what fuels the great engine of moviemaking. When their specialties and interests are focused in an organized way onto the minutiae of soundtracks, then the product is more than the sum of its parts.

It takes energy to feed the movie industry’s insatiable appetite for applied craftsmanship and to do so with expertise and finesse. When I was first getting to know Vanessa, she was working a grueling full-time schedule as a Foley artist for television and films, then performing eight shows a week in various musical plays around town. Inspired by her interminable energy, I got off my couch and went to see her perform in *Pajama Game* at a local theatre. Her character sang and danced on roller skates. Twenty years later, I get tired just thinking about it.

I have known her as a creative sound-editing partner and as a business partner. We first worked together on *Predator*. I had already heard her magnificent work on *Platoon*. Rich Anderson and I knew we needed as rich and varied a Foley track as had enhanced *Platoon* in order to make the sounds of Schwarzenegger’s military gang and their alien antagonist as believable as possible. Vanessa and her Foley partner came through for us with their combat boots on fire. As our career paths meandered around and sometimes intersected, we made sound for a great number of movies together and an even greater number separately. But working together was always the best.

Today, Vanessa is known to be an extraordinary teacher. She knows how to watch each individual learn in his or her own way and how to guide and mentor others. She has taught school kids and has been my colleague in film school at the university level. Ask any of her college students and you will see that she is one of those special teachers that people remember forever. This book comes out of her experience teaching cinema students and answers the necessity for a book about Foley.

Being studious is another facet of Vanessa, and probably not a predictable one for anyone who meets her Auntie Mame persona. But all of that intelligence has to go somewhere: I watched her study for and complete a master’s degree in divinity (M.Div.) and work as a minister in the Unitarian Universalist faith. Her preaching was passionate, funny, and inspiring. With students, congregations, and film festival audiences, she seems always alert that every living individual is on her or his own winding spiritual path. For Vanessa, even when it’s about film, the subtext is that it’s really about the human condition.

Now the disclaimer: I have also known Vanessa as a partner in our marriage and our parenting. It should not come as a surprise to readers, even considering the weight of my undeniable bias, that she is an astounding mother, using all that energy and teaching skill to raise a delightful young person.

With the exception of this introduction, *The Foley Grail* is not about Vanessa, but it is the story of her relationship with this captivating and rarely understood craft. For me, the Foley craft is an irresistible one, rich with varied professional characters and their ideas, and this book offers the agreeable experience of looking behind the curtain at this particular process of movie magic. It is a story only Vanessa could tell, so I will step behind the curtain after declaring, “Ladies and gentlemen, Foley sound artist Vanessa Theme Ament.”

David E. Stone
Motion Picture Sound Editor
Savannah College of Art and Design

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Preface

The first time I entered a Foley stage was an unforgettable and strange experience. I was a stage actress and singer, with years of dancing in my background, but was not particularly interested in film. I had recently auditioned to replace the voice of a foreign actress in a film at an independent studio in Hollywood. A Foley artist by the name of Kim Fowler presented me as someone who had “done a little Foley” previously. Little fibs like this were commonplace at the time to help newcomers get a start. The studio was Gomillion Sound, famous to many of us in the sound business as a studio where new people could get started, and perhaps be exploited but learn a lot. I did not know any of this at the time. I simply thought this might be a good gig between acting jobs and figured I would give it a shot.

The year was 1980. The world had just discovered who had shot J.R. Ewing on *Dallas*. I walked into this dark and cluttered room where Duane Hensel, a veteran television Foley “walker” who had worked on all the Universal television shows of the 1970s, was waiting. He was an old-timer who was crusty on the outside but a cream puff on the inside. I like that kind of guy. He had been told the myth of my experience and proceeded to throw me some cues. My first cue was to drop a remote on the ground for the latest episode of the Ewing clan. I can’t tell you if I was good, awful, or what, but I can tell you that I felt I was in over my head. I had to walk some characters and do some prop cues. I was nervous, timid, and enthralled. I was actually working on a television show for money doing this strange new craft. By the end of the day, I was exhausted from the excitement and stress. I was pretty sure I would never hear from these people again. But I did hear from them again. And thus, my temporary gig, intended to support me between acting and singing jobs, turned into an over two-decade career that spiraled up with the growth of movie sound into a gigantic tornado of working on major features, attending awards events, publishing a newsletter, appearing at film festivals, teaching at universities about Foley and sound editing, and sparring with David Letterman.

I remember, as a little girl, watching the film *Robin and the Seven Hoods*. I was not all that intrigued with the story. I think I went with my parents and watched this film in the local theatre in the small town where I grew up on the central coast of California. What I *do* remember is watching the actors, some of whom were in the famous Rat Pack, walking around on asphalt, or some such outdoor surface, as we would say in “Foley speak.” I noticed the crispness and specificity of their

shoes. There was such a lovely definition to the way they walked. I was entranced. I wondered why my footsteps did not sound so wonderful when I walked.

The next day, I remember trying on all my shoes. I was fascinated. They all sounded so different. I walked around the house, on the streets, in the sand dunes (we lived at the beach)—anywhere I could. I tried to put metal tacks on the bottom of my shoes to get some special sound from my walking. I never forgot that experience, and I never stopped paying attention to the sound of shoes. What a prophetic experience.

Later, when I studied tap dancing, I became a skilled tap dancer. I loved hearing all the sounds I could make from my various foot configurations. Recently, I ran into a former dance classmate who said to me, “You were an amazing tap dancer.” I was good, but not that good. However, I *was* in love with the clarity and precision of the sounds of tap dancing. Years later, as I began my career in Foley, I looked back at that moment in time when I became aware of the art of shoe sounds, and I wondered just how are we influenced by our experiences and backgrounds when we embark on a new adventure in our lives? How does that change our perspective?

As I interviewed the Foley artists, mixers, engineers, and editors included in this book, I paid close attention to their personal histories. I listened carefully as they told me their stories. All of them have had influences in their backgrounds that have contributed to their perspectives. Each of them has a different approach to the art and craft of sound. Each of them has an opinion that is shaped, in part, by what he or she did before.

This book is not just about the art and craft of Foley. It is not simply a “how-to” book that the reader can use to try his or her hand at this amazing profession. It is hoped, instead, that the reader can see how one’s background has a profound influence on the perspective that shapes the way each of us approaches this work. Only by truly understanding that an artist contributes him- or herself quite personally to the craft of Foley does one begin to grasp why there is more than one way to perform the sounds satisfactorily, or even brilliantly.

Foley is the art and craft of designing and recording performed sound effects in sync to the film. It is done in a sound-controlled studio, called a Foley stage, during the postproduction process of moviemaking. It is intended to supplement the sound effects that are edited in.

The Foley artist performs the footsteps, props, and cloth movement of all the characters while viewing a print of the film. There is a Foley mixer, recording all the sounds that the artist makes, and sometimes a recordist, who manages the cues and documentation. Foley takes time, patience, and a great deal of skill. I would add that a sense of humor is essential, in my mind, because of the silly cues we are asked to perform

and the predictable yet unexpected complications that arise during Foley sessions.

It is common for most cineastes to confuse an edited sound effect for Foley and vice versa. The simple explanation is that the Foley artist is concerned with what the actor is doing, whereas the sound editor is editing in effects that deal with the action or environment. However, this is not always the case. Foley can complement what sound effects cover, and the Foley artist will often be asked to do just that. But the original intent and usual purpose of Foley is to enhance or design the footsteps and clothing movement of all characters and the hand props the characters utilize. Sometimes we artists only “sweeten” or enhance these events, and sometimes the soundtrack relies heavily on our work. The Foley artist, along with the supervising Foley editor, will usually be relied on to make that judgment.

In most, if not all, films made today, Foley will be performed and edited. If it is done well and you are not specifically studying the soundtrack, you should not be aware of the Foley. There is a wonderful bromide in the film business that Foley should be “sensed and not heard.” Except for special circumstances, where the story or the director wants the sound to draw attention to itself, this subtlety is the rule. For this reason, it is not always easy to know when the Foley is being used and when what you hear is production sound. That is the desired effect. The problem, however, is that this understated style is then hard to study and understand. It is hoped that the reader will have a better comprehension of what Foley is, how it is performed, why it is needed or desired, and how various artists have approached the work. For, be assured, we all have slightly different perspectives on how to do the craft and what is considered quality Foley. That is the fun of it. For this reason, I have included insights from other Foley artists who can illuminate the discussion past my own observations and experiences.

This book could have been about Foley according to Vanessa. Although my experience and expertise leads me to a strong perspective on what makes Foley special, important, and necessary to any film project, I have only my own experiences and ideas. A more balanced approach, I believe, is to include the views of others who have proved their mettle in the craft. Thus, I have interviewed and consulted with many professionals who have contributed enthusiastically to this project. They believe, as I do, that Foley is entitled to a comprehensive presentation. The reader will be exposed to ideas and opinions that do not always coincide with those of the writer or other professionals. The lesson here is clear: each professional has a different set of talents, skills, and sense of aesthetics, which informs his or her methodology. The reader deserves the opportunity to wrestle with all of these ideas and have a private dialogue with them.

I want to extend my gracious appreciation to the following professionals, consultants, and supporters for their time and contributions to this book: Catherine Clark, Robert Mott, John Roesch, Hilda Hodges, Alyson Dee Moore, Ken Dufva, David Jobe, Robert Deschaine, Michael Semanick, Mark Mangini, Karin Roulo, Jim Fulmis, Greg Barbanell, Jerry Trent, Joan Rowe, Jody Thomas, Mark Pappas, Steve Lee, Benjamin Jackendoff, Sean Rowe, Ryan Maguire, Richard Rogers, Leo Chalukian, Scott Hecker, and Richard Portman. Thanks to Robert Heiber and Mark Gerstner at the Chace Audio facility in Burbank for the use of the Foley stage for the DVD, and to April Connelly for the photographs of the Chace Foley stage. Thanks to Robin Beauchamp and Savannah College of Art and Design for the use of editing equipment for the DVD, and to Adison Allen for all his assistance. I especially want to thank David Fein, who helped me get phone numbers and emails and who was instrumental in all forms of contact; David Stone, who contributed greatly with his witty illustrations and advice regarding all things visual; Jimmy Honore, who told Dick Kupper to hire me; Tommy McCarthy, who decided that I should be trusted to supervise Foley on the stage; and John Post, for being patient with me when I was a newbie in this profession. Thanks also to Richard Corwin, who taught me digital editing; to David Yewdall, who worships Foley; to Ted Gomillion, who gave me my first Foley job; to the late Kim Fowler, who introduced me to Ted Gomillion; to Bill Crosby, who introduced me to Kim Fowler and was supportive of my endeavors; and most of all to Nathaniel Ament-Stone, who understands better than anyone why I can't stop researching and refining and who keeps me inspired when I think I have no more to contribute.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my life in filmmaking. Some of the most enlightened and aware people are in the film industry. There are those who love film and want very much to make a contribution that matters in this popular form of communication. There are, of course, others who just want a good gig. Regardless of the motivation, every person who ever cued a Foley cue sheet, spotted a sound effect, put on a pair of shoes for a take, made a squeak from a hinge, sat in a dark room holding a piece of cloth making the clothing sounds for the characters, enhanced the "gun life" for an action film, did endless hand pats and kisses for a film or television show, combined the ingredients for the perfect snow sound, edited and finessed, mixed and dubbed, or performed whatever other Foley task was required, made an impact on the art and craft of Foley for the rest of us. It is to all of the Foley artists, editors, mixers, recordists, and engineers working in the past, now, and the future that I dedicate this book. I am honored to have worked with many of them and to have learned, in one way or another, from all of them.

PART | ONE

What We Do and Why

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Chapter | one

Holy Foley:

The Evolution of a Craft



When one chooses to research the beginnings of the craft now referred to as Foley, several things become apparent. First, there are many myths and inaccuracies floating around that contribute to the mystery and misunderstanding of the origins and development of Foley. Second, the practitioners of the craft are busy doing their jobs and have precious little time to document the history of how their craft came to be or how they approach the work itself. Finally, those who study and report on the craft and origins of Foley or any aspect of film sound, who are not from the culture, view this world from a different lens, thus have different observations and conclusions than those of us who have “lived it.” As one who comes from the film industry and has subsequently been allowed the privilege of teaching about it, and thus researching the craft for academic accuracy, my purpose is to bring to light the origins and development of Foley, as best we know, based on documented sources and personal interviews with several key individuals who were a part of the beginnings of the craft and the codification of the “system.” Although I do not profess to have the entire story, I feel confident that what I present is a basic overview of the world that existed in the picture business when sound was new and a fair representation of the individuals who were at the beginning of the craft, or close enough to have valuable insights into its historical development.

It is important to state, at the onset, that for most of my Foley career, I thought Jack Foley was a sound editor who got tired of editing in footsteps so he began to perform them himself; he thus began a career of doing his footsteps, as well as those of other editors who did not have the talent or the patience to do them. This, so I understood, led to Jack then performing some props that were better left to him than the cutting room. Somewhere along the line, I got the idea that Jack was from England and that he was around in the 1950s and 1960s. I heard he was on the Universal lot, so I assumed that the editors and Foley artists I knew who had worked at Universal must have known the venerable Mr. Foley. Almost everyone I worked with had some kind of conception about Jack that I now know is inaccurate. Imagine my embarrassment as I now watch my appearance on *Late Night with David Letterman*, which was in July of 1989, where I continued this myth on national television. I must constantly correct the record with every audience or class who sees this clip, as I try to encourage the critical thinking of young minds. So let us begin with who Jack Foley was and why he is the pioneer of today's craft of Foley.

JACK BE NIMBLE: JACK OF ALL TRADES

Jack Foley was from Long Island. He was a New Yorker of Irish descent. His family was Catholic. Beatrice Rehm, a long-distance championship swimmer, worked at the phone company with Jack, who played semipro

baseball. They met through a mutual friend. She was Protestant, and this was a source of conflict in both families. They were secretly married and moved to the West Coast, where Jack hoped for a baseball career in a milder climate. Shortly after, they had a traditional wedding in New York, which, according to Catherine Clark, Jack's granddaughter, united both families. Bea later converted to Catholicism.

"Jack, by all accounts, was quite the charming extrovert."

In 1914, Jack and Bea moved to California, first to Santa Monica and later to a small town called Bishop. This is where things get interesting. Jack served with the American Defense Society during World War I. This group was responsible for guarding the local water supply from sabotage. Jack also worked at the local hardware store and raised his four children in Bishop. He was a regular part of the local community theatre, as actor, writer, and



Jack Foley displaying his notable whimsy, with granddaughter Catherine Clark, partially seen, sitting at his side. Photo courtesy of Catherine Clark.

director, and wrote articles in the local newspaper. He was a cartoonist, so he found himself creating cartoon strips in the local paper as well. Jack, by all accounts, was quite the charming extrovert. His granddaughter would continually describe him as “a people person.” It appears that Jack was a man of many talents, so it should come as no surprise that when the farmers of the area sold their farms to Los Angeles for water rights and the town of Bishop needed revenue, Jack would be one of the people looking for an inventive way to sustain what was now his hometown.

“... not just a guy who wanted a steady job ...”

It appears that Jack saw the potential for Bishop in being a location for westerns in this new movie business from nearby Los Angeles. This was an exciting time for a person who was entrepreneurial. The film industry was new and being reinvented on a daily basis. Once Jack convinced the local storekeepers what an economic boon location shooting could be for Bishop, he set out to convince the small film studios in the Los Angeles area to come to his lovely town of Bishop. He did, and they did. It is important to note that the picture business was not developed in any sort of organized process. Much as the Internet has “happened” upon us in a chaotic and exciting way, only now being tamed and codified, the environment for movies in the early part of the twentieth century was the same. So it was open season for anyone with “gumption” and ingenuity. My grandfather, Earl McMurtrie, was a similar sort as Jack Foley. He was from Colorado, a school dropout at 14, and fell into the film industry at the same time as Jack did. The skill set was different—one of carpentry and set building; the venue was different—Pathé and RKO instead of Universal. But the characters of both these men seem to have some qualities in common; both were adventuresome, courageous, extroverted, and enamored with this new world of movies. Many film pioneers that have been written about have these qualities. This is important, because one must see that Jack Foley was not just a guy who wanted a steady job and income for his family. He was willing to take risks on a new and exciting business that was unpredictable and required flexibility and inventiveness from its participants.

By the time Jack was in his thirties, he had parlayed his budding connections to the film business into a career as a stuntman and double. He became an assistant to director William Kraft and eventually directed short subjects starring Benny Rubin. As was the convention in the movies at the time, everyone pitched in where they could, depending on their talents and commitment. There were not established positions in the beginning. Job titles were not common practice, and people moved from job to job depending on the requisite skill set. Thus, when the now-famous *Showboat* situation came upon Universal, Jack was

one of those who pitched in to solve the latest problem brought on by new technology.

When *The Jazz Singer* was released, with small segments of sound used for Al Jolson's performance, the predictable pressure on other studios to compete technologically put Universal in a panic. The studio was ready to release *Showboat*, a musical, as a silent movie. We can all laugh now at the irony of a silent musical, but at the time, the moviegoer was thrilled to get any glimpse of a Broadway show, even without sound, as traveling to New York to see the production was out of the question. So, in context, it made sense for Universal to make the bold decision to produce this long and involved musical for its audiences. However, with this new wrinkle thrust on all the studios, it became imperative to redo the postproduction work on *Showboat* to put some sound into it. As David Yewdall relates in his book *Practical Art of Motion Picture Sound*, Universal rented the brand new and exciting Fox-Case sound unit to record the music, voices, and sound effects for the film. Jack, among others from the various studios, took a class at the University of Southern California, which introduced the students to this new sound technology. When the studio was finally ready to put sound into the film, there was one soundstage, with the orchestra, singers, and sound people, including Jack, to put all the sound in real time to the film. Jack and his brood added hand clapping, footsteps, any props they could muster, and background voices to the film. This was the incident that would set Jack on his path as an expert in this new field of filmmaking, which at the time had no name. Because of his particular talents including serving as a director, actor, writer, cartoonist, baseball player, and stuntman, he was the person who had the perspective to develop this job, which was invented out of necessity, into an esteemed craft that later was enhanced and perfected by others into a nuanced and respected field of sound effects with its own name, in honor of him.

As Jack Foley continued to perform sounds for films, focusing on props and footsteps, with some cloth sounds, it is helpful to reflect on the cultural environment in which Jack worked. Performing these sounds was considered an integrated part of the filmmaking process. Jack worked on a regular soundstage, using the same kind of sound support that would be afforded on the set with the cast in production. He had prop people, recording experts, sound assistants (later referred to as disciples), and any other type of support, whether technological or labor intensive. As the technology changed, he changed his performance techniques. Sound was primitive during the formative years of Jack's career as a soundman. There was only one track to record on, and this dictated the approach Jack would have to use. He had a piece of cloth he kept in his back pocket, to be pulled out for the clothing sound if he chose, and had a cane he used to create the illusion of more than one person walking at one time.



Jack would play with various gadgets in his kitchen to see how they sounded. He was not locked into any conventions. No one had done this before. There were no debates regarding the art or process. Jack “did his thing” and it was accepted. It is important to note that what Jack did was a secret. Even his family was not sure what he did at Universal. When someone visited him on the lot, Jack was typically in a suit and would sit on a bench working on his column for the showbiz trade paper or be in an office. His family never saw him work. It was not until close to his retirement that his true profession became known.

“... never cut a frame of sound.”

As other studios acquired people who had worked with Jack, they developed their systems for putting these sounds to picture. But all of the studios were influenced by Jack Foley and his beginnings in this craft. Jack Foley never cut a frame of sound. He was never an editor, although he was made an honorary member of the Motion Picture Editors Guild and got a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Motion Picture Sound Editors.

The sound people who followed Jack Foley came from different backgrounds and had different experiences in sound. The idea of performing sound effects live was not only in film. It occurred in radio and television as well. From radio plays to television news, sound effects were beginning to be performed, recorded, edited, and mixed into every aspect of the media, as technology would permit.

CHICKEN OR THE EGG?

Bob Mott, who was a generation behind Jack Foley, was a soundman in radio and television. He had gone to New York University to study screenwriting, after serving in World War II. NYU had a radio show, and Bob, through connections at the school, apprenticed and trained to be a soundman for the radio programs out of the university on the radio station WGYN. Bob relates much of his experiences in his books *Sound Effects*, *Radio TV and Film*, and *Radio Live! Television Live!* Bob is a delightful gentleman who has retired on the central California coast, and in his day he had plenty of experience working on radio shows and television shows. Bob had been a drummer, which made him prone to be talented in the rhythm of sound. He also was a writer, which caused him to think about the drama of a sound.

According to Bob, vaudeville, which was influenced by English Music Hall, was an important training ground for any person who worked on sound for radio. In vaudeville, the drummer was responsible for highlighting gags and dramatic effects with the drum set. The drummer would typically take his cues from the actors. The audience got used to certain drum effects being used for particular gag sounds. When radio began incorporating sounds into radio plays, the soundmen were sometimes these same drummers who had worked in vaudeville. This progressed into the use of records, gadgets, and other props. As they had in vaudeville, the drummers, now soundmen, took their cues from the actors. As radio drama progressed, the actors and soundmen would play off each other, which, of course, resulted in more sound effects supporting the actors' actions.

In his book *Silent Film Sound*, Rick Altman reminds us that music was used to mimic the sound that would support certain action on the screen. So the convention of having sound support story had been well established long before it was more literally produced with the

progression of technology. While vaudeville was utilizing the drum kit for sound emphasis, silent films were using an organ, live orchestra, or records to accompany the film.

"Jack and Bob were *soundmen*."

What is important to note for our purposes is that once sound for radio was popular, it affected both film and television. It is hard to know just how one medium influenced the other, once they were contemporaneous, but it is easy to see how radio sound, film sound, and later television sound meshed their respective techniques. At the time, Bob's job in radio and TV was referred to simply as the "soundman," even when many of the people doing the job were women. There was no separation between the use of recorded effects and props or footsteps performed live. One person did all of these. Nowadays, if one were to see a live radio show performed, the sound person might be referred to as a Foley artist, but that is historically inaccurate. Even Jack Foley was not considered a Foley artist. That terminology came later. Jack and Bob were *soundmen*.

THE STUDIO SYSTEM

John Post (*Repo Man*, *The Thing*, *Terminator*, *Salvador*, *The Player*), who was a sound editor and Foley artist, worked at Universal shortly after Jack Foley retired. Although he never worked with Jack, the conventions that developed through the studio system and the Editors Guild set up the codified postproduction sound effects training from which John blossomed into a respected artist and tutor for many of the Foley artists who came after him. He is an essential link from the days of Jack Foley, who developed the process, to the era of exploding growth in film sound. John retired from the film industry a few years ago, and his recollections of the industry are invaluable for us to understand how the life of the Foley artist changed.

John was great at "walking" and was, in short order, asked to "walk" for other editors who were less skilled. This practice progressed into his performing prop effects because he could do it quickly and creatively, so he became a "Foley walker" and stopped editing. As John relates it, at the same time, there were already people, mostly women, who had been dancers in movies and who were now performing footsteps and some props for sound editors. This was a natural transition from the days of musicals where the dancing sounds were put in after the picture was shot, on a soundstage, with a dancer who specialized in this skill. Most of these specialists were women, as the bias was that the women were more coordinated.

A former *Our Gang* actor, Bonnie Jean Gore, reportedly used to replace Ann Miller's dancing sounds in postproduction, uncredited. It should be noted that the choreographer, Hermes Pan, supposedly did

the dance sounds for Fred Astaire. What is uncontested, and in total character, is that Gene Kelly did his own “dance Foley.” Kelly was a perfectionist and insisted on doing his own stunt work, so it is logical that he would want to perform the recorded sounds for his dancing as well. Dancing is not always live action, and it is not always human. When I performed the Foley for *Cats Don't Dance*, I performed all the dance Foley that was “choreographed” in the animated film about animals trying to get into the movies. This was the last film project for Gene Kelly. He was the consultant for the animated dance steps. And so it goes.

At one point, John Post was paired with another sound editor turned Foley walker, Duane Hensel (*The Philadelphia Experiment*, *Chastity*, *Midnight Crossing*). They did the Foley for all of the Universal television shows throughout the 1970s. I met both of them in 1980 when they were at Gomillion Sound, and we shared the duties of Foley for Lorimar television shows and various features. As a team, they both had the perspective of having edited sound and therefore knew what would be “cut in” and what would need to be “Foleyed.” This set them apart from some of the other walkers who had never edited sound. That difference in perspective plays out even today in the Foley-heavy world of major motion pictures.

What John remembers about the training system to become a Foley walker at Universal was a requirement that the candidate serve eight years as an assistant in sound editing before actually editing. The new editor would be assigned easy editing tasks. Only experienced editors were permitted to perform Foley for themselves or other editors. During that time in film sound, there were strict requirements for union membership and training. One would apprentice, then assist, then edit, then supervise. These requirements have been relaxed considerably. Today the formal promotion of training and responsibility has been modified to conform to the rapidly changing requirements of modern technology.

In the 1960s and 1970s, sound editors were in the union, but the newly codified job of Foley walker was not in any union. Somehow, this remained true until the summer of 2006, when “Foley artist” was finally included as an official category of the Motion Picture Editors Guild. Until that time, the Foley artists who were in the union were accepted under the category of sound editor.

“This would be known as ‘Foley’s room’...”

During Jack Foley’s time at Universal, there were changes regarding the venue where sound would be recorded. Most of the time, Jack would be on a soundstage. An edifice was built for him to isolate his sounds. This would be known as “Foley’s room” or “Foley’s stage.” Now, the studio where Foley is performed is officially a Foley stage. That

transition, and the homage to Jack, is obvious. Desilu Studios, which had originally been RKO, built the first official recording studio for Foley, which, according to many, is when the term became official.

Ken Dufva and David Lee Fein have the distinction of being the oldest Foley team in the film industry, having worked together as Foley artists for 21 years. Some of the many films they worked on together are *Frankie and Johnnie*, *Losing Isaiah*, *Ghost*, *Indecent Proposal* and *The Hunt for Red October*. They worked together first at MGM and later at Paramount. They both entered the system at a time when studios had a standardized progression into virtually all jobs in film-making, and the unions or guilds had a strong influence in the training and job protection of employees. Thus, Ken and Dave have individually and together quite interesting perspectives on the growth and change of the world of Foley from the 1960s to the present day.

Ken was assigned a job at MGM as a projectionist. This was in 1965. He was already a veteran projectionist and had followed his dad into the profession. He became part of the team at MGM as a projectionist for 11 years. During this tenure, he moved to the Foley stage as the regular projectionist. As was the common practice in those days, there was a great deal of job security and protection through the unions, and Kenny was very secure at MGM. However, moving from a position in one union to a position in another union was tricky.

When the opportunity came to Kenny to move to sound, as an editor and Foley walker, it took some time for the position to materialize. The MGM Foley stage had a three-man Foley walker crew and six other people doing various jobs on the stage. So someone had to retire before Kenny could make the transition. The retiree was Lovell Norman. Thus, Kenny replaced Lovell.

“... feeling the eyes of some pernickety person ...”

David Fein’s entrance into Foley actually started at Gomillion Sound. He had worked on small independent films as an editor and moved into Foley as a natural step on these small films. When he got the opportunity to audition to replace Scott Perry at MGM, Dave was very nervous. Although he had done some Foley at Gomillion, MGM was a huge opportunity, and he did not want to make a bad showing. Dave remembers “feeling the eyes of some pernickety person” on his back during the audition. However, all went well. Dave was hired as a sound editor who walked Foley, and within months, when Kenny joined the team, their partnership began.

“Kenny and Dave,” as we in the industry know them, are a remarkable pair. They are both gentle in demeanor, respectful of each other, and professional in their work ethic. They worked together with a high regard for each other, and no conflicts ever arose between them. They got so used to working together that they did not even have to discuss

who would do which cue or how they would approach it. They had a truly functional Foley “marriage,” which was admired by all who knew of them or worked with them. They have attributed this to a lack of competitiveness between them, and one can quickly see when the two are together that they genuinely like and admire each other. This achievement alone is worth emulating. However, they also were one of the best teams in Foley, and their work was first rate. They handled an abundance of top films, although they received screen credit on very few. So those who are not “in the biz” might never know who these talented and distinguished men are. Ken and Dave are also eager contributors to any educational project regarding Foley, as they value passing on the traditions and informing others about the craft. They are quite a pair.

Ken and Dave started at a time when Foley was recorded on one track. Most of the prop effects were edited in, so their task focused more on the footsteps of the characters. Having a team of three people as walkers allowed many characters to be covered at one time. Because recording and rerecording technology was still rather simple, dubbing



Veteran Foley artists Ken Dufva (left) and David Fein (right) performing footsteps cue for a film. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.

mixes did not include any stereo mixing or panning as is now the common practice. So as long as principals were kept together and backgrounds were kept together, they could combine or “marry” characters easily. This, of course, changed as technology allowed more separation of characters and props.

MGM had a nine-person team on the Foley stage when Ken and Dave began working together. There were three walkers, a projectionist, a boom person, a mixer, a recordist, and two prop people. This tradition conformed to what might be on a soundstage for production. But as the years progressed and the system evolved, the tradition became two walkers, a mixer, a recordist, and a projectionist. The stage began to accumulate props, and there was rarely a need for someone to gather props during a session. When Dave and Ken were not walking, they were cutting. So they were truly sound editors as well as Foley artists.

INDEPENDENCY

Robert Rutledge (*The Witches of Eastwick*, *Tango and Cash*, *Back to the Future*, *Fandango*) is included here as one representative from the transitioning Foley generation of John Post, although he was younger. Bob was an amazing professional. His mother, Evelyn, had been one of the first female sound editors, and as a young man, Bob worked with his mother. Thus, he inherited the profession. He was a gifted sound and dialogue editor and performed a lot of his own Foley, as earlier editors had done. What is special about Bob, and the reason he has to be included in the historical perspective, is that Bob was one of the first to see the Foley stage as a place to design custom effects, whereas most focused on performing hand props. Because Bob was an exceptional editor and understood sound so well, he knew how to supplement library sound effects with Foley effects. Today, all Foley artists are expected to know how to design custom effects on a stage that will complement the tracks that the sound editors will edit.

“You can cut sync. You can’t cut ‘feel.’”

Bob knew how to spot a show, pull the effects, supervise a team, walk and edit the Foley, shoot and edit the automated dialogue replacement (ADR), edit the effects, and supervise the final mix. He was a humble and unassuming man who worked as an equal with other Foley artists and not as the supervisor. He was a perfectionist, yet he knew what could be fixed in editing and how to achieve excellence in performance. Bob was one of the first to say, “You have to get the feel right. You can cut sync. You can’t cut ‘feel.’” Bob knew that Foley was intuitive, and he had a special gift for becoming the character in his Foley performance.

Bob trained his two stepsons, Scott Hecker and Gary Hecker, in these crafts. Scott is now an Oscar-nominated supervising sound editor, and Gary is a superior Foley artist with a playful and inventive Foley spirit. Bob's legacy lives on.

The present incarnation of Foley is included in major films, independent films, television shows, commercials, websites, and games. With the advent of the Internet, the opportunities for the use of Foley are vast. No longer is Foley the elite world of a few whose names are included in the final crawl of a film. Foley is so omnipresent now that most every film student, advertising professional, commercial and postproduction house, games-designing company, and uploader onto YouTube is aware of and trying to include Foley in the presentation. This means many individuals are trying their hands and feet at this craft. It is hoped that these people will become more aware of how the craft was born, nurtured, and allowed to "grow up" into the gigantic aspect of sound that it is today. Many people in our past and present are responsible for the development of an exciting and creative aspect of sound that requires sonic education, physical and mental discipline, and artistic creativity. Some of the more notables have been mentioned here. But there are many voices to be heard that will contribute to the discovery and appreciation of the performance end of postproduction sound.

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Noise vs. Sound:

Foley As It Is Used in the
Various Genres and Styles of
Film, Animation, and Games



When the typical filmgoer enters the theatre to enjoy the latest release from Hollywood, Bollywood, or some such place, she or he is not wondering who did the Foley or what Foley will be in the soundtrack. This minor obsession is the territory of the sound expert or fan. However, the movie watcher will be affected, albeit unknowingly, by the sound cues meticulously designed, cued, performed, and edited. The sonic experience might enhance the narrative of the film, or it might actually distract and cause discomfort. Either way, it has impact.

Many films are lauded as having great sound. Sometimes, these celebrated films are actually loaded with so many sounds that the ear is overwhelmed. A loud soundtrack with many noises in it is not necessarily a good or tasteful track. There is an acknowledgment in the sound community that adding “low end” helps a track seem powerful. However, that does not translate to a track with ingenuity or color. It is simply loud and obtrusive.

In the Foley world, similar issues can arise. There can be an emphasis on doing as many sounds as possible to fill the Foley tracks. However, at the final dub, mixers rarely complain that there is not enough Foley. The more frequent complaint is that there is too much Foley. There is often duplication with what has been covered properly in sound effects. The best Foley artists learn to be discriminating about what should be heard and what should be ignored. They learn to help focus the scene with the Foley, not clutter it.

“What do you want to hear?”

The ear can only discern a limited number of sounds. It is a much better strategy to make specific decisions regarding what sounds should be heard rather than make noise for everything that moves. The issue is not what sounds are actually there. As Alyson Moore, one of my previous Foley partners, points out, the best Foley artists ask themselves, “What do you want to hear?” Many of the most renowned sound experts in film and television share this sentiment.

Many films demonstrate an effective use of Foley in film. Foley is the support player in these films and can be studied to better understand its intrinsic value to the narrative in the film. Foley is used for different purposes, depending on the genre, style, and intention of the director.

SOUND AS STORYTELLER

In *Once Upon a Time in the West*, the epic film by Sergio Leone, the opening credits scene, which is about 13 minutes long, is introduced using minimal dialogue. The sound and scant dialogue have been completely reproduced in postproduction. The edited sound effects and Foley tell the story. Three men appear at a train station, slowly and with intention, and proceed to wait. They methodically enter the station,

walking on a hollow wooden floor, their dustcoats flapping in the wind. The ticket attendant speaks a few words, which are replaced dialogue, and tries to sell them tickets to the train, which are tossed into the wind. One of these three men has a battle with a fly. He sits calmly in a creaking wooden rocking chair because it is so hot, and he barely moves while he tries to get the fly out of his face. He finally captures the fly as he smashes his pistol barrel against the rocking chair where the fly has landed. Another has water dripping on his hat from a leak in the roof. Each drip is carefully and artfully designed to emphasize the slowness of the action in the scene. He finally takes his hat off and lets the accumulated water drip run across the brim of his hat and into his mouth because the day is too hot and he needs the moisture. The third runs his hands through the water trough. It is clear to us that the men are “bad guys.” We know this from their intimidating actions and their control of a space that does not belong to them. The windmill in the background squeaks awkwardly. It is a sound effect edited in to have an eerie rhythm that does not match the action but is hypnotic. The footsteps are deliberate and heavy. The plank road is creaky and vacant. The scene is heavy with Foley. The sounds tell the story. The sounds support the visual compositions. The sounds support the characters. When our protagonist gets off the train, we only know it because we hear his harmonica. The guns are shot, bodies fall down, and the story begins. It is a bold approach to a film.

Leone replaced all of the sound in many, if not all, of his films. He preferred to affect the sonic style and have an intentionally artificial sense, yet the sound always progresses the action. The Foley as well as the cut effects are essential characters in all of his films, and this unusual opening illustrates his artful technique.

In *All That Jazz*, we see the main character, a choreographer/director (modeled after the film’s director, Bob Fosse), in a table reading of his latest play. Roy Scheider sits at the table, and for the next couple of minutes all we hear is the subjective sounds from his perspective. The actions of the others are a part of the scene, but are not heard. His chair creaks. He taps his hand on the table. We hear the amplified ticking of his watch. He walks to the stairway and grabs the metal rail, then digs his fingers into the rail. He sits down again. He crushes his cigarette into an ashtray and lights a new one with a match. He then grabs his wrist. He drops his second cigarette to the floor and crushes it with his foot. He breaks his pencil into two pieces and drops it on the floor. He breathes heavily. He sweats. We see the concerned look on his ex-wife’s face as she is participating in the play reading. Then, the sound becomes objective again as the actors finish the reading and get up to walk away, chatting happily. We have just witnessed the character having a heart attack, yet not one word is spoken. With the exception of a few edited sound effects, it is all said with the camera, and Foley.

In *Noises Off*, we see actors rehearsing and then performing a farce for various audiences. The characters, their relationships, and their idiosyncrasies are set up in the first 20 minutes. Then we watch the relationships deteriorate. The farce is now backstage as well as onstage. The disintegration of our characters and their shenanigans are revealed to us while they are backstage and cannot speak, lest the audience hear them. They race up and down the set stairs, pick up and set down plates of sardines, handle newspapers, fiddle with flowers, take slugs from a whiskey bottle, tear off clothes, put clothes on, slap each other, tie shoelaces, grab an axe, fall down stairs, search for a contact lens, and fall over a sofa. Meanwhile, the play is still being performed onstage while the movie audience watches the offstage activity. The sounds the movie audience hears are almost entirely Foley.

"Foley ... is the supporting player to the actors ..."

The examples from these three films are different in genre. One is an epic western, one is a dramatic musical, and the third is a comedic romp. They use Foley in very different styles. The western is using Foley in a stylized manner, the musical in a realistic but heightened manner, and the comedy in a slapstick manner. Yet all three films have a distinct vision for the Foley to follow that supports the script, direction, and acting. The Foley serves the vision of the director and is the supporting player to the actors, the picture editor, and the sound editor.

When designing the sound effects, backgrounds, and Foley for a project, it is essential to understand how the genre and style affect the choices and execution. It is never just a matter of picking sounds from a library, editing them in, performing the pedestrian Foley footsteps and hand props, and adding music to progress the scenes. The writer, director, production sound mixer, director of photography, and picture editor have all had an influence on the shaping of the drama, which the post-production sound team must now support. In retrospect, we can analyze how Foley, as well as edited effects, were used to sonically portray the dramatic purpose of various films.

In *Dead Calm*, we see how the suspense is reliant on sound. In one scene, we watch our lead protagonist intensely use drafting tools to analyze the sketch of the boat he is on. While a video is playing in the background (which features the psychopathic murderer in the film), our character walks through the boat, now filling with water, and proceeds to the bottom of the boat, which is almost submerged. He is swimming in the water and jams his knife through the boat bottom.

Later, our protagonist is spilling gasoline onto the ocean and catches the abandoned boat on fire by throwing a lighted lamp onto the ocean, so as to attract the attention of his wife who is sailing toward him. The psychopath, meanwhile, is throwing the entire force of his body against

the door of the room he is locked in and scrapes the ropes off his hands. He crashes through the door, while wooden debris flies everywhere.

The sonic story adds to the suspense because there is virtually no dialogue and an understated musical score. The director relies on sound to help us enter the psychological space of our characters. The Foley is clean, specific, and realistic. Every edited effect is precise. The style is natural, yet foreboding. Any overplayed sound effect, whether edited or Foleyed, would have diminished the tension of the scenes.

"We hear the 'gush, gunk, and gore' ..."

In John Carpenter's *The Thing*, we encounter a dog that has been absorbed by the "creature." We watch a dog, accompanied by a crewmate, walk cautiously into a caged area with other dogs. The human footsteps are distinct and precise. This "good dog" is apprehensive as he enters the space. His footsteps are clear and prominent. Another dog, already in the room, begins to growl and threaten, his body writhing and transforming. We hear the "gush, gunk, and gore" that has nowadays become predictable. Accompanying the gore are cicada sounds that are edited effects. The good dog tries to free himself by chewing his way through the metal mesh enclosure, which is a Foley effect. The result is a carefully orchestrated series of sound effects and Foley that together form an auditory "skin crawling" so necessary to the story.

In *Poltergeist*, we watch as many toys in a child's bedroom fly through the air and slam into a closet. The music score is loud and obtrusive, so the prop sounds for the toys are equally loud and overplayed. At the end of the scene, the characters handle a simple clown doll as they search for their daughter, who has disappeared. As the action dies down, and the worst of the noise and turmoil is over, the irony of the clown being a loved and harmless toy is illustrated by the childlike and playful jingle added to his hat. The Foley performed for the scene adds to the chaos, then calm, of the psychic phenomenon. Underplayed and realistic Foley would have fallen short of the required task.

SOUND AS ANIMATOR

Foley has become an important part of animation. Originally, animated films had very little sound edited in or used music cues to indicate the sound. In early Warner Brothers cartoons, orchestrated music cues were used to telegraph a character's entrance or mischief. Witness Bugs Bunny as he creates havoc with Elmer Fudd. Pizzicato violins may indicate the rabbit sneakily walking up to Fudd.

Jimmy Macdonald, the voice of Mickey Mouse after Walt Disney and a sound expert at Disney, altered our expectations of sound effects in animation. Jimmy had been a drummer. He was also a trained engineer. Because of his unusual background, he was often called on to

create his own sound “gadgets,” which later became revered props in the Disney prop room. They were invented by a man whose whimsy and imagination, and whose skill as a musician, engineer, and voice actor contributed to his playful and rhythmic perspective on sound.

“... bings and boops ...”

Although he was not specifically a Foley artist, Jimmy did do some of what we do. He used specially made props for specific sounds for animation. The conventions he set with this special gift of his changed the way we approach animation Foley forever. Instead of relying on music for sound effects, as had been the tradition in theatrical cartoons for many years, now the audience was getting accustomed to special “bings and boops,” and many other indescribable sounds that we present-day artists hope to create as well. The irony is that after he retired and there was yet another regime change at Disney, many of his props were thrown in the dumpster at Disney, because the old prop rooms were being cleaned out and these new people did not know what they had. Fortunately, Jimmy found out about this from his colleague Joe Herrington and actually retrieved many of these props from the dumpster. Presently Joe is the official curator for Jimmy’s inventions.

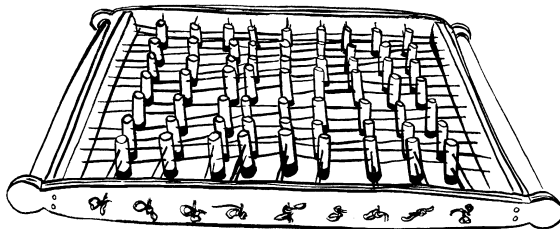


Illustration of one of Jimmy Macdonald’s gadgets. This is the “marching men,” intended to recreate many cartoon characters walking together by manipulating the device.

Today, animated films and television shows are filled with sound. Edited effects and Foley often dominate the soundtrack. In animated musicals, there are few moments when the audience is not hearing music, effects, or Foley. The soundtracks are lush and creative. Yet there are still some films that stand out as excellent examples of how Foley can be genre specific.

In *The Incredibles*, we watch as several superheroes live ordinary lives. The use of sound effects and Foley support this ordinary life. In one scene, our hero is in his cubicle explaining the policies of his insurance company while pretending to deny a woman’s claim. We hear the light background of the office: papers, pencils, chairs, and hands on

tables. The props and footsteps are very realistic to match the animation. Sound and picture support a live action view of the world. No magical or playful sounds are used. The world, sonically, is ordinary.

In *The Lion King*, as we watch the hyenas and Scar banter back and forth, we notice all the footsteps and body movements are evident. However, as the song “Be Prepared” begins, the focus of the sound, including Foley, changes. We are now attending to the song, as does the Foley. Instead of hearing every footstep, we hear only the prominent ones. We hear the marching hyenas and a few of Scar’s more obvious footsteps. We hear the bones of dead animals, played heavily and brightly over the music. We hear only the loud body hits and falls. The song is the star, not the Foley. When the song finishes, the sound effects and Foley become, once again, more prominent. The sound effects, Foley and final mixing choices are altered to accommodate the music.

A recent French animated film utilizes Foley in a manner that comports with the actual animation style. *The Triplets of Belleville* is a wonderfully creative film with an offbeat story, unusual characters, inventive animation, and a soundtrack that supports all of these aspects. The Foley is sparse, as is the animation style. There is almost no dialogue in the entire film, so the story relies totally on the animation and the sound.

A young boy lives with his grandmother and becomes a bicyclist. The grandmother has a clubfoot. In one sequence of scenes, we watch the young boy open a box and take out his new puppy. The box is cardboard and has paper in it. The prop work is underplayed and artful, yet it is not overly precise. The dog footsteps are prominent as we discover that the dog’s main goal is to bark at the train. He travels up and down the stairs several times a day to give the riders their daily salutation. The grandmother, while making the boy’s bed, discovers a scrapbook showing his passion for bicycles. She buys him a tricycle, which causes him to clap his hands with glee.

As the sequence progresses, we see the passing of time as the dog, now aged, goes up the stairs to bark at the metro, but more slowly now. We watch the grandmother following her grandson, who is now grown up, as he trains on his bike. She girds him on with her whistle. After the ride, he flops onto the dining table while his grandmother uses ordinary household items—a vacuum cleaner, eggbeater, and lawnmower—to relax and sooth his muscles.

The film has a charm unlike other animated films. The style is indicative, rather than detailed and lush, and the characters have only the most important and exaggerated characteristics etched in their faces and bodies. We are voyeurs, watching and listening to them proceed through their lives. The Foley is never obtrusive or lifelike. It is like the animation—illustrative and whimsical.

MUSICAL SOUND

The old-fashioned film musical utilized a lot of Foley for the dance sequences. In *Singin' in the Rain*, Donald O'Connor's performance in "Make 'em Laugh" is a combination of production sound, "looping" of some dialogue, dance Foley, and prop work. The beginning of the scene has O'Connor and Gene Kelly walking in front of set pieces while talking. This is dialogue that was replaced after production. The chat leads into O'Connor's song, where he sits on a piano, sings, fiddles with various items, and dances. All of his hand props are Foley and his dancing is Foley. The piano keys he steps on and his singing might be from a prerecorded track or added in during postproduction after the scene is edited. What is notable is that the background props are not audible. The Foley focuses on the foreground props that the leads work with. The lack of background props and footsteps is striking by today's cinematic tastes. There is a certain artificiality to the track that was totally acceptable to the taste and genre of the 1950s.

White Nights, on the other hand, has a scene that demonstrates a similar purpose for Foley footsteps and dancing, but for a different genre. This film is a musical drama. Gregory Hines plays an expatriated American living in the 1980s Soviet Union. He tells his bitter story of how he left the United States with dance. He narrates his story by dramatizing his childhood, Viet Nam experiences, and devolvment into a desperate life. The production track has Hines's footsteps and scuffs in the track. He enhanced his dancing on a custom-made stage, and I Foleyed his footsteps for the scene. What the final soundtrack consists of is a blend of production footsteps, Foley footsteps, and Foleyed dance steps. The purpose of the dance is unique, and the hybrid of the three layers of footsteps is unusual. The goal was to sound natural and subtle.

Although both films combined production, dance Foley, and traditional Foley footsteps and props, the styles are very different. Both films succeed in their sonic goals because the craftspeople involved understood the purpose and style of the films and knew how to utilize the technology of the times appropriately.

INDICATIVE SOUND

Styles in sound reflect styles in cultures. As was illustrated in Leone's Italian-produced films, most of the sound and dialogue were replaced. This has been a frequent experience in the Italian cinema. The sound has not been a primary concern in production; rather, it would be addressed mostly in postproduction. Some French films, on the other hand, seem to have an impressionism style that is utilized in the approach to sound. In *Au Revoir, Les Enfants*, Foley is added in an indicative manner. When the young boys in the school are walking

around atop walking stilts, there is a general sense of the prop, but one cannot really discern one character's actions from another. When eating in the dining area, there is a sense of activity with the bowls of food and eating, yet there is not a clear accounting of who is doing what. Of course, as globalization spreads in the film world, each country learns from the others, and sound is approached more conventionally by all. However, there are distinctions because the cultures have different values. These values are expressed in the scripts, the cinematography, the acting style, the lighting, the costumes, the music, and the sound.

ADAPTIVE SOUND

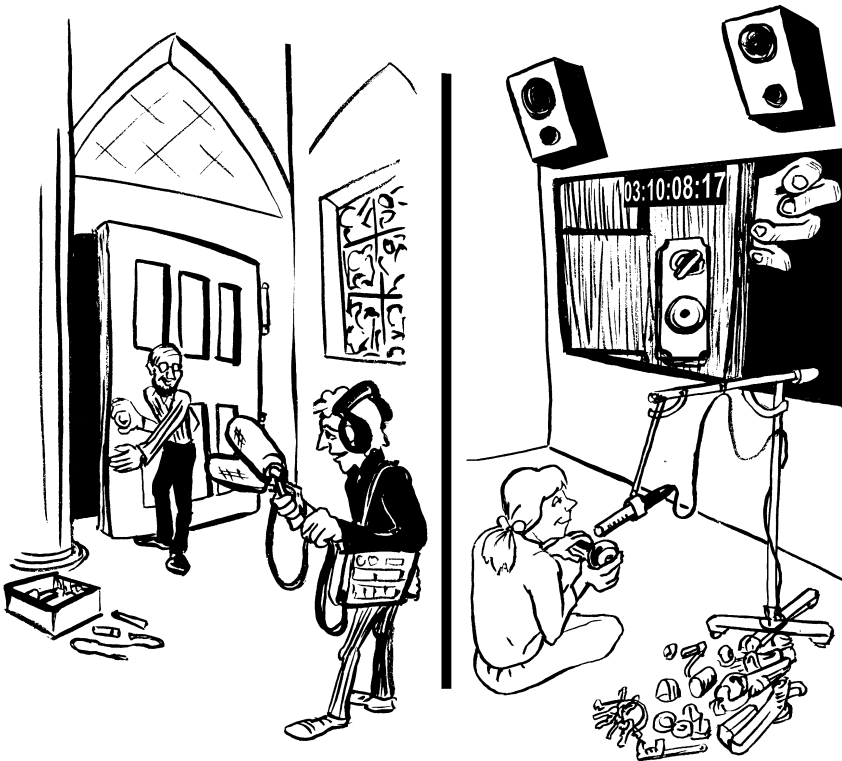
Today's games are very sophisticated. No longer are we satisfied playing Pong or Pac Man. Now games are complicated and utilize the most advanced techniques in animation and sound design. There are detailed story lines with many interactive decisions for the player. Along with these decisions come distinct sound choices. Once again, genre plays a part. If the game is more playful, the sound choices have a light and whimsical quality. The more mysterious games utilize sounds that evoke unsettling emotional responses. What is important to note is that Foley is used within the games in varying degrees. Most game sound design relies on library sounds that are programmed in to respond to the player's decisions. The scenes that include Foley are performed by a Foley artist with the same purpose as that applied to the most expensive and dramatic films. The difference is in the length of the sequences. In games, the sequences are quite short, as a rule. Each alternate is performed with specificity and detail, and a great deal of attention is paid to the style and genre of the game.

As we move into the next phase of sound in media, whether it is film, advertising, television, animation, the Internet, or games, there will be a constant adjustment to the use of Foley. It is impossible to predict how technology or cultural styles will affect how sound in general and Foley specifically will be utilized. As with all good education, we study the classical methodology and learn to work with the variations according to the circumstances.

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Chapter | three

Single or Married: Foley Used Independently or Combined with Sound Effects



When most professionals first start thinking about including Foley in their soundtrack, what they usually have in mind is replacing or enhancing the footsteps of the characters and performing a few hand props. This was the original role of Foley. This is no longer the case, and each Foley artist has the opportunity to utilize Foley in an aspect that includes more specialized design in its implementation. It is helpful to understand when Foley is relied on to enhance or “sweeten” the production track and when it is an essential part of the layering of sound effects.

SUPPORTING REALITY

When Foley is performed to replace footsteps, it is assumed that it is going to be played with production. Thus, the footsteps must be performed with the intent of “fitting in” with the dialogue as it is already recorded. This entails watching the sync very carefully and playing the recorded Foley back with production on the stage to ensure that it does indeed enhance and not detract.

This is also the case for most hand props that are performed. If the artist is handling gun life or flipping pages in a book, for example, the performance should be realistic and subtle. Whatever the actor is handling should be duplicated as closely as possible by the Foley artist. A heavy cup in the film is a heavy cup on the Foley stage. If you see fine china, the dishes should sound fine as well. Watch the actor’s energy and movement, and consider the story. The story dictates everything. When the artist is recreating the prop that is in the scene already, then the goal is for the Foley to be as indistinguishable from production as possible.

Foley, however, has been increasingly used to complement edited sound effects, and in some instances it takes the place of effects entirely. A car crash, for instance, might be partially production, partially edited effects from a library, and partially the added personality and life one gets on the Foley stage.

When a Foley effect is to be played without an accompanying sound effect, either with the production track or even in a scene shot MOS (*mit* out sound), we refer to it as a single effect. However, it becomes a married effect if it is going to be layered with another prop, or pre-dubbed with another track of Foley or edited sound effects. This distinction becomes crucial for the Foley artist and mixer. Is the Foley being relied on by itself? Is this a domestic track or a “foreign”? Will there be ADR?

A married Foley effect might also occur when two sounds will be performed at the same time on one track. One artist might be manipulating the hinge squeaks used in a swing while the other works the chains. One might work the chairs creaking in a classroom while another scrapes the legs of the chairs against the floor.



Ken Dufva and David Fein demonstrate a married Foley cue: two props performed at the same time for one track. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.

ENHANCING REALITY

Sometimes a supervisor has it in mind to have the Foley cover what is traditionally edited from library effects or customized field recordings. In *Sylvester*, which is a film about a girl and her horse, some of the scenes used production horse footsteps. However, the supervisor decided he did not like the horse footsteps he had in the library and asked if I would create the horses on the stage. Now this has been done before, but more often, editors try to cut horses in from various library effects for time and cost efficiency. What resulted was that some scenes were production sound, some were library effects, some were Foley (single track, single effect), and some were Foley married to the sound effects. We do whatever works best.

A typical effect that is a married effect between Foley and sound effects is the ever-present body fall. Typically, the Foley artist will be down on the ground with some cloth or padding and will use the weight of the trunk of his or her body to thrust with control onto the floor. This performance will be combined with whatever has been cut in effects, which is usually some heavy thump sound of one or two tracks. The result is a body fall with the character from Foley and the weight from sound effects.

In *Die Hard*, there is a scene in which Al, the friendly Los Angeles police officer, has a dead body land on his car. He frantically tries to drive away and ends up crashing his car. Steve Flick had his editors cut in most of the crash, but we sweetened it with some Foley stage hits

against the car, crunching of the metal and squeaking of the car door. Once again, this was a married effect.



Ken Dufva prepares to work two props together to create a different resonance in the Foley effect. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.

REPLACING REALITY

Bob Rutledge was one of the first sound editors that began to see the Foley stage as a place to create custom effects. Traditionally, the stage was used for hand props, but Bob, being experimental and energetic, would perform his own Foley and turned the stage into an explosion of creativity. There is nothing he would not do on the stage if he felt it was better than what he could get from his library.

Bob had worked as a sound editor with his mother, and took on more of the responsibility of the company as her health deteriorated. He had worked with editors Fred Brown, Ross Taylor, Bob Henderson, and Alan Murray at the time when editors were still doing a lot of their own Foley. Bob had a gift for Foley and began incorporating more of it into the sound tracks.

"Bob was always thinking outside the box ..."

Bob's stepson, Scott Hecker (*Road to Perdition*, *Meet Joe Black*, *Up Close and Personal*) is a supervising sound editor. Scott remembers that "he [Bob] was always coming up with creative ideas on how he could articulate actual really big sound effects versus the typical footsteps, hand props and the more simple applications. Bob was always thinking outside the box with Foley."

Bob's influence has been great in the Foley world. It is not unusual for an artist to be creating all sorts of loud and amazing sounds that will accompany what the editors are layering. Scott often works with

his brother Gary (*The Da Vinci Code*, *Something's Gotta Give*, *Seabiscuit*) as the lead Foley artist on his sound team, because Gary continues Bob's approach to Foley and has advanced the craft in his own right.

This tradition has continued in the Foley world. Foley artists are asked to create more and more of the effects on the stage. The upside is that the Foley effects are fresh and personal to the film. The downside is that Foley time is expensive and it takes a great deal of time to create sound for a film. Another problem with this approach is that there are sound editors back in the cutting rooms working very hard to make magic themselves. More than once, ambitious Foley artists have created something wonderful on the stage, only to have it be discarded at the dub stage because the sound effects had already been predubbed and the effect was effectively covered.

CREATING REALITY

On some of the more expensive and epic films, Foley is often relied on to create many of the effects typically layered and edited in. The reasons for this practice vary. Sometimes the effects are quite special and specific and relate to a character. In *Explorers*, the spider's footsteps had to be unique. Tim Sadler (*The River*, *China Lake*), the Foley mixer, had been a music engineer, and would often have creative ideas. John Roesch (*Get Smart*, *American Gangster*, *In Her Shoes*), the lead Foley artist, and Tim came up with a plan to have a very musical sound for the footsteps. While I am not exactly sure what John used, David Stone remembers that "it sounded like fiberglass tubing and that John had manipulated it so it gave off different musical sounds. Each footstep had a different pitch." At first, Dave and supervisor Mark Mangini figured they would marry the Foley with a John Pospisil (*Ocean's Thirteen*, *Solaris*, *Antz*) sound design effect. But as they recollect now, they think they relied totally on the Foley because it was so inventive.

Charles Campbell, a well-respected supervisor, is known for requesting special sounds from the stage. Chuck has supervised many films including *The Terminal*, *Amistad*, and *A Few Good Men*. John Roesch has created many remarkable customized effects for Chuck using the Foley stage as a laboratory. Chuck would be at every Foley session and pursued his contribution as a Foley "director." Not only did Chuck reportedly have John and his partner audition shoes for each character, but he gave a lot of input to how he wanted the sounds designed. Chuck knew what effects he had in his library and what he wanted John to cover.

The practice of using the Foley stage as a place to design custom effects became common in the high days of sound. In the 1980s and into the mid-1990s, time and money was spent on the Foley stage without much complaint. As schedules have tightened and money is

scarcer, fewer films allow for the creative indulgences of editors or artists. Fortunately, many of these innovative effects have been preserved in libraries to be used again.

In *Predator*, the mysterious hunter's feet had to be performed first in Foley, then married to a heavy impact sound from the sound editing. The result was a very heavy sounding footfall, with more impact than we can artfully get on the stage, but with a naturalness and liveness that matched the character. It should be noted that the actor portraying the predator was wearing a leotard in the black-and-white duplicate I worked to, and it was only as we got further into the project that I actually saw more of the visual design of the monster.

Dave Stone, who co-supervised *Predator* with Richard Anderson, remembers:

John P. [Pospisil] called the funny gun on the Predator's shoulder a "Parrot Gun" because it looked like a pirate's parrot. He had to create a special set of design effects for it. It had to sound like it was moved by magic. So on the far away shots, we used just John P.'s work. But in the close-ups, we combined it with Foley because it needed more specific actions. My inclination is to use Foley to anchor things like that in reality. Foley adds character, personality and texture to cut sound effects that can be lifeless without it. But how intentional that is depends on the unique moment in the reel.

If an artist is performing Foley for a domestic release of a film or television show, then the task of Foley is usually simpler. It is assumed there will be less time for replacing sound, so as much of the production as possible will be used. Thus, Foley is responsible for less. However, if the language in the show is going to be replaced, then any sound that cannot be separated from dialogue must be completely replaced.

At one time or another, we Foley artists have all been asked to be sound editors without a Moviola or Pro Tools. We create and edit with our bodies. The sounds we make are sometimes expected to stand on their own. But often, our performed effects will be married to edited sound effects that we have never even heard.

Foley can also be recorded "wild." This entails recording a series of a prop or effect to be edited later as a library effect. In actuality, most of the sound effects that end up in the sound library were at one time either field recordings or Foleyed effects. Glass clinks, gun clicks, background dishes, background cop gear, papers rustling, desks creaking, and other such sounds are background sound effects that were, at one time, performed as wild Foley on a stage by a Foley artist or sound editor.

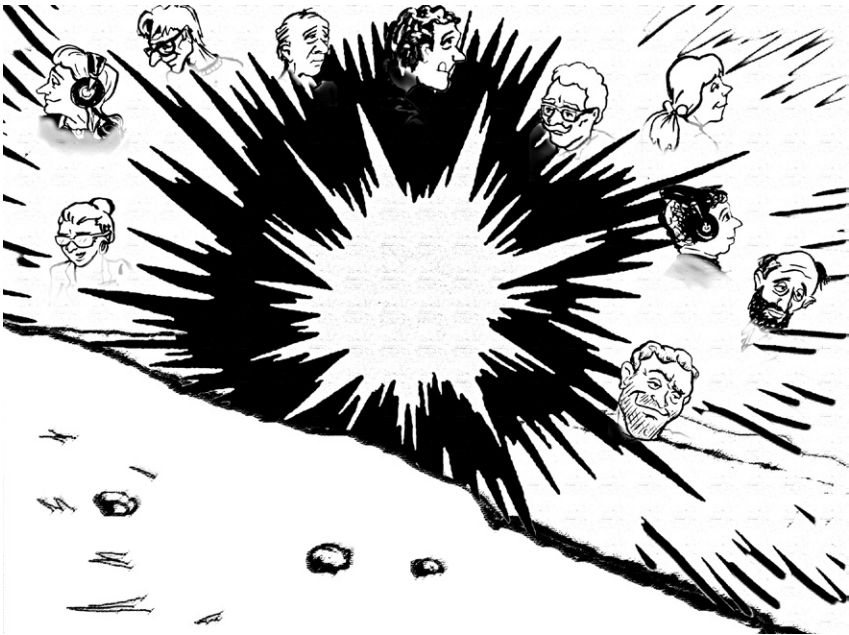
PART | TWO

The Protocols, Conventions, and Hierarchy

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Fire in the Hole:

The Players and Their Responsibilities



Postproduction sound has a systematic set of procedures that has been developed over many years. This system has variations depending on the budget and time allowed for the project. In general, however, most professional films and television shows follow the same paradigm. There is the accepted hierarchy of players and the expected conventions of the process.

THE TEAM LEADER AND THE TEAM

Most films have a supervising sound editor (SSE). The production company, at the request of the director or picture editor, usually hires this person. Sometimes, in animation and television, the postproduction supervisor for the production company does the hiring. The important point is this: the first person hired for postproduction sound will be the supervisor. Some films have a sound designer and a supervising sound editor. The two positions have different tasks. The sound designer is responsible for very specific conceptual sound effects, and the supervising sound editor is the team leader for the rest of the sound crew.

The SSE then hires the necessary editors for the show. He or she may have a budget that allows for a generous supply of editors. More likely than not, however, the budget is slim and a few well-chosen editors will be hired. There will be someone to edit dialogue, someone to edit sound effects and backgrounds, someone to supervise and edit the automated dialogue replacement (ADR), and someone to edit the Foley. The music is composed and edited in a separate place by a separate crew.

On a big-budget show, the SSE will have the luxury of hiring more than one editor for each task. That is desirable, as the schedules become shorter, more demanding, and more labor-intensive. The crew may have to constantly change the edits of the film for “temp dubs” and picture changes.

The Foley artists are usually hired by the SSE. Normally, there are two Foley artists on a film or television show. However, if the budget is tight, it is not uncommon for one artist to have to do the entire show alone. This is not the preferred protocol, but budgets vary greatly and some shows cannot afford the cost of two artists.

The Foley artists are accountable to the supervising Foley editor. There may be another Foley editor, but the supervisor is in charge. This editor will have spotted the required Foley with the SSE and will have cued the Foley for the stage. Once the Foley has been performed and recorded, it is this editor who ensures that the work is appropriate and all the cues are covered.



THE PROCESS OF EACH TEAM PLAYER

The SSE spots the show with the director and picture editor. He or she makes detailed notes on what is requested from the sound team. Notes are made regarding style, important dramatic moments, the specific ideas of the director, and continuity issues. The SSE may have the ADR editor at the session take notes on what lines the actors will need to replace during the ADR session. If the ADR editor is not at this spotting session, the SSE will have a separate spotting session later. The supervising Foley editor will also get a spotting session with the SSE.

The dialogue editors will get the assembled picture with the selected sound “takes” from the picture editor. They will then divide up the reels to be finessed and work carefully to smooth and separate out the dialogue in the film. This is where a lot of magic takes place. Dialogue editing can save the other editors on the sound crew a lot of unnecessary work. By smoothing out and cleaning the dialogue properly, the dialogue editor can retain the footsteps and props that were recorded in production. Thus, the sound effects editors and Foley editors can put their efforts into the truly necessary effects that need to be added to the tracks.

“Specific tracks will be assigned ...”

The Foley editor will cue the footsteps, hand props, cloth and special props, and custom effects that need to be performed on the Foley stage. Specific tracks will be assigned for each character walked and the specific

types of props performed. The cloth will be put in the last track assigned. Traditionally, cue sheets would be sent to the Foley stage that laid out the blueprint for the Foley mixer and Foley artists. When Foley was recorded onto tape, the cue sheets were handwritten. Nowadays, they are typically printed out from a Pro Tools cueing session.

The Foley mixer (or recordist, if there is one on the stage) will then load the Pro Tools session into the computer, and the Foley artists will get the cue sheets so they can plan their approach to the cues. Some studios (and some film schools) have a server that uploads and downloads, so no external hard drives are ever sent to the stage.



While the Foley artists are performing cues on the stage, the sound effects editors are cutting in their effects. The SSE has usually auditioned and assigned effects for the film, and the editors are given their "kit" of

effects in the form of a library. However, this is changing. Now editors can use a server and download the requested effects. It is their job to organize and layer the effects and create the soundtrack for each reel.

Meanwhile, the ADR editor is on the stage getting the required replacement lines from the actors in the film, then going back to the cutting room and cutting in the selected takes.

The point is that all of the sound editors, whether they are cutting dialogue, effects, ADR, or Foley, are doing their tasks at the same time. They have to coordinate their reels and must know what each other is doing. There is never the luxury of waiting to see what someone else has done before the artists perform their craft. The team works in unison, but not together.

TEAM COLLABORATION

All of the members of the sound team have to have a working knowledge of what the other members are responsible for so that there is no overlap in work effort, but everything is covered. The sound effects editors need to know what the dialogue editors are “saving” in production. The Foley editors need to know what the sound editors are cutting in from effects. The sound effects and Foley editors need to know where the music will be loud. All the editors need to know what lines are being replaced. Everybody’s job affects everybody else.

Once all the editors have edited their tracks, the tracks go to the dubbing stage for the final mix. Until recently, there were three mixers at the dub stage. The convention now is two. Some shows rely on one mixer to do all the work. One mixer predubs the dialogue. That task can take a week or more. Another mixer predubs the effects and Foley. Then the ADR is predubbed. For the final mix, both mixers work together. One focuses on dialogue and ADR, the other does the Foley and sound effects. One of them also mixes the music.

Every editor has to be aware of how his or her material will dub. The editor is responsible to the mixer. Often, the SSE will sit on the dub stage during predubs to oversee the process and make sure the mixers have the material they need. The SSE might fix some edits on the mixing stage. The particular editor that cut the reel might make the changes.

The Foley artists and the Foley mixer should also be keenly aware of how the Foley will be dubbed at the final mix. Not only do the Foley artists and Foley mixer have to pay attention to the specific cues, but also it is essential that they know enough about the tasks of the editors and the mixers to be helpful. All too often, the Foley session arrives at the dub stage with too many tracks of Foley.

“... anticipate the mix when presenting the Foley ...”

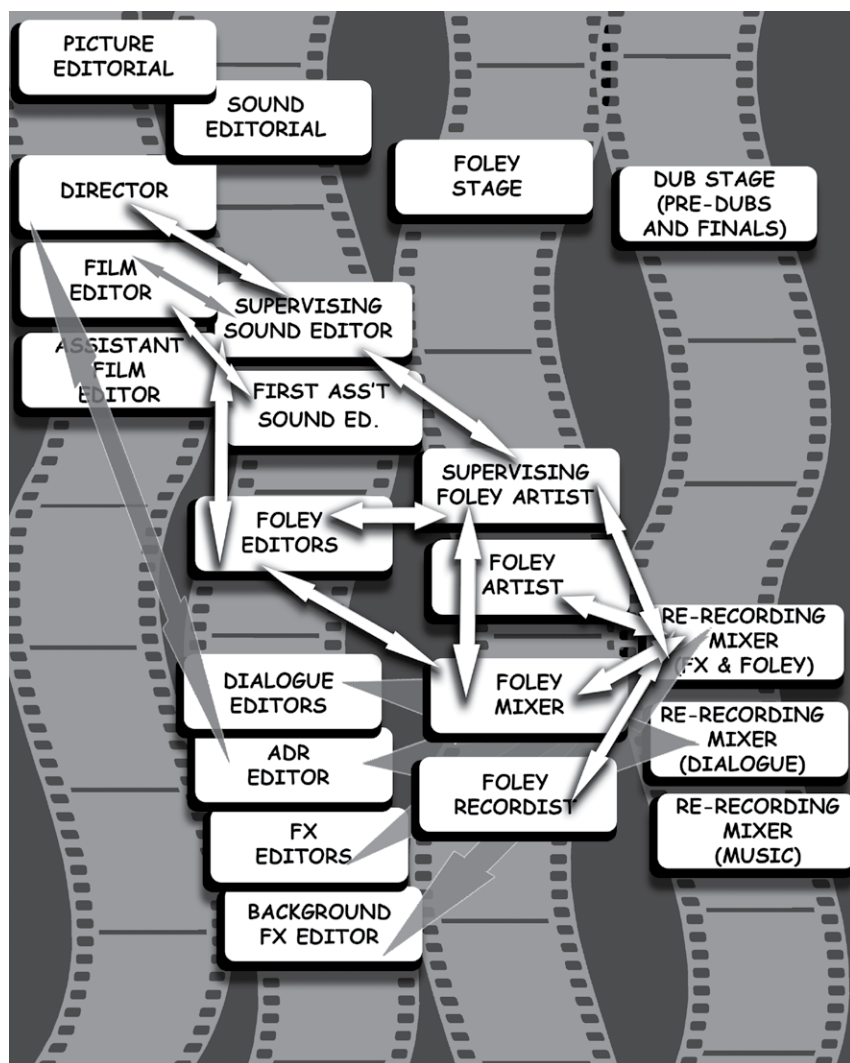


The Foley team may have done a lot of cues that were actually good in production or covered in sound effects. So the mixer has the problem of listening to all the choices and picking one. This is not efficient, and mixers do not appreciate the added work. It is important to remember that the mixers at the final dub have the director, producer, picture editor, and others watching and judging while they try to accommodate the wishes and desires of the onlookers. It is a stressful situation, and the best favor any Foley artist, mixer, or editor can do is to anticipate the mix when presenting the Foley.

In television, the situation is similar, except that everything is happening at once and in a compressed schedule. It is not uncommon for the show to “turn over” one week before it is suppose to air on television. So it is even more essential that the sound team be organized and aware of each other’s tasks. It is also helpful to have little, if any, duplication of an effect. It should be covered in the production track, the effects tracks, or

“... protocols are different.”

For an independent film, the context is different, so the protocols are different. The person in charge of sound is often the same person who composed the music or wrote the script. Perhaps the mixer is also the editor. The Foley artist might also edit. Also, it is typical in a small film that some of the team members are less experienced. Thus, although the film is smaller and the budget is miniscule, it is helpful for inde-



pendent filmmakers to understand what the professionals in “the big show” do so they can adapt the practices to their own projects.

The most important step is to have one person in charge of organizing the soundtrack. That person acts as the supervisor. The supervisor can also edit, or perform the Foley or mix, but there needs to be one person who is the team leader and point person.

Once the leader is established, the organization of the soundtrack can vary. The Foley artist can cue and cut as well. The Foley mixer can mix the final dub. The editors can predub in the Pro Tools. The dialogue editor can also compose the music. The configuration of skills can vary,

but the tasks and accountability cannot. The system used in features and television is tried and tested. It works very well. It is a good template for any project. You will have fewer people who multitask. That is the only difference.

One of the first issues that will come up when spotting a project for sound is what effects need to be covered and by whom. If the dialogue editor is stellar, then a lot of the recorded dialogue and effects will be artfully treated, and the effects and Foley editors will not need to cover as much material. This, however, is a big “if.”

Dialogue editing is a fine art, and if improperly executed it can yield disastrous results. Dialogue that is “overcleaned”—that is, does not have enough background noise—will sound sterile. A sterile background means sound effects, backgrounds (BGs) and Foley, will have to take more responsibility. If the dialogue is dirty and sloppily edited, then effects, backgrounds, and Foley have to top the production and add even more layers of sound.

If the editors cutting sound effects do not communicate properly to the Foley team, then sounds will be made on the Foley stage that duplicate sound effects that are already on the tracks. It is a common problem for the dubbing mixers to have to slow down the predub process to hunt for the effects. Are they covered in Foley? Production? Sound effects? Not at all?

Also, there are too many stories of a dubbing mixer having three or four versions of a sound. The decision has to be made—on the dub stage, under the watchful eye of the producer paying for the stage time, and with intense time pressure—what effects to use. As Mike Finnell, producer for Joe Dante, allegedly once said to a well-regarded SSE, “I have to pay someone to cue it, then pay someone to cut it, then pay someone to get rid of it.”

Then, of course, there is the famous, yet perhaps apocryphal, story of Richard Portman, a revered mixer, who simply threw out tracks 13 through 24 of the Foley and only dubbed tracks 1 through 12. It was neither the first, nor last time that a mixer has been burdened with the task of dealing with too many cues that did not need to be performed at all.

The Foley stage is not a place to show off every sound you can make. Foley is a profession and should be performed as such. There is a job to do. As award-winning supervising sound editor David Stone says, the job of Foley is “to have an intuitive appreciation of the dramatic focus of the scene and how that relates to the sound.”

Let's Go Ahead and Go Back:

Spotting and Cueing



In my fantasy world of performing Foley for a film, television, or games, I saunter onto the stage, soy latte and newspaper in tow, and leisurely sip and read while the mixer readies the stage. I methodically read over the cues, which make perfect sense, as the Foley editor is very experienced and has the awareness of what is possible on a Foley stage and how much time the cues will take to perform and finesse. The cue sheets are artful and precise, and all the necessary information for each cue is programmed into the proper channels. The footsteps are performed smoothly and easily, and one of us says, “Let’s go ahead and go back,” which is our cue to go back to the beginning of the reel and begin to perform the prop cues.

In my actual experience, it is all too often the case that I find myself looking at a horrifying “laundry list” of requests, none of which makes any sense, and organized with the care of a frantically rushed beginning editor who has been asked to cue the Foley because no one else has time. There is no road map, no plan, and no method of execution.

One of the reasons I decided to edit and cue Foley for myself and other artists is because I understand all too well how difficult it is for Foley artists and mixers to create optimal Foley with cue sheets that are not useful. There is a protocol for cueing that is sane and efficient and allows all Foley professionals to focus on their tasks rather than use precious stage time to decipher “wish lists.”

THE SPOTTING SESSION

The process starts with the spotting sessions. Ideally, when a supervising sound editor (SSE) is hired to head a sound crew, she or he meets with the director and picture editor. Sometimes, if time permits and the budget allows, the first picture assistant and ADR supervisor might attend the session as well. There are rare occasions when the Foley supervisor is at the first spotting session. As a Foley editor, I recall spotting with the director present about five or six times. One of the best spotting sessions I experienced in this manner was on the delightful animated show *Olive, the Other Reindeer*. Steve Moore was the director and Matt Groening was the producer. Matt appeared at the spotting session, and we all had a wonderful time discussing sound concept and style. Most spotting sessions are much more serious and grueling.

The director and editor will usually run the picture and discuss the preferences with the SSE. The SSE takes notes and asks about ADR that will be needed, special concerns, and timelines. There will be questions about temp dubs, reshoots, and picture changes. Often, the director will state the obvious to the sound editor about the pedestrian effects.

“‘At last, a director with some common sense’...”

But the key is that the SSE gets a clear sense of what the expectations are regarding sound.

David Stone (*Predator*, *Dolores Claiborne*, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*) relates a story about working with Tim Burton on *Batman Returns*:

So, we were in Chris Lebenzon's cutting room with Tim, and Rich Anderson and I were at the KEM table, and Chris and Tim were driving, going back and forth and Tim would say, "Oh, there's a door. We have to get that door. Here's a this and here's a that." And then he just stopped and turned to us and said, "Oh, what am I doing? You guys know what to do. Why don't I just go to the places where I have concerns?" And Rich and I just turned to each other as though to say, "At last, a director with some common sense and some trust! He knows that we know how to cover the mundane things. That's why he's paying us."

Dave continues:

Every movie has certain unusual concerns, what we used to call "the sound nobody's ever heard before" because so many directors would make that point as though they were the first to ever say that. After you've done a few movies, you begin to see these patterns. The supervisor can save the director a lot of time by acknowledging the special concerns and spend the time on the issues that really need to be discussed. We don't get much time with the director, as a rule, and an empowering director, like Tim, will use our time together wisely.

During this spotting session, Dave made Foley notes for me. He then presented me with my own notebook with a complete written breakdown of each reel, what the sound concerns were, what sound effects would cover, and what I would be responsible for in Foley. He then scheduled a session with me to run the film and talk through concept, style, and schedule. I left the session knowing what was expected of Foley, who the effects editors were (in case I had to call about a specific cue), and how much I had to accomplish each day on the stage. This is the high-end approach to spotting.

Dave held similar sessions for ADR. At these meetings, the ADR supervisor was told what lines would be replaced in ADR and which lines the dialogue editors would probably be able to "save" in the production tracks. All editors had a notebook. All editors knew who was on the crew, where they were, and what they were cutting in. It is a seamless approach that allows maximum empowerment for the editors because the communication is so complete.

Each SSE has his or her own approach for spotting with the crew. "I try to approach a piece of work in many passes. So, for instance, I might try to sit with the person in charge of the Foley cueing and first just discuss the 'big deal' questions. I like to layer the work," Dave Stone says. "For instance, 'We're going to do a jungle picture like

FOLEY

RESULTS OF SPOTTING SESSION 3/25/87
SPOTTED REELS 1-6 WITH EDITORS, DIRECTOR, ADR

PROLOGUE: Spaceship lands, from dist. space. About 30 sec.
TITLES, FADE OUT, FADE IN ON SC. 001 (Copter in)
SC. 002: Palapa has a wood floor
SC. 003: As dialogue progresses, we begin to lose o/s activity but for occasional jeep, a few Copter in or out or by
SC. 004: Pre-lap Copters & BG over dissolve from map c.u. Get 1:1 of ADR pilot radio stuff, to cut static & squelches We also have FX military radio for aircraft.
SC. 004A: They like the idea of pre-lapping radio chatter for cockpit scenes, even over exteriors of the Copters. This should be done carefully, and split so we could lose the ext.
SC. 005: For FOLEY, hard to see what Ramirez is doing with a prop. He pulls a roll of tape off the wall, tapes up some gear in his lap, later tosses the tape to another guy.
SC. 007: SHOT MISSING: This will be a heat-seeking INFRARED shot of the jungle, probably from Chopper belly POV. We will do a simple elect. hum or nothing here. It's to set up audience to understand later, the heat-seeking powers of the alien Predator.
SC. 011: Dave has to research this, but there are lights for prepping to jump out of Copter. The temp dub has a garden-variety buzzer sunch-up, which is OK, but we'll see. Just note that there are 2 ready lights. The final one which means "OK, now jump!" comes in SC.013, which is currently in reel 2.

-----REEL 2 as of 3/26-----
SC. 012: Put some "niners and rogers" over ext. copter And be prepared to sync up squelches & static to ADR.
SC. 013: Coordinate primary light buzzer w/ editor on R-1. You have second light-buzzer which means "OK, Jump Now!" In the temp, they had two plain old buzzers, different pitches. Cut extra blade whumps, and or heavy wind to surge as they open the copter door to jump.
FOLEY: At about 57' in the 3/26 version, they throw the reppel ropes out of the copter. DIR. & ED. hot to sell this to audience, tho they know you wouldnt hear it. Cue it big!
SC. 014: FOLEY: Cue big rope whirrs thru hands. We'll try to FX record it, too. WE RECORDED GREAT WHIRRS THRU HANDS - JUST NEED OTHER ROPE MUTS.
SC. 015: JUNGLE BG SPOOKY HERE
SC. 016: On dissolve, new, different BG's. (about 160'?) Cue Ramirez look with monkeys or birds.
SC. 017: Ramirez has climbed up into Copter. While we're on him looking at gutted wires, etc., have FOLEY cued so Dillon is climbing up o/s. Give Dillon time to climb up there. Then we see they're both up there.
SC. 019: When cut to Billy The Indian, hard cut in new BG - to establ. another location. A bird cues Ramirez. At about 445' (this version) hard cut new BG location for Dutch and Ramirez. At about 477' hard-cut in big palm frond sweep. DIR likes idea of PUNCHING CUTS w/ extra foliage (to sweeten foley), to give some tension while they're stalking around.
SC. 020: Don't forget, when you see the alien wearing a body-stocking over his lizard suit, he'll become CAMOUFLAGED by optical house. (But not enough so the audience can't see him)

An excerpt from the supervising sound editor's book for the film Predator, indicating specific requests from Foley.

Predator. Let's talk about the foliage. Let's make that a special treatment and get fresh foliage every day.' Then I would go to another specific issue."

Rarely are postproduction crews this well prepared. However, this is an ideal, which can be adapted to any media project. The emphasis is on organization and communication. Maximum efficiency and creativity can be attained if the housekeeping aspects of sound are honored.

FOCUSING THE TASKS

The same principles can be followed for smaller or independent films. The key is that there must be a leader. Ostensibly, there needs to be a supervising sound editor who functions as the “go-to” person for everything. A fantastic first assistant is a necessity as well. Even if a project has only a few individuals editing an entire film, a strong SSE and first assistant will ensure that the show is executed efficiently.

Mark Pappas (300, *The Interpreter*, *War of the Worlds*) relates that spotting sessions are also being modified to accommodate tighter budgets. “Normally, we hope that the supervisor of a show is able to spot with the director, but that happens less and less nowadays,” he notes. “What happens is the picture editor is whom they may spot with. We get the instructions from the picture editor. Then after the first temp, you actually hear things that the director might say. If there is a second temp or [we] go right into predubs, we hope we have it remedied by that point.”

One of my favorite soundtracks is *Road to Perdition*. It is artful, elegant, and unobvious. Scott Hecker was the SSE on the show. I was curious about how he decided on the style of sound to create for the film. He relates how director Sam Mendes described his sonic vision: “When I was working with Sam initially, he said, ‘Scott, I want the sound to be poetic, not prosaic. I want it to be operatic, not episodic.’” When a director gives imagery like this, it is inspiring, to say the least. Scott’s sound supervision on the film earned him an Oscar nomination.

Another film Scott supervised was *Without Limits*, directed by Robert Towne. The film is about Olympic runner Steve Prefontaine. There are several sequences where the film shows him running. Scott assumed he would have the Foley (performed by his brother, Gary) cover all the footsteps of Prefontaine. Robert Towne had another idea. He told Scott he wanted the running to be done with sound design. Instead of a “real-world” runner with cleats and footsteps increasing with effort (the expected approach), he wanted each race to sound different.

Towne wanted the first race to sound like “fish feeding under water.” He wanted the second race to sound like “birds flapping wings on a plate of glass.” Scott says, “I started out scared and walked out [of the spotting session] thinking, this is going to be cool!”

Gary Hecker was dubious and wanted to cover the footsteps in Foley, “just in case.” But Scott was firm in his resolve to trust the director and himself. “[Towne] wanted me to take a can opener to the top of my head and think outside the box.”

SPOTTING REDUX

Sometimes, a spotting session is for the intention of “repurposing” an already released film. At one point, I was involved with this process at

Disney Television. A film was going to be shown on network television and had to be conformed to the commercial breaks and the time limitations on the air. Sometimes the film had to be shortened. Sometimes, however, we had to add in footage that was not in the original release. This would require editing in sound effects, performing and editing Foley and ADR, and editing additional music cues.

The spotting sessions of repurposed films are short and sweet. The network provides simple notes, and we all conform to the new requirements. The trick is getting the new sound to match the old sound so it can then be remixed at the dub stage.

We would get the stems from the original dub of the film and go back into the material to see what changes or additions were requested. Once we found sound effects that fit and matched, we went on the Foley stage to perform the necessary cues and edit them in. The same would be done for ADR. Another editor would be finding music cues that could be stretched or added to the new version.

There might also be a separate spotting session for the airline or television version of a film. This usually does not affect Foley much. The purpose is to replace objectionable language with new ADR lines that cover the old line. If you have heard “Oh, that is freaking great” or “Just flake off,” you can be sure you were watching either the airline version or the repurposed television version. Sometimes you will even notice that words are missing. Now you know why.

CUEING FOR SHOEING

Once a Foley editor has the spotting notes, the next step is to translate these concepts and limitations into cue sheets to be used on the stage. Until recently, the more experienced and meticulous editors would present handwritten cue sheets to the Foley crew on the stage. The cue sheets were notated in vertical columns with the principal footstep cues beginning in track one, two, three and so on. The middle tracks would be background footstep cues, and the outside tracks would be various props. The final track was a cloth pass.

Now, most cueing is done on a Pro Tools session. The tracks are horizontal, but the approach is the same. The first main character’s footsteps are on track one. The track assignments remain as they did previously. The main difference is that instead of writing the cues in, the cues are marked into a session, the session is saved on a hard drive or sent to a server, and the stage loads in the sessions from the server or the hard drive. The cues are then recorded right in the regions marked and tagged in Pro Tools. Cue sheets can be printed from the Pro Tools sessions.

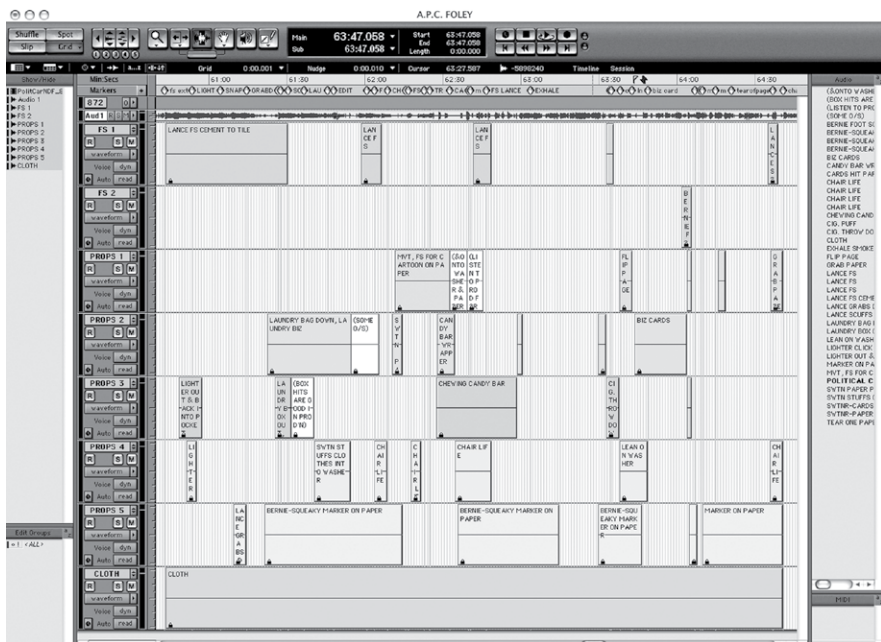
Figure 2

Sheet # 1 of 2

Total Tracks 1 / 2

Page	Page	Page	Page	Page
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9	97	98	99	100

49 | Let's Go Ahead and Go Back



A modern Pro Tools Foley cue session, showing cues as they are assigned to specific tracks prior to Foley session.

It is not necessary to cue Foley to the first specific moment of movement. Foley artists will be looking at the action in context of the scene. Whereas ADR is cued to the first “mod” of sound, to better help the actor be in perfect sync, Foley can be cued more loosely. As long as you cue with the thought of helping the artist anticipate the action, your cueing will be appropriate. There is a danger to cueing too closely to the first footstep. Mixers and artists like a “breath” before the actual cue begins. Sometimes “streamers” are programmed into the recording equipment, which help the artist hit sync, but many of us are used to “eyeballing” it. The important thing is to get close to the moment, not on top of it.

“... Foley is a performance.”

Another helpful hint to cueing is that it is better for the Foley artists if the cues have a flow to them. If the picture is edited to show a back-and-forth perspective (we see Jane walk down the hall, then Max in the kitchen, then Jane, then Max), it is easier for the Foley artists if you keep Jane’s cue going, rather than stopping it and cueing for the next cut. The walk will be more natural and the artist will be more relaxed. Remember, Foley is a performance. Cue for the artist and the mixer, not for the editor.

If the Foley editor happens to be someone who likes doing tax returns or computer science programming, then cueing Foley will be a vacation. For the rest of us mere mortals, it is important to understand

that the most tedious and annoying part of Foley is the cueing. It is slow, painstaking, monotonous and, at times, boring. It is also the most critical use of time in a Foley editor's workflow. It should take about four hours for an experienced editor to cue about 10 minutes of film. An animated film will take longer, as will an action sequence. The short spurts of Foley required in games today take less time and have less detail. However, as technology allows for more complicated interaction in gaming, the Foley will become more intricate.

When an editor cues Foley, she or he has to watch every scene several times. All editors vary the approach, but there are some conventions to keep in mind. First, cue the main characters in the scene, character by character. Keep each character on a consistent track, if possible. Mimi is on track one, Joe is on track two, Maurice is on track three, and so on. If Mimi has a complicated walk and needs to go from one surface to another during that walk, it might be good to start the concrete footsteps on track one and jump to track two for the grass footsteps. Some Foley artists can make that transition on the stage easily in one track. However, if the artist is less experienced or the mixer does not have a lot of skill punching in on a cue, then the editor can cue the walk on two tracks.

The next step in cueing is to look at background characters. They might be groups of people or perhaps individuals. If some background person walks from right to left or left to right, put that person on a separate track and indicate the direction of the walk. If there are characters on the left, center, and right of the screen, you will need three tracks just for those incidental background people (BGs). With principal players, you identify names. However, with BGs, use clothing colors, height, or an identifying characteristic to help the Foley artist see quickly whom you have cued. An example would be "tall man, blue shirt, right to left" or "two girls running center."

Be as specific as you can without using too many words. When we were doing the Foley on *Platoon*, the Foley editor, who was experienced and knowledgeable, cued "man carrying child." Although this sounds just fine, the scene included several men, each carrying a child.

"Think in terms of food groups."

Once the footsteps are cued, the next step is to start the reel or scene from the top and start identifying props. Keep similar props in similar tracks. Paper cues should be in different tracks from metal cues or leather chairs, for example. When we are on the Foley stage, the mixer adjusts the microphone to record certain props. Most Foley artists perform all the paper cues in one sitting, so it is easier if we don't have to hunt for each cue. Think in terms of food groups. Paper, hand pats, body falls, metal crashes, cop gear, horse footsteps, saddle and bridle, debris, and so on are all different kinds of props. The key is to have a

clear road map for your artists and mixer so everyone is “on the same page,” literally and figuratively.

In the day of magnetic film and then 24-track recording, Foley artists would use tracks judiciously. Now, with Pro Tools, there are fewer limitations on track use. The good news is that it is possible to split out cues and layer more. The bad news is that this encourages the less disciplined editor to throw cues in anywhere without much thought. Once again, however, it is essential to consider the workflow. The people who come after the cueing need to have a secure sense of direction and communication. The more precise and methodical the cueing, the more relaxed and specific the Foley session can be. Foley artists are always under intense time pressure. If the Pro Tools crashes or the microphone starts humming, time will be lost while the problem is addressed. Organized cueing allows room for mistakes, retakes, and outtakes.



When it comes to cueing the Foley, the editor is serving the needs of the Foley artists and the mixer. Foley stages are expensive and usually booked in advance. The number of Foley sessions booked for a project is usually decided before the first spotting session. The editor should cue only what needs to be performed on the stage. If the effects editor is going to use library effects for the cue, then it does not need to be cued for the stage. It is best to prioritize. What must be done on the stage is what should be cued. It is always acceptable to cue some additional cues that are not necessary. If “wish list” cues are going to be added, then it is wise to notate them as such.

In the words of Foley mixer David Jobe, when it comes to the biggest obstacle on the Foley stage, “It’s time, time, time!”

Scene Change:

The Foley Stage, Mixing Booth, and Prop Room



There are few encounters that one finds more intriguing than a visit to a Foley stage. The peculiar experience of being in a dark room, with designated areas on which to walk, strange items skewed around, a pile of mismatched and unattractive shoe wear on the floor, and the strangely dressed people manipulating various pieces of metal, wood, and the like is not comparable to any other. Few people would ever forget the unique impressions of that encounter.

What few people would spend much time contemplating is how that room was conceived, designed, and executed. If a person did devote time to studying and investigating the room itself and the accompanying mixing booth and prop room, the specifics of the construction and the demands of the technology would add yet another layer of appreciation to the secret world of “Foleydom.” For those who are curious and wish to attempt, construct, or adapt a room to be a Foley stage, the principles and requirements are fairly simple to utilize, once you understand the necessary components. Then you can embellish at your discretion.

THE ACOUSTICAL BLUEPRINT

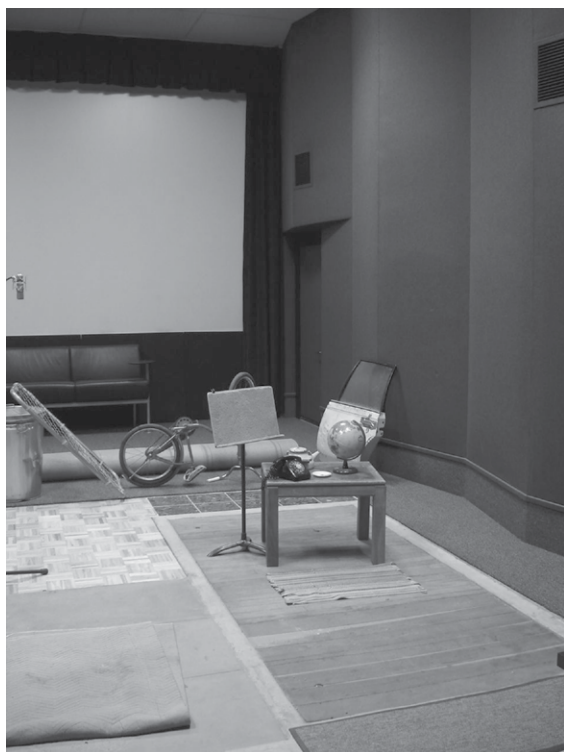
An intelligently designed and appropriately constructed Foley stage begins with the electrical requirements. Although most rooms have conventional standards for electrical wiring, a Foley stage has specific needs. When all is said and done, no matter how beautiful the room looks or how impressive the recording equipment is, if the room is not wired for the specific goal of recording sound effects with a wide variety of dynamic range and little, if any, interference from outside noise and electrical hum, then you will spend countless hours tracking down the noises and trying to get rid of them. The first rule of the Foley stage is that it must work electronically.

Jim Fulmis, owner of Fultek Professional Audio and a veteran electrical engineer, has designed and wired many recording and rerecording stages and knows firsthand the nightmare of trying to fix a stage that is broken. When asked when he prefers to be involved with the construction of a Foley stage, he says, “It is always best to be involved in the early stages of design rather than one [a Foley stage] that has already been built.” This is the sentiment of most engineers. The earlier you bring in your electrical experts and are assured that your concept for a room is workable, the better. Once you commit to the construction of your stage, it is already too late for optimal electrical applications.

To begin with, the engineer must consider the shape of the room. The best shape for the Foley stage is a rectangle rather than square. The walls, ceiling, and floor should not be perfect parallels. There are formulas in construction that allow for walls that are slightly off in measurements so the sound waves can be broken up. The goal is to reduce the chance of sound wave reflection (bounce). This way, the room is

less reverberant. Most acousticians agree with this perspective. Some, however, prefer rooms with more bounce and life. If you are used to the life in a music recording room, then the concept of a room that requires sound waves to break up might seem strange. But on a Foley stage, you typically want less reverb.

"... a hum or buzz can shut down operations ..."



Foley stage at Chace Audio in Burbank, California. Photo courtesy of Chace Audio.

In a room built to capture and record sound, the electrical needs are peculiar as well. When building an office building or home, one does not have to be concerned with buzz or hum that is running through a microphone cable. However, on a Foley stage, a hum or buzz can shut down operations for hours or even days. Thus, it is essential for the wiring used for microphones to be placed away from, and not parallel to, the wiring used for electricity. If the microphone wiring and the electrical wiring are too close together or, as is sometimes the case, bundled together, then when you try to record, you will get a hum. Microphone wiring will draw current from the electrical wiring, and it can be impossible to get rid of the resultant hum.

I have spent many days on Foley stages when we could not find where the hum was. Sometimes we had to stop work until an engineer could find and eliminate the hum. Sometimes this fix would last awhile. Other times, the hum came back. There are stages that Foley artists and mixers dread working because there is hum that never goes away. Had an expert who understood the use of the room laid the wiring, this problem could have been avoided.

Another possible pitfall to be avoided via sound engineering is the perpetual buzz in the microphone line. When wires are properly grounded, there will never be a buzz. You will need two types of grounds. One is the audio ground and one is the electrical. Some engineers will have one ground that does both. The bigger the ground wire size, the better. You will also need adequate pipe size for the wires to go through.

It might seem obvious that you would want proper grounding and wiring for a room that relies totally on the efficient and reliable use of electricity and microphones. However, every artist and mixer has horror stories about hum and buzz. Most of the issues that come up on a stage could be avoided if the time and money were used at the front end setting up the stage properly. If you adapt a room used previously for other purposes, you need to have an expert examine the wiring before building anything. Simple mistakes can cause huge problems, as Jim Fulmis illustrates:

I can cite an instance where they brought in a welding cable and ran a copper ground in and added another ground. I was called in after the stage was down for two days and I said, "We're going to disconnect all the grounds." Then we found out there was an air conditioning conduit touching a cabinet that the equipment was in and that was creating a ground loop. So we put blocks of wood on it to keep that from ever happening again and put one ground in. The stage was quieter than it had ever been.

Your goal is to have the room work properly from the time you flick the first switch to record. It is never true that you necessarily have to work the bugs out of any stage. "I've seen so many places where they just keep adding grounds to this or grounds to that, and that will work today. But then tomorrow you plug something else in and now you've got a new ground loop and a new buzz or hum," Jim reiterates.

If the room is wired well, you don't have to spend a fortune for your equipment. As Jim says, "You can use pretty cheap gear, provided it's adequate to the job, and get away with it. You can get really good sound out of inexpensive gear if it's all put together correctly. That's the most important thing."

THE INTERIOR DESIGN

An ideal Foley stage combines function and form. Not only does it need to have the essential elements of a workspace that makes sense to the artists, but it should also have an atmosphere that allows artists to be comfortable and efficient. It is easier to be creative and productive if the stage is designed in a way that maximizes the artist's time and energy.

Most experts agree that Foley stages need to have a minimum of reflection. While it is possible to use baffles to soften sounds that are too sharp or reflective, it is easier to work in a room that is not as live as a music studio. If you are utilizing your stage for other purposes, then you will need to make some compromises with the acoustics.

If you are using a room that has already been built, chances are it has four walls specifically designed to be parallel. You can build walls inside walls to shape the room any way you want. You are not locked into the original design. Think outside the box.

In addition to nonparallel walls, ceiling, and floor, the surfaces should have traps built in or added on that enhance the flow of sound waves. Instead of hard walls (too much reflection) or soft walls (too absorptive), you should include a mixture of both surface types. You can add traps with different textures and shapes to help absorb sound without making the room so dead it has no personality at all. A good rule to follow for the placement of traps is to mix it up. Pair soft with hard: soft surface/hard surface, and so on. Putting two traps of similar material together does not usually result in the best acoustics. Play with the shapes as well. Each room has its own identity. You will need to learn the acoustic style of the room and be willing to adjust your traps. Two rooms designed, constructed, and engineered the same way will sound different. Go figure.



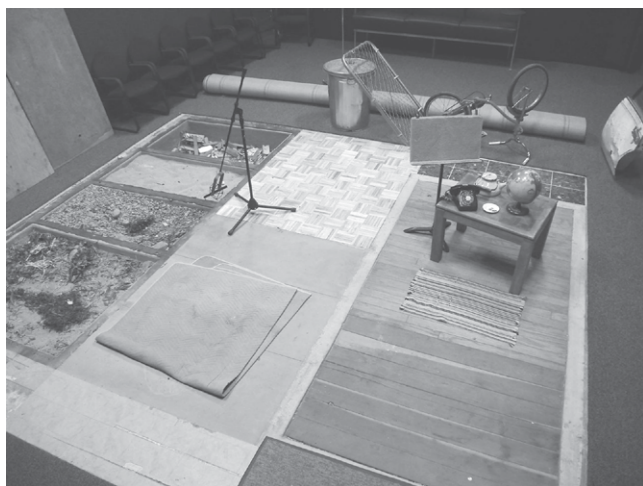
Angled walls and ceiling with alternating hard and soft “traps” for optimum movement of sound waves. Photo by the author.

If you are able to build a floating floor, you will have the best results with your Foley pits. A floating floor has air between it and the foundation. You can then put foam or some other acoustic material into the space to isolate sound that can travel through your floors from another source. There is a stage in West Los Angeles infamous for its vibration from the street traffic. We work around it, but it adds a great deal of effort and stress to the creative process. We move baffles around constantly and even set mic stands on top of baffles on top of carpet to isolate the mic stand from the rumble.

"You can use baffles and rugs ..."



Chace Audio Foley stage with pits covered by carpet. This allows multiple uses as a Foley and ADR stage. Photo courtesy of Chace Audio.



The carpet is removed to reveal carefully placed pits and walking surfaces. Photo courtesy of Chace Audio.

If you cannot build a floating floor, you can use rugs inside your pits to deaden any sounds while you are using them. You can use baffles and rugs under the mic stands as well. Your mixer will be your best guide for determining what works.

Jody Thomas was a story editor who is now a Foley artist. She cut her Foley teeth at Warner Brothers on many television shows, including *Smallville*, *Drawn Together*, and *One Tree Hill*. She now specializes in animated television shows, which she Foleys at her own Foley stage next to her house. She has confronted all the issues of building a stage from inception to practical use. She began with a large, prebuilt shed as the shell for her building and used all the wisdom of the best experts to build herself a stage so she could work at home and be available to her daughter. Because Jody does both animated television shows and feature films, she needed a stage that was large enough to operate in but small enough to be economical. Her approach is useful to any film school or independent filmmaker who wants to have a good sounding and workable arrangement.



The exterior of Jody Thomas's Foley stage. Jody enclosed her stage in a premade shed. Photo by the author.

First, Jody went through the process of acquiring the proper building permits. She then selected her team to construct and wire the stage. She carefully crafted where her Foley pits would be, where to build the water pit, where she would store her props, and what level of technology she would use.

Jody has constructed her pits so they are built into the floor. Some of the pits have some air under them, but her dirt pit is actually dirt on a dirt foundation. Jody's home is out in a more rural area of Los

Angeles, so she does not have a lot of street traffic. Also, her home is built up in the hills, so her floors are away from the street.

Another innovation is that Jody has several exchangeable surfaces that can slide into the top of a pit. This allows her to have more surface choices without the need for a big room with lots of custom pits. One is a shallow splash pit that can have a metal grate over it for a hollow metal surface.



Jody's Foley stage during a session. Surfaces are carefully planned, and props are accessible for the day's session. Photo by the author.



Jody's stage is compact and functional. She has utilized every space in an intelligent and professional manner. Photo by the author.

Jody has utilized two clever ideas to maximize the storage space for her props. Her room has a Rubbermaid garage system rail that looks like crown molding. She can clip all sorts of things onto the rail. Also, she has pegboard on her wall. Not only is pegboard acoustically absorptive, but she can also hang props on it.



Pegboard for hanging items, and cupboards and kitchen surface for performing cues. Photo by the author.



Storage, storage, storage—on the stage for everyday use, in addition to a dedicated prop storage area. Photo by the author.

For her mixing booth glass, Jody has followed conventional Foley stage wisdom. She has two panes of glass, one angled, so the sound waves do not reflect either in the stage or between the panes.



Jody's booth has angled glass, which allows sound waves to move around. Photo by the author.



Another angle of the window view of the mixing booth from the Foley stage. Photo by the author.

Jody uses a TV monitor for her picture. This monitor has an articulating arm, so she can move the monitor to any angle in the room. This allows her to use all her space for performing cues. Monitors give off less noise than a typical television, so while you may be tempted to get a fancy television, think sonically. Do what Jody did. Get a monitor that you can move around. That is a simple and effective solution.

"One door will not be enough ..."

The door to her stage is a double door. This is an essential element to diminish the effect of noise from the mixing booth and outside. One door will not be enough to keep noise from leaking. With two doors together, constructed with a bit of air in between the two, you will have the best chance of keeping your sounds isolated. It helps if all doors that lead to the outside or other rooms are double doors.

Foley pits are ideally set into the ground. The size can vary, but you should keep in mind the probability that at some time, more than one person is going to be standing in a pit or on a surface at one time. Thus, you need a size that can easily accommodate that scenario. The location of pits in relation to each other is a matter of personal taste. It is helpful to think about what surfaces you travel to and from most frequently, and put them next to each other. Keep in mind that anything with metal on it will cause "ring off" on a cue. That will be a constant problem. So it is best to have any pit with metal away from most of the others. You can cover it with rugs or foam baffles if need be.



*Pit covers, traps on the walls, many accessories to allow optimum sound quality.
Photo by the author.*



The proverbial dirt pit with small baffles stacked next to it. Photo by the author.

I like to have exterior surface pits near each other and interior surfaces near each other. I also like to have a concrete surface near one or two interior surfaces, for example, wood and linoleum or tile. It really is just logic. Most live-action shows will, at some point, have a character go inside from outside and vice versa.

I like to have two dirt pits, if possible. One would contain very gritty dirt, coarse and dry-sounding. Another, however, might contain a softer kind of dirt. Potting soil is not recommended. It is moist, which leads to all sorts of things that grow and cause an odor, and it has a soft sound that has virtually no character at all. It is a good idea to have at least one gravel pit. You can use fine gravel, and add some of the gravel to a dirt pit to create more interest to the dirt. Rather than have large rock gravel sitting in a pit, you can store a bag of it for occasional use. If you can pour a small section of real asphalt, that is a great addition. Put it near the concrete.

"Be practical."

In addition to a concrete surface, you will need at least one hard wood surface, but two hard woods with contrasting sound would be better. If you can manage it, it is terrific to have a boardwalk surface. This surface needs to be built over a pit so there is echo and life to the sound. Another practical surface is an industrial pallet. You will need tile or linoleum. Having both is better. But, once again, be practical. Think about what you use the most. Metal surfaces are terrific, if you can build them in. However, I have found that it is also useful to have many different types of metal surface plates that are easily stored, because metal surfaces vary greatly in the movie world. Think about the escalator, the subway grate, the bus, metal bridges, etc. How can

you possibly build all these sounds with a small room and budget? *Be practical.* Build what you use the most, and store the rest. Usually, when you are creating something futuristic, epic, or animated, you need lots of possible metal sounds. Keep in mind that metal reflects sound and adds a quality to any prop recorded around it. It is a good idea to have absorptive material around metal or drape cloth over it when not in use.



Chace Audio has a film screen and a movable monitor to allow viewing the picture from many places. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.

It is helpful to have a mat to use for grass. Many of us have found that the grass mats used for display around Easter or summertime are perfect. You can buy these from wholesalers who specialize in display materials for retailers. Astroturf is not the same surface and sounds like what it is. Previously, we used quarter-inch tape. It was fast, accessible, and inexpensive. With the improvement in technology, sound recording is so sensitive now that sometimes quarter-inch sounds rough and scratchy; it is fine for augmenting certain types of foliage, but for grass it may not be acceptable. If you do rely on quarter-inch tape, it might help the sound to put it under a piece of cloth in the dirt pit.



Dirt pit with quarter-inch tape to be used for grass and foliage which is still used by many Foley artists. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.

Any Foley stage needs various carpet and rug surfaces. Industrial carpet pieces and various throw rugs are essential. Some stages have carpeting built over pit covers, which is useful for minimizing the reflection of the covers themselves, but not always useful to walk on. You will want to have as much versatility as possible.

If you can have a real water pit, with a pump to empty it, that is great. The sound is better if it is flush to the ground, which means cutting into your floating floor. If you cannot do that, then a water pit that is above the ground is fine. Be careful how you mic it. Water slaps against the sides and can sound like a bathtub. On *Little Mermaid 2*, my mixer, Karin Roulo, had us move the mic around constantly to avoid reflection and splashing. The pit should be deep enough to simulate the ocean. You can always fill it less. A good guideline is to allow several feet of space for water, which will prevent it from spilling out or splashing everywhere on the stage.



Jody Thomas had a water pit installed that self-drains. Photo by the author.

You will need a wide assortment of props to stock your stage. You will also need a prop room in which to store them. While it is fine to put many of your daily items on the stage on shelves or hanging as Jody does, you need a place to store items that are used only occasionally. Jody built a small storage place near her stage for the odd assortment of accessories she has collected. If you can manage some kind of storage near the stage for regularly used items, the props used less often can be stored farther away. Most stages I have worked on have both kinds of storage. You will find you start seeing everything in the world as a potential Foley prop, and you will want a place to store these miraculous items.

"... a plethora of squeaks ..."



Chace Audio prop room. Many props organized for easy location of specific props. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.



Another view of the large prop room at Chace Audio. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.



Jody Thomas has an additional prop room outside her Foley stage. She used another shed, smaller and well appointed. Photo by the author.

It is hard for me to remember a time when I did not use a car door or hood in a film. While sound effects editors will cut in door and trunk opens and closes, all the accompanying “life” needs to be performed on the Foley stage. Some stages have a variety of sizes and styles of doors and hoods. You should have at least one or two choices. Car doors and hoods are used for many different sounds, and as you get more comfortable with how things record, you will find a plethora of squeaks, creaks, and reverberant sounds on a good sounding door or hood. The handles and windows on the door will also be useful.

Many films have dishes in the sink or water drip cues. Therefore it is useful to have a place to install a sink and faucet. If it is not possible to do that (which is more often than not the case), then your workspace will need to include a big vessel in which to drip and splash small amounts of water.

Foley stages get dirty. Walking in dirt pits puts dirt in the air. It is essential to have an air conditioner system that cleans the air. After walking in dirt pits for a few hours, the air is unhealthy to breathe, and chances are you cannot work with the air conditioner on because the noise will be recorded, so calculate in your plans how you will manage dirty air. Also, the dirt lands on surfaces, so stages need to be cleaned regularly. This is a real problem in the major film world. Often we are asked to use a stage that someone else is using during another shift. Because there is not enough time to clean between shifts, the dirt accumulates and an unhealthy work environment results. Also, dirt pits become full of bacteria, so the dirt needs to be removed and replaced regularly. I cannot recount how many unpleasant working experiences I have had working on stages that were dirty, messy, and cluttered. It takes time and discipline to maintain appropriate Foley hygiene. However, it is the considerate and professional way to proceed.

When it comes to purchasing equipment for your stage, although it is seductive to buy the priciest tools with the most accessories, these are really unnecessary for a Foley stage. Even the Limited Edition of Pro Tools will suffice for most purposes. It is important to remember the task at hand. You need to be able to record props and footsteps with a wide variety of dynamic range. You need one, two, or three mic choices. You need a microphone amplifier. You need a tool kit that allows you to utilize time code, and you need some kind of intercom system that allows the artist on the stage to hear playback and the mixer to hear the artist in between cues.

Jody Thomas uses the Digi 02 DV Tool Kit for time code. She also has several microphones and a preamp. “I knew what I needed and what I didn’t need,” she says. Sennheiser, Schoeps, and Neumann have well-respected microphones that are typically used when recording Foley.



The control room for Jody's stage. It is small, efficient, and has the lean and mean versions of required hardware—a professional mixing apparatus on a budget. Photo by the author.

THE ALTERNATIVE SPACE

Some sound professionals like to try other ways to record Foley. Mark Mangini is a veteran supervising sound editor who is responsible for the sound design of many wonderful soundtracks such as *Aladdin*, *The Fifth Element*, *Gremlins*, and *The Burbs*. He tried a different approach when he supervised the sound on *The Green Mile*. Mark had grown frustrated with sitting on a dub stage during predubs while the rerecording mixers would finesse the Foley to make it sound realistic. As he states it, “It doesn’t sound like what it’s meant to represent. It is meant to represent some acoustical reality that we can all relate to. We record Foley in a way that is surreal.”

So Mark decided to try something different. He wanted to mimic reality, so he went on his own location-scouting endeavor. He wanted to “cast” locations for their “acoustical signature” and found an abandoned military base that had a concrete corridor and an abandoned prison. He recorded “auditions” of the spaces and had a remote Foley rig assembled with a battery-operated Pro Tools. He worked his budget to allow for the unusual approach to recording Foley, and left time and money in the budget for mistakes and unexpected events. At this point, he was convinced he would record the Foley in this new way.

Finding a Foley artist who wanted to try this new concept, however, was not so easy. The logistics of how to record, where to keep props, how to control the sound, technology, and workflow, and other unforeseen issues caused most of the Foley artists Mark approached to be less than excited. Foley mixers also had concerns. A mixer is used to fol-

lowing a kinesthetic routine with his or her mixing board and monitor that allows optimal functioning. To change the recording configuration is a disconcerting issue for any mixer.

Robert Winder, who at the time managed the stages and operations at Warner Hollywood Studios (formerly Samuel Goldwyn, now under new ownership and with a new name), proposed a compromise for Mark. The film had been shot on the lot, and the shooting stages were still available. They had been built with specifications that were authentic to the real-life spaces of prisons and offices. Thus, instead of having fake surfaces and walls that cause soundstages to sound similar to each other, these sets had a more authentic look and sound than most. Frank Darabont, the director, had insisted on this detail in the sets.

So Mark did a test. He had John Roesch (*Braveheart*, *The Prestige*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *Fight Club*) do sample Foley on both the sets and the Foley stage, and he let the director pick his favorite. The director chose the set samples. So the first issue was resolved. The Foley would be shot on the sets of *The Green Mile*.

The next challenge was how to record the Foley. According to Mark, Mary Jo Lang, John's experienced and meticulous Foley mixer, was reluctant to abandon her methodology of mixing, lest the product suffer. She had the configuration of her mixing board and monitor in positions that allowed her to mix with optimal efficiency and maximum technical expertise. It happened that Warner Hollywood had recently upgraded its infrastructure with fiber optics throughout the lot, including the soundstages and all recording stages. This meant it was technically possible to have sound travel across the lot from the soundstages to the Foley stage. It was also possible to have a talkback system, a monitor and headphones put on a rolling rig, so John and Hilda Hodges, his partner (*Zoolander*, *Stigmata*, *The Peacemaker*, *Independence Day*), could perform the Foley on the sets while Mary Jo watched and guided them from her well-oiled mixing booth.

"'John, walk down the mile—really—walk down the mile.'"

John and Hilda had more adjustments to make. Mark wanted the footsteps walked in a nontraditional way. Typically, a microphone is set in one place, and the artist walks the character while staying in one location. Mark wanted to try to have the characters walk away or toward the microphone to replicate the action on screen. This is not an easy task for a Foley artist who has learned how to walk characters while staying in place. One is not quite sure how far away to walk, as he or she is always aware of where the mic is. Mark wanted John and Hilda to abandon the established practice. Mark decided to place the microphone on a boom, as is done in production, and to move the mic stands around. As he would say to John, "John, walk down the mile—really—walk down the mile."

However trying the process might have been for all involved, two things are certain. First, the soundtrack itself is a first-rate sound job, and second, human ingenuity allowed for experimentation. It is always a good idea to question whether the approach we use is the best. It is important to note at this point that the accepted standard for Foley is still to perform it on a Foley stage and rely on the rerecording mixers to add elements that will enhance the believability of the environment. However, there will always be those who want to test limits, and by breaking away from our comfort zone, we might discover a better way to approach our work.

PART | THREE

The Art and Craft of Foley

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Walking in Their Shoes:

Performing the Footsteps



It would come as no surprise to any film fan who is aware of the role of postproduction sound that at some point, someone is replacing the footsteps of an actor in a scene. It seems logical that the audience would need to hear the character in the scene walk. However, as we examine the actual dramatic needs in a scene, this may or may not be the case.

Let's first look at the actual purposes of replacing or enhancing footsteps. When the Foley artist or editor is viewing the scene, many of the footsteps in the scene may be present and clear sounding. There may be no reason to do anything at all to the footsteps. Perhaps the character is walking and there is no dialogue. If this is the case, then you, as the Foley artist, do not replace the footsteps. Even if the film is going to be released in a foreign market and language is going to be replaced, there is no need to replace the footsteps unless there are ambient sounds from production that the dialogue editor will not be able to clean out or mask. If the production track is fairly clean and there is no dialogue, the footsteps and props can remain.

Often, however, there are interruptions in the character's footsteps, or there may be dialogue, mismatched footsteps from various angles used in the edited version, or a need to use a foreign language. Now the Foley artist has to think about the proper approach to creating the footstep sounds for the character. The artist has to consider the following: is the character male, female, young, old, fast-paced, sluggish, a heavy walker, light and airy, rushed, plodding, anxious, happy, or encumbered in any way? We do not just put on a logical pair of shoes and start walking. Some of us audition many pairs of shoes to see which pair seems the most likely match for what the person is wearing (we may not always actually see the character's feet, and the production track may not offer much guidance) and on what surface(s) the character walks. The time period and location become critical concerns. Thus, just the selection of shoes, if there is ample time budgeted for the film, can be a major decision for each character in each scene.

METHOD FOLEY

When I was working on *Barfly*, I had one of the rare experiences of having the director in the session with me. I prefer to work with only the mixer giving input and guiding me, if I need assistance. But Barbet Schroeder, an international director, decided he wanted to be involved with the Foley. This is more common on some films in some foreign countries, but quite rare in Hollywood and never welcomed by any of us in Foley. Professionals from other aspects of filmmaking really understand very little of our craft or what our approach is, and we do a much better job when we are trusted to use our intelligence and artistic experience. When we have unwanted interference, it distracts us, makes us

self-conscious, and impedes the process. Nevertheless, Barbet felt entitled to have an opinion on what shoes I wore for each character. He was particularly consumed with the Mickey Rourke character.

Barbet had me try on many pairs of shoes. Nothing pleased him. He has some idea in his head of what he wanted the character to sound like and was not interested in my opinion or perspective, although, by this time, many directors and sound editors had trusted me to create the sonic performance of their actors. Thus, I was getting more frustrated by the minute. I cannot remember exactly how long Mr. Schroeder had me “audition” for him, but it must have been close to an hour. I finally asked to take a break and talked with the supervising Foley editor. I pleaded for him to intercept for me. This was tricky politically.

We broke for dinner (we were working nights), and when I returned, Barbet was going through my Foley bags looking at my shoes. This, by the way, is considered a real trespass by all Foley artists. I then decided to advocate for myself. I told him that I really needed him to trust me to make his characters come to life. “Let me make some decisions about the shoes and walk the characters. If, after you hear the tracks, you want me to change something, I will.” This seemed to appease him for the time. However, it was reported to me later that he wanted all the footsteps played very loud in the final dub. To this day, the Foley bothers me because it is mixed too loudly. The director got what he wanted, but I believe he was wrong. He had a preconceived idea in his head and did not understand the role of Foley to support, unobtrusively, the actor’s performance.

When a Foley artist selects shoes for a performance, she or he considers the choice of surfaces. This affects the sound of the shoes. The microphone used and the distance from the mic also affect the performance. The sonic character of the room affects the performance. So choosing a shoe for the character is not simple, but as one gains experience, eliminating improper shoes becomes easier.

“It has a ‘swish’ sound ...”

If the character is walking on a hard surface, it is important to consider a shoe that is not too “bright”—that is, not too sharp and high-pitched in sound. Chances are, if the shoe has too much “high end,” it will not blend into the dialogue track easily. If the character is walking on carpet, it might be better to avoid walking the steps at all. Carpet is hard to record properly. It has a “swish” sound to every impact, and to get enough level in the recording, you have to walk with more definition and weight. If the character is walking lightly or is in a soft shoe, socks, or is barefoot, it might not be worth doing.

If the character changes surfaces during a walk, it is critical to have a plan. Are you going to try to make the changes in one take? If so, be prepared. This is not easy. You will be watching the screen, not your

feet or the surfaces. If you don't know where your surfaces are and cannot walk from one to the other, on the correct footstep in the picture, with the correct emphasis, it is better to punch in for the steps that change surfaces. Or perhaps, you can change tracks and walk each part separately. Your best friend, at this point, is your mixer.

If the character is heavy, that does not mean she or he walks heavily. This is a common misconception. Most people would assume that a heavy person is a heavy walker. Charles Durning, a rather rotund actor, has a fast-paced and clipped walking style and is light on his feet. Go figure. Kathleen Turner, the gorgeous and sexy vamp, has a fast and athletic walk, with more determination and weight than some, in many of her roles.

"... walking on broken glass ..."

How a character walks in different shoes varies. A woman in heels walks very differently than a woman in flats. Someone in soft shoes has a more casual walk than someone in hard street shoes or dressy hard-soled shoes. Bare feet are hard to portray. In *Die Hard*, the Bruce Willis character is barefoot through most of the film. I had to walk barefooted, but with more weight and emphasis than if I had a shoe on. My feet would make joint-cracking sounds now and then, because there were no shoes on for support. Thus, the mixer had to punch in and let me fix the steps with that distracting and jarring "crack" sound. When the character is walking on broken glass, I did one track of straight barefooted steps, then added a track of glass impacts by putting glass on tile, and "walked with my hands," wearing gloves. We have a saying in Foley that illustrates the silliness of some cues. We say, "Next they'll want walking on broken glass." This time, "they" really did.

My partner in that film, Robin Harlan (*Letters from Iwo Jima*, *For Your Consideration*, *Vanilla Sky*), walked the Alan Rickman character. He was suave, international, and poised. She auditioned several pairs of shoes then selected a gorgeous-sounding pair of shoes that had a rich and authoritarian sound. Her character was the boss of the whole operation, and he needed to sound "in charge." He did. Robin's choice was artful and appropriate.

Shoes do not necessarily look like what they sound like. This is an important aspect of shoe selection to remember. This is the very reason Barbet Schroeder was unsatisfied with any shoes I selected. He thought he could "cast" the shoe according to its "look." The assumption that you can discern how a shoe will record by how it looks is inaccurate and uncreative. You must listen to your shoes and not look at them. I have a pair of glamorous-sounding shoes I used for the stiletto heels for *Woman in Red*. They are ugly blue shoes that are shredded yet sound great. My favorite shoe for representing classy, elegant men is actually a woman's patent leather oxford. I have a pair of brown shoes with flaking paint that is great for tall, heavy men in a hard shoe.

Some shoes obtain a squeak. It might be appropriate to have a squeak for the character. If that is the case, you will want to keep that pair as is. You can eliminate a squeak, however, by taping the side of the shoe that squeaks with gaffer's tape. Many a Foley artist has walked across a studio lot in taped shoes to get a cup of coffee. Studio workers are blasé at the sight. They are used to us. Another trick is to use Neet's Foot Oil. It softens leather and can eliminate unwanted sounds.

Foley artists have shoes that are specialized. We have shoes with cleats, both metal and plastic, for sports movies. We have boots that work for military films, boots for Westerns, boots with various heels. We have shoes we use for police officers, fire fighters, doctors, and nurses. We have tap shoes, ballet shoes (both soft and toe), and ballroom dancing shoes. We collect shoes on a regular basis and try them out as often as possible. We have our favorites and the ones we tolerate. They are our friends, and we treasure them.

When a favorite pair of shoes no longer does the job, either by wearing out or getting that horrible squeak, we mourn.

"It looks ridiculous, but in the playback, sounds reasonable."

Sometimes, we walk more than one character at once. This may seem nonsensical at first, but there is a reason for the practice and a method to the madness. When confronted with a scene with lots of background actors (BGs), you don't want to walk each character separately. They are not important to the scene, and you don't want to waste tracks. So you make sounds that cover more than one person. It is often a good idea to approach this in one of two ways. One way is to pick a generic pair of shoes that works for most of the people for one track, and your partner (assuming you work in twos) does the track in another generic-sounding pair. The other approach is to have one kind of shoe on one foot and another kind on the other foot. This is tricky but can be effective. It just takes practice. Because I can tap dance, I can make a series of sounds with my feet that are generic and confusing to some. It looks ridiculous, but in the playback, sounds reasonable.

Some Foley artists can utilize various parts of a foot. This may sound a little strange, but when you consider that a person who has a gift for walking characters or has trained as a dancer, it makes sense. The foot has more than just a sole. There is the ball of the foot, the heel of the foot, and two sides. For anyone who has trained as a tap dancer, the idea of there being only one way to work a foot is laughable. The foot can be manipulated in many ways. As a former dancer, I have often moved my foot in peculiar ways to obtain a different sound in a shoe or make footsteps seem less predictable and contrived. I have walked on the insides of the foot and the outsides of the foot, and emphasized the ball, the heel, the flat footfall, or the heel-toe footfall. I play with the sound. Any person who truly wants to investigate all the ways to

walk a character will, at some time or other, experiment with how the foot can actually move. We are not necessarily eccentric. We are curious and inventive. What complicates all footsteps cues is one fundamental Foley technique. You cannot walk forward and travel. You must walk in place so you are positioned near the microphone. Thus, you have to learn how to make the footsteps sound natural without traveling.



CARTOON:

"It's for the schoolyard scene!"

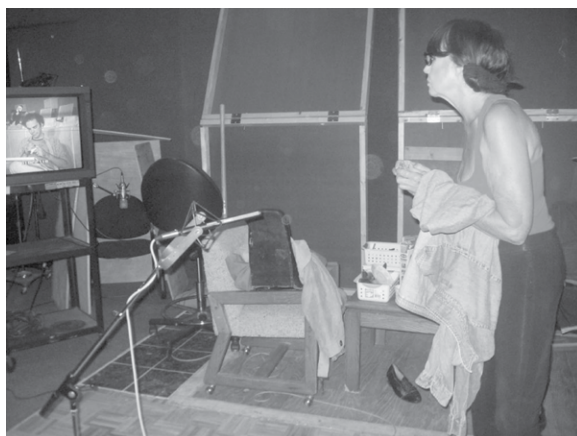
Joan Rowe, a Foley artist since 1978, has a long résumé of films including *Crash*, *Drugstore Cowboy*, and *Gladiator*. Joan was introduced into the craft in a similar way as I. She had been a voice actor during her time in Europe and had returned to the states with her two small children. She had been at Gomillion Sound, as I had, performing some ADR. Ted Gomillion, the owner of the studio and a rerecording mixer, liked her sync and asked if she wanted to learn Foley. He accompanied

her to a strange room, and they watched some woman, behind a glass window, throwing a car door around and stomping in dirt. Joan thought to herself, “Ooh, I am an artist” and thought this strange act was beneath her. Then she remembered she had two small children to support and was cleaning houses for a living—we film folks often do different jobs to support ourselves between gigs—and perhaps she should rethink what she now refers to as her “arrogance.”

“I was just flapping around.”

Joan had a great deal of trouble learning how to get her footsteps to match the people on the screen. She was just beginning her career in Foley and had discovered in her first session how hard it was to perform footsteps properly. Her first day on the Foley stage, she faked her way through the day and vowed to learn how to walk before her next session, which was weeks later. Joan had found performing prop cues to be easier. This, however, is the typical scenario for a beginning Foley artist. Making sense of props and how to manipulate them for a reasonable sound is easier to relate to than walking in sync with someone else. Joan practiced walking like others on the streets when she was out. She turned on her television and practiced walking to all the characters on the show. She did this for weeks on end. When she was called back in to work, she had some sense of how to walk her characters. However, as Joan relates it:

I could not get my feet to walk “heel-toe.” I was just flapping around. It was hard to control my feet. John Post could manipulate his feet many different ways. He could contort his feet. I could not. So I decided to practice and practice until I got better. Now, my footsteps are really good. But it was not easy for me.



Veteran Foley artist Joan Rowe, using a cloth to hold a granola bar used for a chewing cue. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.

Most Foley artists I have worked with or known have expressed a similar frustration. Learning how to perform props is not as alien, because at one time or another, most of the ordinary prop cues one does on the stage mimic what we have done in our own lives. Creating footsteps, however, is different. Performing footsteps in sync, with an awareness of each impact of each step, and making those steps fit the action on screen is less familiar to most of us—that is, except for those of us who had been dancers.

MUST YOU DANCE?

Jerry Trent (*Friends with Money*, *U-571*, *Sin City*) had been a dancer in many musicals. Raised in Illinois, he moved to New York and became a Broadway and touring dancer. He then went to Los Angeles to appear in the film *The One and Only Original Family Band*. The dancers were asked to “Foley” the dance footsteps in postproduction. This was Jerry’s introduction to postproduction sound. He continued to make a career as an onscreen dancer and off-screen “Foley dancer,” until he made the transition to being a Foley artist and added the more traditional sounds to his skill set. Jerry is the most organized and disciplined of artists, with Foley bags that have categories and compartments for all his tools. Most Foley artists are less tidy than Jerry. Some are quite the opposite. But Jerry has taken that famous dancer’s discipline to the ultimate in his approach to his work.

Jerry has trouble conceiving how someone can walk a character without dance training. For Jerry, who was a gifted and experienced film dancer as well as an actor, dancing is what prepared him to be the excellent artist he is today. He found footsteps easy to do. Many Foley artists started out as dancers. The ability to anticipate the movements of a character comes more easily to dancers than it does to others.

Jerry relates a story about one of his experiences doing dance Foley. He was working on *The Turning Point* and was asked to do some of the ballet sounds for Mikhail Baryshnikov. The choreographer was concerned that Jerry could not dance like the gifted Russian. He was asked, “Can you do as many turns as Baryshnikov? Can you stay in the air as long as Baryshnikov?” Jerry, in his typical dry delivery, replied, “I don’t have to do the same steps, they just have to sound like the steps. I can do most of this sitting down.” The choreographer was dubious, but Jerry proved his point—what matters is what it *sounds* like. “Sometimes we put the shoes on our hands,” says Jerry. “You don’t have to know the steps. It has to sound like the dancing, not look like the dancing.”

I have found the same to be true. When working on *White Nights*, I was asked to do dance Foley. I knew I could handle all the ballet sounds. I knew what all the sounds should be and how to do them with the least amount of energy and effort. I could sit, stand on one foot,

lean on a wall, or whatever felt right because I knew what it sounded like. I was, however, concerned about the tap. Although I was an experienced and skilled tap dancer, I was never going to be a Gregory Hines. He was a mammoth improvisational dancer. So I expressed my concern to the supervising sound editor and told him I would study Greg's dancing as best I could but that I felt unprepared. I thought about calling Jerry. However, as it turned out, the producers had a surface built in New York for Gregory to Foley his own dancing. So I did all the ballet and the simple tap that both Hines and Baryshnikov did, but was relieved of the migraine-inducing task of becoming Gregory Hines.

As it turns out, the same situation happened again on *Tap*, which Jerry worked on. The director wanted a stage for Gregory, so one was built. As Jerry tells the story:

They built a platform two feet off the ground, and I knew it was going to sound boomy. When Gregory saw it, he said, "The boards are going in the wrong direction and it sounds like a drum." So I said, "You can move the platform the other direction so the boards are going the right way, but it will still sound boomy."

WHERE ARE THE FEET?

One of the issues that comes up for a Foley artist performing dance footsteps or ordinary walks is where to look if the feet are not on camera. Early in my career, Robert Deschaine, the mixer on a TV movie I was working on at the time, saw me struggle with a character. It was a long sequence with a lot of edits. The character was running. I was exhausted and humiliated at my inability to run in proper sync. Bob, the consummate professional, said, "Watch her shoulders." That was all he said, as Bob is not one to elaborate. I did as he said, mostly out of fear that I was about to be replaced on the show. It worked. The run looked and sounded great. I had the right instincts for running the character but was lost when the edits masked the rhythm of the run. By watching the shoulders, I fell into her rhythm, even with the difficult edits.

Often, a character's feet are not onscreen and the edits don't keep the character in the same rhythm. A skilled Foley artist has learned where to look to get the character's footsteps in sync. It could be the shoulders, the head, the hands, or any other part of the body that indicates the actor's intention. Picture editing is not focused on the sync of footsteps. Rather, its task is to support the story and the flow of the dramatic or comedic action. So the sound experts have to concern themselves with smoothing over the cuts that don't match. This can be tricky. Many times a character is stepping on the right foot at the end of one cut (the A side) only to be in midstep on the next cut (the B side). One has to try two things. Either option might work. Try double stepping: step the same step twice and see if that works. Or one can let

it hang over: don't make the step on the first cut and complete it on the next cut. You never know which way works better in the rhythm of the walk until you try it.

Sometimes actors do strange things that you cannot accurately interpret. John Forsythe had the appearance of taking longer to get out of a car than most actors. This was hard to figure out. Jerry Trent, while working on a television show starring Forsythe, finally saw in one angle of a shot why this was so. The classy Mr. Forsythe was planting his feet and then taking the time to pull his pants legs down before he got out of the car. Once that unpredictable behavior was discovered, it became easier to anticipate the actor's exit from the car.

SHOE SHOPPING

When a Foley artist first starts gathering shoes, there are the typical places to venture for purchasing and collecting. Of course, the first place to look is the closet. There are always shoes that sound great. It is important to think of various types of characters and what types of shoes they might wear. Once again, how the shoes sound is more important than how they look. Another place we all go to is the thrift store. These shops carry cheap shoes that can be amazing sonic finds. We also buy shoes in an actual store, either retail or discount. The fun begins when we have to audition the shoes. The sales clerk will always assume we are looking for a pair of shoes to go with an outfit or for a specific occasion. When we ask to be allowed to go to the hard tile to listen to the shoes, rather than stay on the carpet, an explanation has to follow. Many times, onlookers have assessed me as totally nuts because I am walking on tile, bent over, with my ears as close to the floor as possible while I walk, so I can hear the shoes. Even in Tinseltown, where everyone is used to showbiz types, this action gives one pause.

GENDER BENDING

Men walk female characters and women walk male characters. Gender is irrelevant to the Foley artist. However, several issues can come up when walking the other gender. For women, we often have to walk a man who has a longer gait or a heavier footfall. The obvious assumption is that the woman might not be heavy enough to "walk a big guy," but that would be a misconception. Not only does size not dictate footfall weight, neither does gender. The challenge, rather, is the timing of the weight shifts. Women generally take steps closer together, unless they are quite tall. So the female artist accounts for that in her rhythmic approach to a male character.

For men, there is a problem with high heels. Most men spend their "real lives" in flat shoes or boots. Rarely are they in a situation to wear

the varying types of shoes that women wear. Thus, they are less used to the different heel heights and the adjustments women do to accommodate different types of shoes. Add to that the problem of foot size, and one can see why some men find it hard to locate shoes they can use for “well-heeled” female characters. There are solutions. One is to shop at a store that caters to female impersonators. This is easy to do in a city like Los Angeles, but if one is doing film work in another region or is in a smaller market that produces independent films, commercials, or games, then these stores are harder to come by. However, many male artists have shoes that sound like heels because of the lighter and brighter sound. They have learned how to manipulate the foot to sound like the shoe is a high heel. John Post was a master at this, and many male Foley artists have conquered this issue easily. Again, gender is truly not an issue.

Greg Barbanell, another veteran (*Torch Song Trilogy*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*), was a film student at Cal Arts in Valencia. He had done some acting in the San Francisco area and had entered Cal Arts in the Theatre program. He became more interested in film and got involved as an assistant picture editor after writing and directing films in school. He had also been the main cameraperson for many of the school films. His last year in school, he worked on an independent film with sound editor Gene Corso (*The China Syndrome*, *Predator*, *DeepStar Six*). He began to use Gene’s sound library for his film projects and eventually started doing his own Foley. Later, he had his own sound effects company. Greg became a business owner, sound editor, and Foley artist. He later left the complicated world of running a business and remained in the world of Foley, where he is one of the busiest artists around.

One story that Greg relates has to do with a book he became fascinated with when he was four or five years old, *Gerald McBoing-Boing*. Gerald was a little boy who did not speak but would make sounds with his mouth. The strangest sounds would come out. Greg loved this book so much that as an adult he researched how to get a copy of the book. He was able to find one, although the book is out of print. A film was also made about this book. What is interesting about this is that Greg, like others who have found themselves making their careers in sound, was attracted to the notion of sound being a world of its own. While Greg was pursuing acting, directing, and camerawork, this fascination with sound began early and in a seemingly unrelated way. Yet he has found himself in a lifelong career as an expert Foley artist, creating sounds, like Gerald McBoing-Boing.

Greg has, in the past, been a big guy. While at his heaviest, he could walk any character with the delicacy and precision of the most agile dancer. Greg’s background as an actor helps him get into the character on the screen. Thus, even the daintiest woman is believably walked by

Greg. His height and weight are irrelevant. This is the case for any professional in the field. We are all experienced at the sonic portrayal of all kinds of characters and our physical build is not what is at issue. For any person who wants to walk Foley well, sync, sensitivity, precision, character intention, and artistic taste are the criteria.

CRITTERS

Animal footsteps are a strange hybrid. They are considered footstep cues yet are performed like prop cues. Foley artists have lots of tricks for doing animal feet. One is using soft slippers or ballet shoes on your feet. Depending on the surface used, the ear can be fooled. Some of us use gardener's gloves with tacks on the ends for dogs. I have often had acrylic nails and used my bare hands. However, when doing animal feet in a dirt pit, it is best to use gloves. One never knows what is in that pit. The important thing is to be impressionistic. Once again, the picture edits might help or hinder, so it is best to go with the flow and be rhythmic but not overly concerned with precision.



Ken Dufva performs animal footsteps. Photo courtesy of David Lee Fein and Ken Dufva.



Kenny's preferred glove prop for animal footsteps. Photo courtesy of David Lee Fein and Ken Dufva.

When we perform the footsteps for cows, goats, or animals with hooves, we can use old film cores from the days of magnetic film or some such device. Most people have heard about using coconuts for horse feet. Many of us still do that. I use them with the meat still in them and baked, then hot-glued to the shell. Duane Hensel taught me that trick in 1980, and I still prefer it to the alternatives. Some artists have special devices made from plungers or other props. The trick to horse feet, however, is the rhythm. Horses have many different types of walks or runs, and it is important to bridge the cut without jolting the rhythm. The point here is that we all approach the task of creating animal footsteps differently. When Greg Barbanell and I worked on the animated Disney film *Lion King 2*, we each had a slightly different technique to do all the animals. We both were skilled, and both approaches were effective.



MIT OUT PEOPLE

Performing footsteps for characters is a key purpose of a Foley artist. There are computer programs and machines invented to synthesize footsteps and edit them in, so as to reduce the need for the live performance of a person supporting the actor's vision sonically. There will always be someone trying to invent a machine that can replace labor, and the world of postproduction sound is no different. Although some may hope to cut costs by substituting programmed footsteps for the custom-designed performance of a trained and artistic professional, the result will always pale by comparison. As John Roesch has said, "The embodiment of great Foley is when you believe the characterization you are hearing."

What We Use For ... :

Performing the Props



One of the first questions that people ask a Foley artist, whether it is during a formal interview or a casual encounter, is, “What did you use for (name of prop or event) in (name of movie)?” I don’t know what others answer, but usually, I am in the mental space where my honest reaction is either “I don’t know” or “I don’t remember.” I am aware that this is not the most impressive answer and certainly I don’t want to disappoint. The truth is, I don’t hang on the data of what I used for unusual props for a movie unless it was really a preplanned set of sounds.

Foley artists have three main categories of prop sounds for any film, television show, or game. The first category is comprised of the typical and predictable sounds that come up repeatedly, the second includes the sounds that accompany edited sound effects, and the third category consists of the unusual designed sounds that are particular to a scene. It is most useful to address each category separately. This chapter is primarily concerned with the first and second categories. The third category has a chapter specifically dedicated to it.

To begin with, the Foley artist needs to pay close attention to the production track when deciding what to use for performing the prop sounds. With few exceptions, the Foley will need to blend into the track and sound realistic. Since production mixers also have variations in the way they mic and record the dialogue, which affects the clarity and timbre of the props, the artist has to pay close attention to the style of the production mix as well as the style of the visual film itself.

Most Foley artists move around and have, at one time or another, worked with many of the others. If this is not the case, there is enough sharing of techniques where most of us use a lot of the same types of elements for the ordinary and predictable prop sounds. Most of us know each other and freely ask what prop or technique is used. Only a few of us feel the need to protect the information. Since it is my belief that the individual artist has other qualities that makes him or her special, other than the props used, it seems appropriate, in the spirit of openness and education, to disclose most of these techniques.

PROP SURFACES

To begin with, when we walk characters on a gritty street or sidewalk, some of us use dirt sprinkled on the surface. Many of us, however, use coffee grounds, right out of the can. We sprinkle the grounds on the surface, then work it into the surface for the appropriate “grit factor.” If the street is really gritty and we want to give the impression of a dirty walkway, we use more of the grounds or dirt. If the walkway in the scene is cleaner or takes place in a nice part of town, and we want to support the beauty of the tasteful environment established in produc-

tion, we use fewer grounds or less dirt and grind it to a fine powder. Some shoes have soles that the grit clings to, while others do not. The “shoe element” must, therefore, also be taken into account. High heels are notorious for “grit cling.”

Walking on a gritty surface takes some practice. The tendency for the beginner will be to walk normally while watching the picture. However, the real design of gritty surface Foley comes in altering the footsteps with intention so every step does not have the exact same amount of grit. On any street or walkway, grit is uneven. Thus, the Foley walking needs to have a certain unpredictability to it as well.

“What kind of snow is it?”

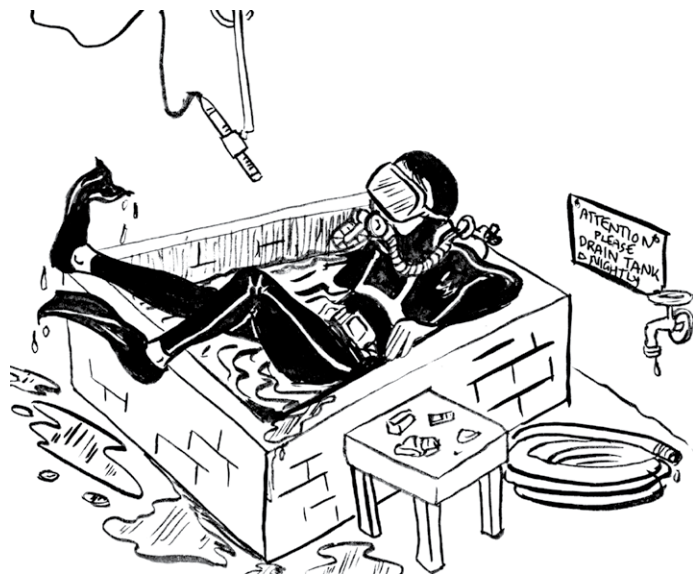
When we have to walk our characters in snow, there are many opinions. It used to be common practice to use vermiculite, which is poisonous to the lungs. The few times I worked with a more senior artist who insisted on this technique, I wore a facemask. At this point in my life, I simply refuse, as do most of the artists I know. It is absurd to hurt your health for a movie. Some use rock salt. Some use shaved ice. Some use some combination that includes cornstarch. My personal favorite is a stew of cornmeal, cornstarch, and some dirt, if the snow is dryer. If it is wet snow, I might use a wet cloth for one track of footsteps, and one track of cornstarch on top of dirt, which is on top of a cement surface. The question the artist must ask is, “What kind of snow is it? Wet? Fresh? Refrozen?”

When I worked on *Chain Reaction*, I had very little experience in real snow. The movie takes place in Chicago, Wisconsin, and Washington, D.C., during winter. There were all kinds of snow on all kinds of surfaces. My Foley mixer, Karin Roulo, was from Chicago, so I relied on her guidance to inform my “snow design.” Karin would tell me whether it looked like fresh snow, frozen snow, icy snow, or black ice. She would give me verbal descriptions of the sound of the snow in each situation. We would carefully audition each snow scene to ensure the squeak was appropriate to the kind of snow and that the footsteps were still defined and in character to the actor. It was a very meticulous process, but I did not want a sloppy approach to the snow sounds since the weather and environment were key characters in the story.

There is even a scene where the two leads are in an iceboat on Lake Geneva, where we supplemented the edited effects. The lesson is, don’t make the assumption that one sound for snow footsteps is correct for all situations. The more precise the casting of the snow, the more subtle and believable the footsteps are. The goal is always to sound like the environment on screen. As a side note, when it came time for screen credits to be submitted, I was informed I was not allowed credits as both supervising Foley editor and Foley artist. Most studios will allow the double credit, but for some reason it became an issue. Therefore, I

submitted my deceased mother's name as Foley artist. Sometimes our industry can be very silly.

When water is required for a scene, whether for an ocean, lake, pond, puddle, or bathtub, once again, there are different approaches. The issue becomes making the depth of the water believable while keeping the water from slapping against the sides of the water vessel. If the tub is portable, the obstacle can be the plastic sound or metal "ring off" of the tub. If the tub is below floor level, one has to get into awkward positions to get hands and arms into the tub. If the stage tub is above the ground, water can hit the sides of the tub and cause an echo. There is always a problem with water splashing onto a surface that makes a sound that is not desirable in the track. Puddles are easy. A little bit of water, spilled onto the floor, with a wet rag or paper towel used to vary the sound, can be a realistic approach.



EVERYDAY PROPS

There are some pedestrian props that most of us use on a daily basis. Practically every movie or television show has some kind of paper handled by an actor in a scene. It might be newspaper, copy paper, notepaper, sticky notes, wrapping paper, or some other assortment. Paper is not as easy to record as one might think. Each microphone and stage adds a quality to paper that makes it hard to judge what to use. Once an artist is familiar with a stage and the mic, it becomes pretty simple. In the beginning, however, the point to remember is that what to use for the cue *depends*. One thing is certain: one kind of paper cannot be used for all kinds of paper. It is a good idea to have many different samples available.

When a new Foley artist first starts doing paper cues, the drill is always the same. She or he will overdo the paper, and it will have no specific definition or intention. After hearing the cue, with too much noise and too little character, the cue is redone many times. Finally, after frustration and embarrassment, the performer realizes how little needs to be done for paper to “read.” Paper cues may look simple. However, a good paper cue takes discipline. Less is more with paper. The cue needs to be specific, with page turns being precise and all paper movement clean and understated unless it is a debris or background “paper life” cue.

Another common prop is what we call “cop gear”—that is, the keys, handcuffs, gun, and club that police carry on their belts. We use a piece of leather, perhaps a small purse or such, varying keys and handcuffs, some item for a gun, and we will add a small piece of wood if the club is obviously moving. “Cop gear” is a standard and predictable prop in many films. We might do one track for a principal player and several tracks for background police. We hold the items in a comfortable position and manipulate the props throughout the scene. The tendency is to do too much of the keys and handcuffs because that is the “cool” part. However, metal records “hot” as a rule, so underplaying the metal components and focusing on the leather adds a nicer texture to the prop. It should be said that every Foley artist has a different ratio of metal to leather. Foley is an art, not a science. There are guidelines and conventions but not hard and fast rules.

Doors are edited in from a sound effects library, although there are Foley artists who actually take the time to open and shut doors on a stage. The problem with this practice is that there are so many types of doors in many types of rooms. It is a far more effective use of time for the supervising sound editor to audition doors in a library, assign them to the appropriate doors in the scenes, and let the Foley artists deal with the door handles. Sometimes editors want the artists to do the doors, but it is never as useful as editing them in. On *Noises Off*, Richard Anderson, the supervisor, “pulled” the sound effects, including the doors, and I did every door handle that was touched. If you ever watch the film, you will notice how many times these doors are opened and closed. The doors are a main character in the film, and Richard picked the doors he wanted and asked me to do only the handles.

“We make it creak.”

Foley artists typically add “chair life” to scenes. Perhaps a character sits in a wooden chair. We make it creak. We use a chair, board, industrial pallet, or anything else with the right creak. Leather chairs need leather squeaks. We might use a chair, a couch, or a purse. Rick Sanchez (*The Indescribable Nth*, *George Lucas in Love*, *The Mighty*), a former Foley artist turned editor and mixer, gave me a chiropractor block, which has been in many of the films I have worked on. Years later, I still use it on a regular basis for many leather sounds. Rocking chairs

get creaks added in. Rolling chairs need to roll, and turning chairs need to turn. If it adds drama and interest, we will do it.

The typing of a computer keyboard is often edited in, if sync is not a problem. When the keyboard is on camera for a principal, however, a Foley artist does the keystrokes. This takes time and patience, as we cannot predict exactly what the actor is going to do. A mixer who can punch in with precision is very helpful. Keyboards all have a different sound. It is a good idea to have several from which to choose. Laptops sound different than desktop keyboards. A discerning ear can easily tell the difference. When I was Foleying *Die Hard*, Steve Flick, the supervisor, brought me a cheap ten-dollar computer keyboard with which to Foley all the computer typing. Although the keyboard was inexpensive, it sounded great, and I still use it. As a side note, the film was reedited after most of the editors were off the show, and there was a new picture insert that did not match my typing. So to this day I cringe when I see the out-of-sync typing. The lesson here: it is better to keep at least one editor to conform sound edits right up through the final dub.

PROPS THAT CHALLENGE

Horror films have standard props. Most cineastes know by now that we often use celery for bones crunching. Although edited effects also have sounds to use for this kind of cue, Foley artists automatically add the celery in because it is easy and sounds great. We often use liquid detergent on our hands for the goopy sounds, and we might add in a wet chamois or even sounds we make in our mouths. Some Foley artists use various meat items from the butcher section for ripping flesh or crunches or such. Some of us prefer not to use meat. The point is that the sound of the prop can be inventive and offbeat, but it is how we use these standard props to suit the scene that matters. We often do several tracks with several of the components.



The author twists celery for bone crunches. Photo by the author.

Wing flaps for birds are often a Foley effect. Some of us use old ballet shoes that we hit lightly against our hands. Some of us use feather dusters. Some of us use both, with one artist doing one and one doing the other, or on multiple tracks. Some of us use mouth sounds.

Glass breaks are sometimes done on a stage and sometimes edited in. A typical approach is to edit in the sound and enhance it on the stage. Also in *Die Hard*, there is a scene where gunshots hit the glass windows in the high-rise building and they shatter. The glass breaks were edited in. Steve then sent over many large panes of glass that Robin Harlan and I broke in sync to picture, but with the intention of getting the shards to fall in sync. Robin, the taller of us, held the large panes of glass up, and I hit them in sync. We had eye goggles and gloves, and were careful to get out of the way of the impacts. This is dangerous stuff. Don't try it, unless you have lots of protection and have enough experience to be secure in the practice. Although Robin and I were veterans and knew what we were doing, we never underestimated the danger.

Debris is a typical Foley effect. Explosions, violent encounters, rock-slides, and many other events have falling debris. We use dirt, rocks, twigs, coins, dice—anything we can find that works for the cue. Usually, several tracks are required. Some tracks will have heavier elements and others will have lighter or brighter-sounding elements. It is always important to consider what the elements will fall onto. The wrong prop falling on the wrong surface betrays the sound. Once again, it is not what it looks like, it is what it sounds like that matters.

Foliage is a prop that we routinely do in Foley. However, the items used can vary. The tendency now is to try to get fresh foliage. We cut branches off of nearby onsite trees and plants, buy flowers and plants, and bring foliage from our own yards. Sometimes, in a pinch, we supplement with quarter-inch tape. Old habits die hard. Sometimes, when the sound is comedic, we will use the old recording tape for comedic purposes.

Foley artists have to enhance the sounds of military equipment that actors wear. The backpacks and assorted sundry accessories are all sweetened. We have assorted backpacks and bags and canvas items on the stage or in our own private stash, but there are times when we rent the real items from prop rental companies. On both *Platoon* and *Predator*, we auditioned and rented items from Ellis Mercantile in Hollywood. It takes time to get the right textures in the sounds. There is an abundance of choices in packs, guns, and other equipment, and they all have a character peculiar to the prop.

"There are no hard and fast rules ..."

The loading of shells and cocking of guns are usually cut in for expediency. Sound effect libraries have literally thousands of gun sounds.

It is a waste of valuable stage time to perform them, but for many films, artists have been requested to do them due to a shortage of editing time, or a lack of library effects, or because the artist wanted to “just in case.” There are no hard and fast rules, just personal preferences. What really does need to be done is all the handling of guns by the actors.

Guns rattle in films, although in real life, “rattly” guns would be poorly maintained and dangerous. In film, however, the drama that is added by having a bit of “gun life” can be theatrically tasteful. The trick is to do just a little. Do too much rattle, and when you play it back, it sounds comedic. Some artists use real guns (we plug them for safety), and some have various toys for particular gun sounds. I have both. I have a rifle, several handguns, a starting pistol for races, and other items. Deadbolts, door handles, office staplers, and wrenches have all been “gun life” at one time or another.

When a film has a gambling scene, there are cards, dice, chips, coins, paper money, felt tables; in short, there is a lot of activity. These types of scenes can be grueling. There is a lot of detail and the on-camera action cannot be faked because it is usually the story point of the scene, so the audience is probably going to notice anything that rings false. We have to split out the principal on-camera gambling action and be precise with each card movement, each chip spill, each dice roll. We then do general background tracks for the atmosphere that we actually see on camera. Sound editors cut in more background sounds to add another layer.

Roller skates, skateboards, baseballs, bats, golf clubs, tennis racquets, in short, any sports equipment cues are sweetened in Foley. We use the correct props, usually, but if they are not available, we consider the sonic elements in the prop and find reasonable replacements. Face slaps, handclaps, caresses, back pats, even sexual encounters are sweetened in Foley. Brushing hair, brushing teeth, brushing a horse, any kind of brushing prop is faked with whatever “sells” for a brush and the item being brushed. We don’t have horses on the stage, but we may have wigs or furry coats. The more an artist is confronted with a prop, the more he or she has a plethora of ideas on how to perform it.

John Roesch was brought into Foley by Joan Rowe. She had been his landlady at his Venice, California apartment. He had been a Directing Fellow at the American Film Institute (AFI), and was given an opportunity to be one of three assistants on a small film, *Jackson County Jail*. His hope was to eventually get into production. He was asked to do some of the Foley, which was a craft that was new to him. He had mentioned this, offhandedly to Joan, when she told him what she did. She introduced him to Ted Gomillion, and he began his career as a Foley artist. Shortly after, he became the lead Foley artist for Chuck Campbell. He has not looked back since.

John and Joan became Foley partners for many years before they went their own ways. John started his own Foley company, partnering with two other men. One was a music engineer and the other, a businessman. The company was a force to contend with for many years until the partners went their own ways and John became a resident Foley artist at Warner Brothers, where he presently works.

Because John had intended to be a director, he has always been in the role of the “directing” Foley artist. He is in a unique position to decide who works on which film and when. He has always handpicked his partner, mixer, and recordist. In fact, John is one of the few artists who has the clout to insist he always have a recordist. Even someone as established as John has had his challenges when it comes to creating Foley.

“I did Judo, so I took a real fall ...”

At some point in many films and television shows, Foley artists will be asked to do body falls. Normally, a film with a decent budget and time will cut in body falls and rely on the artists to enhance or “sweeten” it on the stage. Most of us have a variation of a technique that puts the artist on the floor, with cloth, throwing, in a controlled manner, the torso and arms on the ground, using the cloth for mass, with our focus on the character of the particular fall. But John had a different plan. “I did Judo, so I took a real fall because I did not know there was a set of conventions,” John says, as he muses at himself. “I probably did some real damage to my body.” I remember the first time I heard that John did body falls for real. I got quite a chuckle out of it. However, John is a smart man with a real dedication to the craft. It simply took time for him to discover that others found an easier way, and that sound editors cut in the weight of the fall and artists do the “character” of the fall.

Jerry Trent recalls in *Funny Lady* that the close-up of Barbra Streisand in the song “Great Day” showed her clapping out of sync with the song. Jerry was supposed to Foley the claps. He followed picture and he was asked to fix it and put it in sync with the music. “How?” he asked, “It’s a close-up. I can’t change the picture.” This is an illustration of a common problem Foley artists have with props. We are asked to fix something that will result in drawing attention to the lack of continuity, when our job is to do the opposite. In *A Goofy Movie*, there is a song that includes a set of keys swaying in the scene. The keys are drawn to be in sync with the song, as part of an accompaniment. The problem was the sync did not match the music, which was added later. Joan Rowe performed the Foley for me, as I was the supervising Foley editor. I had cued the keys and Joannie Foleyed them for me. I edited them to bridge the visual and imperceptibly put them in sync to match the song. It was tricky, but I found what I thought was an elegant solution. One member of the committee who was at the predubs was disturbed because

I had to cheat the sound to smooth into the song. Once I explained why I had done what I had done, everyone was satisfied. It remained as I had cut it. But I had to defend my solution to the constant challenge of the picture not matching sonic needs.

LISTEN, DON'T LOOK!

At one time or another, every Foley artist I know has had to deal with a figure of authority being on the stage and having an opinion about how to do a prop. One solution that many artists have used is to do the props behind a baffle on the stage so the person cannot see what is being used. The reason for this is simple. Typically, the person thinks that the appearance of the prop has a relationship to the sound. The Foley artist has thought carefully about how to create the sound and has a plan. So by occluding the onlooker's vision, the artist can perform the prop and ask how it sounded. The problem then is that the onlooker may ask, "What did you use?" as though it really matters. I know some artists that will use the exact same thing that was objected to earlier by pretending to try another idea, but this time hiding the prop.

Alyson Moore came from an acting family. Her father was Alvy Moore, known best as Hank from *Green Acres* but who was also an independent producer. He knew Russ and Lee Tinsley, who owned a small postproduction company called Echo Sound. Alyson started working with them as an assistant. She learned a lot from the editors there, including how to cue Foley. Bill Wistram, one of the sound editors who was supervising a television show for Echo, at one point asked Alyson to take the laundry list of cues to the Foley stage. As the artists performed the cues, Alyson would write the cue sheets that would go to the sound editors.

After a year or so, Alyson began training as a Foley artist to be a backup if one of the main artists on the shows got sick. She eventually took over the Echo television Foley and was their lead Foley artist for years. Although Alyson was employed primarily in television, she also worked on feature films including *Lost in America*, *Heroes*, and *Clueless*. Alyson now works primarily with John Roesch.

Alyson tells a story about how she had been using a can opener for a gun cue. The mixer, who is also an excellent Foley artist, insisted she use something different. He did not believe the prop would work. Alyson went behind a baffle and performed the cue. The mixer said with enthusiasm, "That was great! What did you use?" Alyson, quite amused, answered, "What do you think? My can opener." The baffle shields us all from the critical eye and lets the critical ear be the judge. It's not always the tool; it's how you use it.

When Alyson first started working with John, it was problematic deciding who would perform which prop. John had certain props he

would do and others he would leave to Alyson. But the work was not being divided evenly. Alyson had spent many years in television as the lead Foley artist, and her years of writing cue sheets had prepared her for dividing up prop cues: “I go through the sheets and pick out the props I want to do, then I pick out the props I know John would like to do, then we split the props no one wants to do.” Alyson likes structure and is very systematic. It works very well for the both of them.

Alyson remembers how Mary Rodgers (*The Education of Charlie Banks*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *True Blood*), an artist we have both adored working with, “had an uncanny knack for seeing something and making it work quickly.” Here is what Alyson says now to all budding Foley artists: “Whatever you think is going to work, try it. You just never know what is going to work.”

Bob Mott describes what he calls the “watching directors.” In the days of making live sound effects for television news, some of the directors would watch him work and be concerned about what he was using. “They used to listen with their eyes,” says Bob with an impish smile. The lesson is simple: watch the film and listen to the prop. Don’t watch the prop. It affects your perception.

CLOTH

Foley artists enhance the clothes that the characters are wearing. Typically, there is one pass, at the end of the tracks, that is a dedicated cloth pass. An artist has a variety of fabric with which to work. The main cloth pass coordinates with the dialogue of the actors and is mixed through the center speaker at the final dub. However, if there is a specialty cloth, such as a leather jacket or wedding dress, that cloth will be treated as a separate prop and will be assigned to a different track in the session.

Some credit Bob Rutledge with the idea of the single cloth pass. Up until the early 1980s, it was customary to have cloth that you would carry in your hands and move it while you were walking a character. This is what Jack Foley did, and up until I worked with Bob, this is what most of us were doing. Bob had already affected some other artists with this new way of utilizing cloth, but I was not aware of it. He saw me do my cue while holding a piece of cloth. He got annoyed with the practice and gently said to me, “Don’t put the cloth in here. Let me show you.” He then taught me how to use one piece of cloth to follow the general movement of the characters as they walked or made bold gestures. He explained that it would fit with the dialogue. I proceeded to do as he did, and my cloth movement was transformed.

I continued the mission of cloth transition in Foleydom whenever I worked with someone else. When I worked up in Northern California,

the practice had been to do a cloth pass for every character. When I performed the cloth Bob's way, it was quickly adapted. Now, virtually every Foley artist in the U.S. does a single cloth pass, and the mixers play it along with the final mix, where it is subtle and unobtrusive.

PROP CHARACTER

Actors handle props differently. Depending on the training of the actor and the character portrayed, the behavior conventions of the time period in the film and the style of the genre, there can be quite a few variations in how to do the props the actors handle. In a comedy, the props sometimes are supposed to get a laugh. In the famous "put the candle back" scene in *Young Frankenstein*, the candle action is unrealistic and heightened for broad comedy. In *Glory*, when the young soldier is asked to load and shoot his gun over and over, the sound is clean, loud, and dramatic. In *Malice*, when the Anne Bancroft character is pouring and drinking her single malt scotch, it is not just a drink; it is her best friend, and she handles it accordingly. The attentive Foley artist will take into account all the character and dramatic purpose of the prop and not get into a rote performance.



Most Foley artists have an affinity for performing props before they are comfortable with footsteps. Both David Fein and Ken Dufva found props to be easier in the beginning. "I think Ken has an instinctual creativity about what to use. It probably started to feel natural pretty quickly," says David. "Our approaches are pretty similar." Jody Thomas prefers to do props for animation. "It keeps me on my toes," she says. "I love figuring it out!"

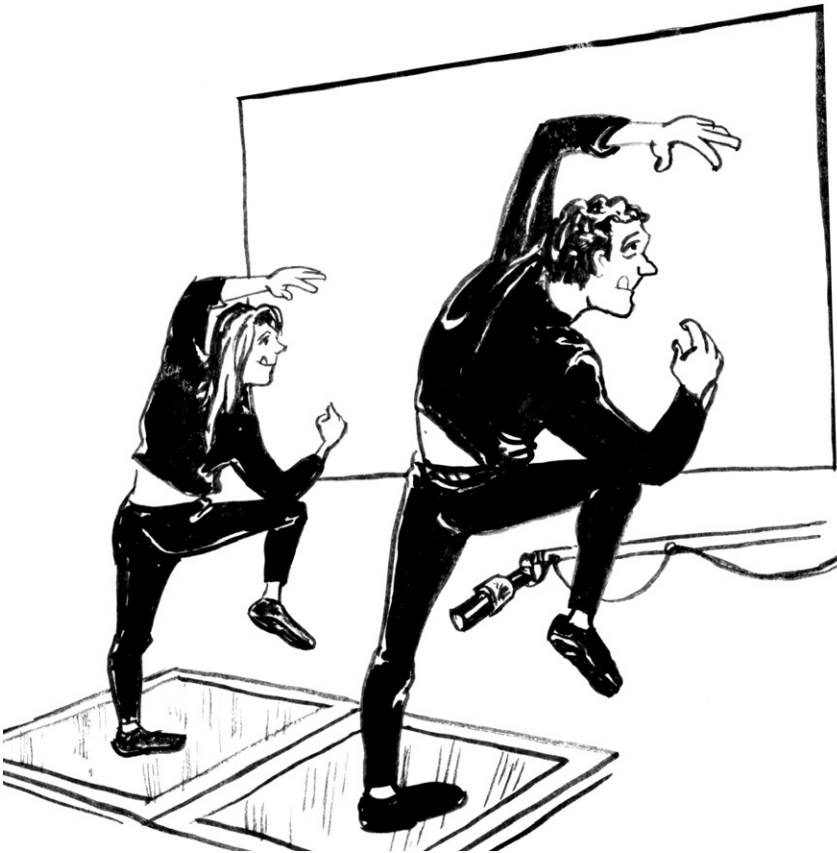
David Fein says it best: "Some of the props we had should probably be in museums."

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Chapter | nine

Hang It as a Unit:

The Knack for Sync



When I first entered the world of Foley, it was usually to do a television show. I was doing the Foley for several shows produced by Lorimar Television, and we were working with simple and primitive technology compared to what is used now. Normally, we had three tracks on which to record. This meant that all the footsteps, the props, and the cloth were often combined.

I worked with one Foley partner, and the two of us would usually walk two characters or more at one time on one track. The projector we used did not have high speed, so we had to work in real time and then rewind to the beginning of the reel, which was a 10-minute reel, also in real time. Thus, our procedures and coffee breaks were dictated by the rewind times.

My partner (sometimes Duane Hensel, sometimes John Post and, most often as time went on, Jim Bailey) and I would pick characters and walk them simultaneously. We would usually do two tracks of footsteps and one track of whatever props we could manage or that were not going to be edited in. These cues took up all three tracks. Out of necessity, the cloth movement was added in with the footsteps tracks. We would hold a piece of cloth, a pair of softened jeans or some similar fabric, and move in sync to our footsteps. It was a simple technique and, by today's standards, rather crude. Sometimes Jim Bailey (*The Celestine Prophecy*, *I Heart Huckabees*, *Garden State*) would do all the cloth for all our characters while we walked, and sometimes vice versa.

As time went on, we recorded to the three tracks (called full coat) and one additional track (single stripe) for a grand total of four tracks of sound. Now it was really exciting. We could separate out a character now and then or record more props.

WHEN SYNC WAS KING

In television, the time was, and still is, shorter from turnover to dub than for the typical film schedule. The shows air weekly, and we don't get much time to cue or cut. Many times, in the 1980s, we would get a show the night before it aired and had a few hours to shoot the Foley. There would be virtually no time to edit the sync. The sound editors would always hope that our sync was so good that the editing needed would be quite minimal. Add to the time element the difficulty of editing a track that had two characters walking at the same time. Cutting into the track meant affecting the sync of both characters. If one artist had better sync than another, the editing would adversely affect both. Thus, it was better to let the viewer's eye default to a natural impressionism that would save the editor the headache of fixing the sync. Even today, when characters can be separated easily because of all the tracks available in digital recording and editing, one can still spot

Foley that has not been cut because of the time restraints in television production.

When Foley artists have trained under these conditions, our ability to walk in excellent sync becomes a premium skill. The ability to perform with such precision is more important than when there is ample time to edit the Foley and finesse it. Back in those days, the ultimate compliment the supervising editor could give would be to say, "The sync is so good, we can hang it as a unit." This meant that no editing would be necessary, and the staff sound editors could focus their time on editing the "hard" effects that were required in the show. Because there was also limited time to pull effects to cut, and most editors did that on their own, our ability to walk in good sync was greatly valued.

In feature films, the emphasis is different. It becomes more important to have style and finesse in the Foley, because it is assumed that a Foley editor will tighten or improve the sync if it is not sufficient. It is more desirable for the Foley to have creativity and taste. Sync can be edited in more easily than Foley can be performed and recorded. There are Foley artists who have spent a great deal of time working on features and have not had to have their Foley "hung."

Because I began my Foley career in television and had a dance and music background, my sync has been reliably accurate. It was not until I had been in Foley for four years that I had the luxury of thinking of the feel of the cue more than the sync. When a Foley artist has experience in both television and film, a lovely symbiosis ensues. The artist is able to "land the cue" quite easily with effortless sync and yet put the emphasis on the art of the cue. This is not to say that those trained only in film lack good sync. There are Foley artists who have never walked a frame of film for television yet who have wonderful sync. Nor is it true that every television-trained artist has amazing sync. But for those of us who trained in the trenches of television, we are used to getting good sync usually in the first take, because there was no time to redo a cue and then wait for that unendurable rewind time.

THE "FEEL" IS PERFORMED, NOT EDITED

With the advent of digital recording and editing, the importance of sync has changed considerably. It is possible for the Foley mixer to tighten the sync of an artist's performance immediately. David Jobe, a veteran Foley mixer, will sometimes improve a minor sync issue by moving a footstep or prop slightly in the recorded track editorially. Although editing is usually not the responsibility of the mixer, sometimes it takes a quick nudge on Pro Tools to shape the cue and let the editor focus on the more specific and difficult editing.

However, editing by a mixer on a Foley stage is not always the preference of the mixer. When Karin Roulo mixes Foley, she prefers to leave the editing to the editor. Her perspective is that she has her area of expertise and responsibility and prefers not to blur the lines. There is something to be said for keeping the boundaries of the crafts clear.

In the world of independent filmmaking, games, and film schools, the salient point is that the Foley artist does not have to have impeccable sync. However, the better the sync, the more the artist can focus on the aesthetics and style of the performance.

“... performance is based on the character ...”

When a Foley artist is walking a cue, the performance is based on the character established by the actor and the flow of action created by the picture editor. The artist is changing surfaces, bridging awkward cuts, camouflaging changes in walking stride, and attending to the perspective of the character within the scene. At the same time, the artist is hitting the best possible sync so the least amount of editing will be required. One might wonder why the sync cannot just be cut in so the artist can let that part of the task go. The answer lies in remembering why Foley was developed as a craft. Footsteps do not have an impact that can be measured. Each actor has a different way of walking. The artist reproduces this performance sonically.

Foley artists use specific techniques to improve sync when performing a cue. When walking a character, watch the cue once. Notice the overall nature of the walk. Is it even and deliberate? Plodding? Mercurial? Every actor has certain noticeable traits to his or her walk, regardless of the film. Now watch the cue again. How does the actor use his or her body? Do the shoulders move a lot? Does the head bob up and down? What about the arms swinging? Actors give many cues that help the Foley artist move with the actor.

Often it helps to watch each footstep as you perform, but sometimes doing this can slow you down and you will be behind in sync. There is usually a rhythm to each walk, except when the transitions occur. The shift of weight, the change in direction, and a sudden distraction can all cause the rhythm to shift.

It is fairly typical for a neophyte Foley artist to walk with a flat footfall. Plop, plop, plop is what it will sound like. Then there is the tendency to overarticulate. Too much heel-toe will sound like ta-da, ta-da, ta-da. Neither sounds good. A character will have some heel-toe footfalls, some plops, some scuffs, and some minor weight shifts. The more comfortable you are with the character, the less you will sound artificial.

With props, sync can be easier. Many prop sounds have a specific impact. A book being set down, for instance, is easier to do in sync.

There is a precise moment when the book connects with the surface. That is the moment to focus on. An oddity that occurs in Foley is the pickup of a prop. Often the Foley artist will cheat the sound of picking up a glass, book, or some such item. Although in real life we do not always hear the item being picked up, in Foley we enhance that sound to add drama to the prop. The trick is to perform the pickup without too much scrape or swipe, lest it sound artificial and silly.

Then there is the place when the prop has a plethora of activity, like gun movement or saddle and bridle for a horse, among other possibilities. There is a place in the event where the eye and ear meet in harmony and it all seems perfect. This is the part of the prop to focus on. I call this the “sweet spot,” the term used in sports to describe that perfect place where the ball meets the racquet or bat and the ball just sails away effortlessly.

If, however, the prop is amorphous, like papers moving or leaves fluttering, then you need to let your natural sense of composition guide you. Remember that the audience is watching the film in real time. Whatever the audience will catch, you should catch. As you acquire more practice with the craft, you will automatically see more specific events in every cue.

PERCEPTION IS REALITY

John Roesch states, “Excellent sync comes from a performance.” This is always the goal of the Foley artist. If the Foley performance is truly connected to the actor’s actions, the sync will be good most of the time. However, it really takes a lot of experience performing Foley before sync becomes second nature to the artist.

Getting accurate sync in animation or in games is more of a challenge. Whereas live-action film has a predictable rhythm to it, animation and games do not. The timing is artificial and created for effect. It is hard to anticipate the clothes jumping out of a dresser in *Beauty and the Beast* or the various permutations of the characters’ actions in games. It takes time and experience to master the peculiar timing issues that arise in computer-generated and interactive formats.

Often, when someone is new to performing Foley, it is hard for that artist to tell when his or her sync is close enough. Approximate sync can seem just fine. Usually, if a cue is one frame late, only the very trained eye can perceive it. Many can perceive it if a cue is two frames late, and if a cue is three frames late it is obvious to most viewers. Early sync is not so forgiving. One frame early “feels” funny. Two frames early is upsetting to most. Thus, when performing a cue, one frame late is not a tragedy. There is some forgiveness in the sync, unless one is “topping production”—that is, layering the Foley on top of the sound already in the production track.

Most of our celebrated Foley artists have had to work on many projects to get good sync. It is a goal worth striving for. It takes time, patience, and a critical eye. In the meantime, the emphasis should be on the feel, character, and rhythm of the performance. Even the best of us in the craft bless the editors and mixers who aid our efforts.

Magic Wind:

Unusual Foley Requests



A few years back, I was filling in for a Foley artist colleague on a straight-to-video animated film. It was a *Pocahontas* sequel. The cue sheet was a bit of a mess and had obviously been cued by a well-intentioned but rather inexperienced editor. One of the cues, which was a prop cue, was called “magic wind.”

All of us on the stage laughed and made all sorts of jokes for the entire day. When the editor called the stage to see how we were doing, we politely asked what he meant by “magic wind.” His response was some version of, “You know, do the wind that you see.”

We get all kinds of requests that don’t make a lot of sense to us. There are a plethora of stories that float around the editing rooms and Foley stages about requests that are either impossible to do or really don’t need to be done. A lot of time is wasted trying to get into the heads of editors. Sometimes they really don’t know what they want, and other times they just cannot communicate effectively. The purpose of relating these anecdotal stories, besides having a well-needed laugh, is to remind ourselves that this is not brain surgery, even if others think it is.

SOMETHING NEVER HEARD BEFORE

Bob Mott relates a story about a newscast for which he was preparing sound effects. “They wanted the sound of an atom bomb. They went out to field record, and the bomb melted the microphone. They parked so far away, yet it lifted the van off the ground.”

So, “they” asked Bob to make a sound effect for the atom bomb. He only worked with established recordings. He watched the footage and saw the mushroom cloud. He used a recording of the Mogambi waterfalls and slowed them down for the roar. Then he added a layer of a wall being demolished and raised the level. By the time he was finished, he had used four records, some of them doubled up for the resultant effect.

Apparently, sound people have always been asked to create something without any thought of whether it can be done, or how. There is always an artist who will try. Some of them succeed in creating an amazing sound effect.

John Post, while working on *The Thing*, needed to have a sound for the monster underneath the board planks. Supervising sound editor David Yewdall asked him to create the monster moving under the planks while the planks came apart and flew into the air. This is a tricky effect to *create* on a Foley stage, but John likes a challenge. So he and Duane Hensel took short pieces of lumber and laid them on the stage, rather like dominoes. The two men stood at each side of the planks, and in sync to picture, they grabbed a plank and rattled it against the floor and the next plank. Then, John put on his editor’s



"It needs to sound more purple!"

hat and after the cue was recorded, he slowed it down to a snail's pace, which added more depth. The slowed-down effect was ominous and bizarre.

As a side note, John also did a dog voice for the dog as it ran through the snow for the same film. Today, an actor in the Screen Actors Guild would be hired to do that.

David Jobe was the Foley mixer on *Sarah Connor*. The Foley artists were asked to create something for the terminator's metallic articulated arms. David Fein "grabbed an I-beam and rubbed it. I picked the chorusing voice on the Eventide (equalizing software) and we did it," David recalls.

Joan Rowe relates a story about a request on *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*: "Spielberg wanted E.T. to be 'liquidy and friendly,' and sometimes 'liquidy' sounds slimy. It's hard to put words to sound. I walked through some stores and listened to the movement of packaged liver in a flat container. It had a 'cheery little sound.'" Joan would handle this package of liver as one of the sounds for E.T.'s body. Every few days, she would go to the store near the studio and get another package. She would walk into the store in her Foley attire (leotards and Foley shoes),

and one time she heard the cashier whisper to the person he was chatting with, “That’s the woman who listens to the liver!”



“That’s the woman who listens to the liver!”

Joannie also recorded a track of Jell-O clumped inside a wet towel and a track of a bag of popcorn to augment her liver effect. She moved all three props in sync with E.T. as he moved. The next time you watch the film, you will have a greater appreciation for the eccentricities of our craft.

When people find out I performed the Foley on *Predator* (along with Robin Harlan), they usually ask what I used for the Predator’s body. There is a complicated answer. I had several tracks for the body. One track was a wet chamois. Another was hand lotion on my hands. A third was a wet leather purse. A fourth track was some mouth noises I made. We called it “predabody.” There was also “predaface,” “predahands,” and “predafeet.” We get punchy sometimes.

Greg Barbanell had an odd task for the film *Defending Your Life*. He spent a day trying to find a way to “walk in heaven,” as the supervisor had requested. Greg believes that is not something you should really hear. He cannot remember how it was resolved. But he does remember thinking it was a waste of time and money trying to do it.

Both *Robocop* and *Robocop 2* utilized a created contraption for Robocop’s footsteps. David Fein and Ken Dufva had done the original film, so when I was asked to do the sequel, it was necessary to duplicate the same footstep quality. Fortunately, the mechanical device designed for his footsteps still existed, so I was able to use it. It looked a bit like a mechanical foot and had a heavy springlike action that took both hands to handle properly. I got very tired manipulating it, and the microphone had to be placed in a careful way to avoid getting slap back from the metal in the foot.

BEST LAID PLANS

When I first saw *The Breakfast Club*, I noticed the Foley was done very well. There was one cue, however, that bothered me. In one scene, the Ally Sheedy character is chewing her nails. The sound used, obviously Foley to a trained ear, was loud and unrealistic. It bothered me and seemed completely out of character with the rest of the sound.

John Roesch was one of the Foley artists on the show. I asked him about this cue that had bothered me for years, because John's work is usually excellent. He told me what I had suspected. It was a director's request to Foley it "over the top."

Directors have requests that we must obey. Sometimes these requests are appropriate, sometimes not. We do the cues without question, but we often do alternatives in case the cue does not work on the dub stage.

On *Exorcist 3*, there were scenes with nurses walking around a hospital. It is normal and customary to do nurses in soft tennis shoes or athletic shoes. Nurses walk a lot and always wear comfortable shoes. Their shoes are not a story point, typically, so we walk them to give a sense that the nurses are there, but not to distract from the dialogue or action.

I walked plenty of nurses for the film. Sometime during the Foley schedule, Richard Anderson, the supervising sound editor (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Shark Tale*, *Being John Malkovich*), brought actual nurse shoes to the stage. He told me that William Peter Blatty, the director, wanted me to walk the nurses in these shoes. Of course, I rewalked all the nurses in the requested shoes. They sounded like soft athletic shoes. Richard and I both knew they would, but we accommodated the director anyway.

Another nurse story comes with the film *Malice*. The picture editor was supervising the predubs while the director, Harold Becker, was unavailable. When he saw nurses on the screen, he decided he wanted to hear them in stiletto heels. If you have not seen the film, you need to know that it is a serious drama. So I rewalked all the nurses in sexy stiletto heels. But I kept the tracks with nurses' shoes, just in case. When Harold came back, he, of course, asked to have the tracks with the correct shoes and not the stilettos. I don't recall if he ever was told why I did two versions.

Joan Rowe tells a story on herself. She is a very creative artist, but sometimes gets herself in trouble with her zeal. While working on *Speed*, for supervisor Steven Flick, she wanted to do the gears grinding for the elevator. Now, Flick is well known for preferring to have the sound effects editors cut in the creative sounds for machinery. He takes great effort to audition and present effects for the editors to layer and design with. But Joannie would not be dissuaded. She found a magnetic

film rewinder that had a glitch in its mechanical action. When she wound it backward, it “made a good sound,” and she mounted it on a table on the stage. Then she put a trim bin upside-down on the table for echo. She wound the rewinder forward for the elevator going up and backward for the elevator gears grinding. Then she banged wires against the trim bin to sweeten the sound for the gears.

When Joannie presented her wonderful creation to Steve, he was impressed with her ingenuity but not happy with the time she used to create the effect he had already pulled out of library effects. She is not sure if her Foley was used, but as she puts it, “I did it because I wanted to. My favorite part of doing Foley is that it is an absolutely creative process.” Creating sounds is what feeds Joannie.

“... we did what they wanted ...”

Greg Barbanell once worked on a film that had a lot of scenes in casinos. The supervisor wanted all the chips to sound different, so he brought in chips from many different casinos. Greg used all the chips and manipulated them in as many ways as he could. When asked if the different chips actually sounded different, he replied, with his typical dry humor and without missing a beat, “No, they didn’t. But we did what they wanted.”

Robert Deschaine, a veteran Foley, ADR, and rerecording mixer (*Action Jackson*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Under Fire*), was mixing Foley on a movie, and the editor wanted fresh grass for the Foley every day. Fresh sod was brought in, and Bob carefully watered it every night and put it under globe lights. At the end of three nights, the grass was dead and didn’t sound right. Someone said, “Why don’t we use quarter-inch tape and put a cloth on it?” They did so, and it was remarkably realistic. Sometimes we *all* overthink this process.

I remember working with an editor who was new to supervising at the time. He spent all his time on the stage with us and micromanaged every cue. It was a frustrating experience. But my favorite moment was when he commented on how he wanted the street to sound. He said quite seriously, “Just junk it up.”

Another experience working with an inexperienced editor had to do with replacing some footsteps. We had done most of the Foley on *Robocop 2*. We were nearing the end of our work on the film when an editor came to the stage and asked us to replace a few of the steps in the middle of a scene. She did not want the entire walk, just a few of the steps. The problem for us was that since we had finished walking all the characters, the stage had flooded, and that particular surface had been destroyed. So I suggested we rewalk the entire scene on a different surface. My concern was that the new footsteps would not match the old ones. She nixed that idea. So I obediently replaced just the few steps she wanted. I still don’t know how that turned out.

Bob Mott expresses it best when describing his ultimate responsibility as a “sound man.” He says, “I had to fill in what they imagined.” When asked, “What was your favorite part about doing sound effects?” His reply, which speaks for all of us who do Foley today, was “I think the creative challenge.”

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Chapter | eleven

Mix and Match: The Foley Mixer



Ask a Foley artist who his or her best friend at work is, and almost invariably you will be told it is the Foley mixer. An artist can be gifted, professional, and efficient yet create disappointing Foley for a project. The reason is simple: the mixer is the partner in crime, and both artist and mixer need to have similar philosophies about the work and compatible personalities on the stage or the process will be laborious and unfulfilling.

I have had many frustrating experiences with mixers, and getting through the day was quite an ordeal. This is not all that unusual in a work situation. But on a Foley stage, when you, perhaps one partner, and a mixer are spending day after day in a dark room, making noises for a film for a supervisor who is unreasonable on a schedule that is unforgiving, it can be brutal. Thus, it is important at this point to address the role of the Foley mixer in detail and explain how the mixer can best support and work in concert with the Foley artist assigned to the show.

We should first examine how the Foley artists and Foley mixer are selected. Ordinarily, the Foley artists are the primary concern when a supervising sound editor (SSE) is putting the Foley team together. Whether the decision about the artists is based on a past relationship, a specific genre of film, or a contractual deal with a company, it is always the case that the SSE is very concerned with who the Foley artists are. Many times I and other “lead” Foley artists have been the first point of contact for the SSE, and the responsibility for the second artist lies at our feet. When this happens, sometimes the SSE has a stage he or she wants to have for the Foley sessions. Sometimes the artists come attached to a particular stage, and sometimes the SSE has a favorite stage to go to. Rarely, however, does an SSE decide to have the Foley done based on who the mixer will be. It does happen that there is a preference for a particular mixer over another at a particular facility, but in all my years of being involved with this craft, I cannot remember a time when the decision on where to do the Foley was based primarily on who the mixer is. There are mixers who would like to believe that the opposite is true, but it is not even logical to make that assumption.

Every Foley artist has a favorite mixer. Some of us have several we really enjoy working with, and we try to do most of our projects with one of our favorites. We each have different preferences for what we like in our mixer. But we all prefer to work with mixers with whom we have a rapport.

MORE THAN SIMPLY RECORDING

The Foley mixer is responsible for actually recording the sounds we make. What is usually confusing to those not in the field is why the

person recording our sounds is not called a recordist or why she or he is not called an engineer, as the counterpart in the music industry is called. The job title has to do with the union to which the mixer belongs.

In production, the person who records the sound in the studio or on location is called the production mixer. Thus, the convention has been extended to include the person who records the Foley, ADR, and rerecords in the final dub. Anyone who records the sound in film is called a mixer, except for the field recordist, whose specialty is to go out and record customized sound effects for a particular project. If there is a recordist in the Foley stage, ADR stage, or rerecording stage, that person handles the cue sheets, makes sure the equipment is set up, and listens for pops or problems in the tracks. The actual recording of the Foley is done by the mixer.

The Foley mixer has usually worked his or her way up the ladder by being a recordist and, in the days of magnetic film, a loader. The loader actually loaded the magnetic film onto the recorder. The recordist would sit in a separate room, wearing headphones, would listen for any problems in the track, and would support the mixer in any way necessary. The Foley mixer would be allowed to sit in that chair only after learning the previous jobs.

"My ... job is on this side of the window ..."

Foley mixing is an art, but there is need for some technical knowledge. Today, because of the technology involved with mixing, the mixer needs to know a great deal about Pro Tools and some of the plug-ins that can be used with the Pro Tools software. But the main qualities of a good mixer include having a good ear for aesthetics, an excellent eye for sync, a skilled hand at recording and punching in for special cues, and an understanding of the job of the artist. As one Foley artist puts it, "My job is on this side of the window, and the mixer's job is on that side. We need to understand what each other does, but we don't interfere."

Before the standard use of digital recording on the stage, mixers recorded most Foley without designing perspective much in the recording. There was an expectation that the Foley mixer was recording the sounds flat, and that all perspective or reflection in the sound would be added during the final dub. This industry standard led to the practice of focusing on mixing clean, with very little extra character added to any particular sound. The goal was to sound realistic, with a few exceptions.

Later, as technology changed, recording to hard drives became the norm, and more bells and whistles were available to the Foley mixer, it was only a matter of time before some mixers began to expand their role on the Foley stage. Add to this the normal effect of the marketplace

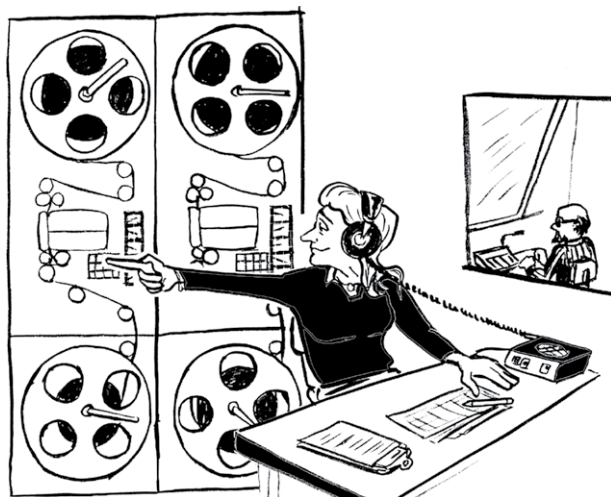
preferring the least expensive and most productive use of labor, and what has happened is that more is expected from the Foley mixer. Many are happy to oblige because they enjoy the tools that are now allotted to them.



Ryan Maguire mixing the Foley on A Political Cartoon. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.

Foley mixers are as different in their approach to their work as Foley artists are. No two mixers or artists perceive their role exactly as someone else does, nor do they practice their craft in the same way. Their specific personalities, backgrounds, and aesthetic preferences vary greatly. The common thread between all of them is the workflow and professional process that is expected of them.

THE CLASSICAL APPROACH



Robert Deschaine started mixing at Gomillion Sound in Hollywood in the early 1970s. Bob had been an actor in New York, having studied with Stella Adler, and he moved to Los Angeles to try his luck as a full-time actor. He had a few acting jobs, including an appearance on the television show *Combat*. But it did not take Bob long to discover the grueling life of an aspiring actor was not for him.

Before long, Bob was the studio manager at Hollywood Video Center, which taped the *Steve Allen Show* and the *Della Reese Show*, among others. He was there for almost four years before the company went out of business and was bought by Merv Griffin. For a while, Bob was a production manager on the road for film production companies.

“... we worked long hours and we learned our craft ...”

At a point where Bob had been off the road for a while and needed a job, he found himself, like so many of us, at Gomillion Sound. Ted Gomillion needed a studio manager, so Bob was hired. At this point, Bob had no experience with microphones, cables, recording or mixing films at all. He decided to learn all the jobs that were performed at the studio. “Back in those days there were a few studios—Producers Sound, Cine Sound, Gomillion Sound—where people could get training. We didn’t get much money, but we worked long hours and we learned our craft,” Bob remembers.

Before long, Bob was mixing Foley, ADR, and final dubs. He knew every job in the postproduction sound recording and mixing world. Because he would be the rerecording mixer on the films and television shows where he mixed Foley and ADR, he had a unique perspective on how to best mix the Foley. Bob remembers someone at Gomillion telling him, “Foley is supposed to be there and you’re not supposed to pick it out.” With that in mind, Bob became very aware of how to mix Foley so it fit in with the scene. He found that all Foley artists had different styles and approaches: “Sometimes there were people who were heavy on their heel-toe or toe-heel, and I could always tell that someone wasn’t doing it right when I got it on the dub stage.”

Bob learned to mix at a time when Foley was entering a period of developing specialists in the field. While a lot of the editors were still performing their own Foley, a new breed of “Foley walkers” was being introduced into the mix. Also, at this time, Foley was recorded onto three tracks of 35mm magnetic film called a full coat. He would get the picture and cue sheets for the Foley at eight in the morning, and it had to be completed by six at night so it could be dubbed for the next airdate: “I saw a lot of people [Foley artists] who were very talented and could do it quickly and get it in sync, and we didn’t have to cut it. We made sure that when it left the stage everything was in sync because they [the editors] didn’t have time to cut it.”

Because Bob had been involved with production and was not yet a rerecording mixer, he was aware of making the Foley sound as much like production sound as possible: “I had to learn perspective and moving the microphone where you think it would be if they were on location.” He is careful about “not getting it too close to the mic or too hot and hopefully you won’t distort.”

Bob also mixes ADR, which is really enjoyable for him because of his connection to actors. Because Bob was an actor himself, his past profession influences his approach to both Foley and ADR. He has a real admiration for Foley artists who are well prepared and do their homework for each project. “I would watch these people and they would put their minds into whoever the actors or actresses were and they would emulate these people. When you would finally put it all together, you would think the actors or actresses were really walking that scene.”

“I would walk in my mind. I would visualize that I’m into their feet. I’d have to walk with them so I could punch in when their foot is in the air so I didn’t erase anything,” Bob recalls. Of course, technology has come such a long way since the days of magnetic tape or 24-track, so mixers have different methodologies for punching and editing on the stage. But because Bob trained during a period of more rudimentary equipment, his skill was honed to be specific and efficient.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Bob is one of the most experienced mixers around and also one of the most empowering. Bob is a devoted team player and believes in collaboration, and several Foley and ADR mixers with respectable careers began as recordists with Bob. One of those mixers is David Jobe. David Jobe is presently a Foley mixer at Warner Brothers and has been mixing Foley for about 15 years. Some of the films he has mixed include *The Crossing Guard*, *Apollo 13*, and *Tombstone*. He began his sound career at a small company that worked in electronic newsgathering. He then worked his way into a job at Warner Hollywood in the late 1980s as a “dummy loader.” He loaded the recorders with magnetic film for those that mixed on dubbing stages. As his career progressed, his swiftness at doing his tasks, his intelligence, and his amiable personality led him to a position as an ADR recordist for Bob at Skywalker South. It wasn’t long before Bob gave David a shot at mixing a few cues on the ADR stage while Bob watched and coached.

David caught on quickly, and before long, he would come into work and be told he had to mix ADR because Bob was sick. David still doesn’t know if that was the true story, as Bob is known for being generous with his time and his mixer’s chair. Either way, David was moved up to mixer. Thus, David was baptized by fire. Shortly after, he was

assigned his own stage at Skywalker South and began his career mixing Foley. He mixed there for several years before going to Warner Brothers in Burbank, where he has been mixing Foley for eight years.

"I choose to mix closer to the cliff."

David is a mixer who pushes himself to excel. Even before Pro Tools became the standard mixing format and provided more options, he was using two or three microphones on a stage. This is a practice he still enjoys. One mic is used to record the prop or footsteps, one might be used for reflection (by aiming it at the ceiling or putting in an adjacent room), and, at times, one more might be placed "off-axis." He is adventurous in his use of microphones but can exercise caution when he knows the rerecording mixer prefers less perspective from the Foley stage. However, as David puts it, "I choose to mix closer to the cliff. It's more satisfying." David is quick to note, however, that when he mixes Foley for television, he is less likely to be experimental. Television is still mixed with less perspective and reflection because it will be seen in homes rather than in a theatre, so he mixes the Foley flatter for television.

Some SSEs prefer to have Foley recorded flat, as was typically the tradition. But there are those who depend on the Foley stage to add in equalization and perspective, so there is less time spent on the dubbing stage. Scott Hecker finds that rerecording mixers are becoming more open to some perspective and reflection being painted on the Foley stage: "With the schedules shrinking now, the last thing they want to do is to take the time to put room into it. Smart Foley artists will put in a moderate amount of room application; not as much as it can be, but at least to fit it in the space."

THE TRADITIONALIST

Karin Roulo, a Foley mixer since the late 1980s (*Deal of a Lifetime*, *Sneakers*, *Problem Child*), is more traditional in her approach. She has a unique background for a Foley mixer (she is one of the few female mixers in the industry) because she started her career as an engineer. She is methodical and precise and is very aware of the technical aspects of mixing. She initially trained at Warner Hollywood (previously Goldwyn and presently The Lot), under John Bonner, chief engineer. She trained for a year, and Bill Varney (*V.I. Warshawski*, *Harry and the Hendersons*, *The Money Pit*), the lead rerecording mixer, let her sit in on final dubbing mixes. She learned how postproduction sound was used in the final mix of films. She then moved into production as a cable puller.

The cable puller on a film shoot holds the cable for the camera operator. Cables can get in the way and be disconnected, walked on, or even appear in the scene. The cable puller ensures none of these events

occur. Karin was utilized in unusual settings because as a small woman (a rarity in engineering situations), she was able to fit into strange places, like under a table. She worked for various television shows in this capacity until she found herself working on the *Merv Griffin Show*. A female assistant director was mugged while leaving the show one night, and after that, Karin had to be accompanied by guards to and from the building. She tired of that complication, so she decided to change employment.

Karin found herself at Ryder Sound, training to repair Nagras. The Nagra was the standard machine used to record field effects for sound editors, as well as for production mixing. It was here where Karin became entranced with Foley. She watched John Roesch and Joan Rowe work with one of the best Foley mixers at the time, Richard Rogers (*Boomtown*, *Ronin*, *Andersonville*). She was not only fascinated with the process but was impressed with the way John and Joan worked as a team. Chuck Campbell was the supervisor on the stage. "It was a good introduction," says Karin of her first experience with Foley. "He [Chuck] knew what he wanted, and he was able to tell them. He was able to express how the director wanted the characters in the film perceived."

Soon after, Karin was brought in to be the Foley recordist on *Happy New Year* at Ryder Sound. The recordist who usually worked with Richard Rogers was sick, and Richard knew Karin was smart and professional. Karin was excellent at the job. She stayed on for the entire film. This is when I first met Karin. I was the lead Foley artist on the show.

Karin was hired as a recordist on several shows after that, but it wasn't long before she found herself mixing Foley at Larson Sound in Burbank. She had known the owner, Rick Larson, through her engineering career, and he hired her on the spot. She worked with Hilda Hodges and Alyson Moore on several television shows.

"... I want to give as full a sound as possible ..."

As Karin became more experienced as a mixer, Bill Varney was now in charge of the soundstages at Universal. He wanted to bring Karin there to work the Foley stage. So she went to Universal. Before long, Karin was working several stages all over town. Her perspective is that of a technically aware and perfectionistic engineer. She is tuned in to the quality of the recording:

I know what levels the equipment can handle and I want to give as full a sound as possible, so I think I tend to layer my sounds more, especially props. I'd rather spread things out and give the dubbing [rerecording] mixers more flexibility because they may not see it the same way I do.

CONVENTIONS AND THE UNCONVENTIONAL

Some mixers like a Foley stage with very little reflection. They call that a “dead room.” When a room has too much life, they find that is hard to get rid of the “bounce” or “ping.” While the artists can place room baffles on the stage to protect themselves from reflection, sometimes it is impossible to get the room dead enough for sensitive and quiet cues. Then there is the issue of constantly moving baffles around the room and placing them in an ideal position. Karin is a mixer who prefers mixing in a dead room. She normally employs the more classic approach by mixing the Foley flat but adds, “It depends on the dubbing mixer. I’ve had a few who would have preferred that I had mixed it more, and that is usually when they were on a tight budget.” Karin has helped construct electronic parts for stages, so she is sensitive to the problems of a live room: “They may need to change the edit on the dub stage. If the room is too live, they may have trouble matching the sound.”

Some mixers, especially those who started in music, where the instruments are enhanced by more life in the room, keep that sensibility when recording Foley. It is not uncommon for a mixer with this perspective to be unsatisfied with any Foley stage, since they are typically designed to have soft walls and ceilings to deaden the sound. David Jobe prefers a live room, or as he likes to express it, “When I say lively, I mean those stages that have more breath to them. When you have a dead stage, it colors the sound. The walls pull out certain frequencies.”

Ask a Foley mixer about microphone preferences and while the opinions vary there is a consensus that most mixers have a few favorites and don’t spend a lot of time auditioning microphones. A music engineer, conversely, will pick the exact microphone that brings out the best in each instrument and singer individually. There are some standard microphones that will usually appear in the Foley mixer’s repertoire. One is the Sennheiser 416, which is a bright microphone and has good midrange. Neumann is a familiar microphone brand, as is the Schoeps. The preference is personal and very dependent on the sound quality of the stage. David Jobe likes the Neumann because it has a large diaphragm. He uses the Sennheiser as a room mic because it “packs a punch” and will often use a Schoeps mic as well. “You want a quality, warm microphone,” he says.

How a mixer works with the stage and its peculiar qualities is an important aspect of mixing. Mixers need to have the patience to work with whatever issues come up with the sound floor on the stage and not be deterred by them. Whatever concerns occur with the actual recording are not the problems of the artists. So a good mixer always makes the distinction between when the recording is less than

acceptable because of the equipment, room, or pilot error and when the artist's performance needs improvement. A great mixer is always sure to communicate the reasons for problems with a recording, because the natural tendency of a Foley artist is to change what she or he has done if the cue has to be redone. If the mixer wants to ensure that the artist repeats the same performance, he or she needs to communicate that.

IT'S A MARRIAGE

Another quality of a great Foley mixer is respect, if not adoration, for the artists. The mixer should have a great understanding of how artists approach their craft so that any misunderstandings can be avoided. It is important to understand that the mixer's job is to accommodate the sounds. The sounds are created by the artists. Therefore, simple syllogism dictates that the mixer's job is to accommodate the artist. All Foley artists are different and approach the work differently. A good mixer is flexible and tries to learn the secret language of each artist so that the day goes smoothly. It also helps to make for a great session if the mixer truly wants the artists to feel free to experiment.

The same is true of the artists toward the mixers. It is not helpful if the artist is unconcerned with the challenges of the mixer. Foley mixers are ultimately responsible for the quality of the recording, which involves working with the room's sonic personality and troubleshooting any problems that arise. Whereas the relationship between one Foley artist and another while working on a film is like a marriage, so too is the relationship between the artists and the mixer. It is complicated, nuanced, and, at its best, pure magic.

Some Foley artists are impatient with mixers. This is unfortunate, as the mixer is busy with so many technical aspects of the job that she or he cannot always pay attention to every issue that comes up on the stage itself. So the artist that is patient with the mixer and tries to accommodate the mixer's technical needs will win a friend for life.

Mixers have their own techniques for creating the ideal working environment with artists. Over the years, they learn how to deal with the various personalities, the biorhythms, and the strengths and weaknesses of each of the artists. Karin Roulo has a specific approach when working with less experienced Foley artists for the first time: "The first few cues I would tend to play back more than with an experienced team, because I want them to get an idea of what it's sounding like. I might call them into the booth and have them take a look at it." When asked what is the hardest part of working with new artists she says, "If I know they're having a hard time getting sync,

especially on footsteps, and they won't let their partner try it, that is the hardest thing, when they get territorial and they're not willing to see another viewpoint."

Karin likes learning from her artists: "Jerry [Trent] taught me to visualize the whole scene, to focus on the lead actors and look from a dancer's perspective. Greg [Barbanell] has a light-hearted approach to Foley. He's very professional and he is good on comedies. For such a big person, he's very light on his feet." She attributes this author with teaching her about layering sounds. As much as I appreciate the acknowledgment, I must confess that Richard Rogers taught me to layer sound elements on various tracks to allow mixing and blending on the dub stage.

David Jobe explains his method for working with various artists: "My hope is that the Foley artists and I are on the same page aesthetically." If issues arise, however, David adds, "I will have my battles already chosen. I try to, in a kind and diplomatic way, ease them into what I think might be better. It's all subjective."

"Trust between mixer and artist is essential."

Time is the enemy for both the artists and the mixer. However, while the artists may be feeling stress to finish the required amount of work for the session, it is the mixer who feels the heat directly when the client is in the mixing booth. Invariably, once an audience is in the booth, the mixer is asked to direct the artist or "play that back for me," or "tell them to do it again," or some such unspecific advice. The mixer has no choice but to please the client, and the artist does not always know what is being said in the booth. Trust between mixer and artist is essential. The mixer can protect the artist from the deleterious effect of micromanaging by a client. Precious time will be wasted with this all-too-predictable exercise, but the fault does not lie with the Foley mixer. A sophisticated Foley artist is aware of this and lets the mixer know it.

Until recently, it was the convention to have the SSE or the Foley editor come to the Foley stage for playback. This is the process of playing a reel for the editor to determine if the Foley is going to be satisfactory. This is a good use of time for all involved because the Foley team can work undisturbed, but the client has the opportunity to offer input and comment on the possible "fixes" she or he wants. When time is tight or the budget is slim, this is not always the practice. If possible, however, this is the best approach to ensure that the editor gets what is needed from Foley and the Foley team gets the privacy and best environment to create the optimum results.

Regardless of the time pressure and the monetary limitations, the Foley mixer can always have a huge impact on the quality of the Foley.

The relationship between the mixer and the artists can be professional, creative, and absolutely magical.

Bob Deschaine has some advice for aspiring Foley mixers: "Go on a dubbing stage and see what the Foley sounds like after it's mixed. Also, get up off your tush and move the microphone, because you've got to do a little work with perspective to emulate where they are walking in the scene."

PART | FOUR

Editing and Mixing

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Chapter | twelve

I Miss Mag:

Editing Foley



Each sound editor has been introduced to the profession with the most modern type of technology available. Before the digital age, editors would have cut on optical sound or magnetic film. The optical soundtrack had a visual line, similar to the waveform of today, with which to decipher where sound would begin and end. The editor would have a visual cue as to what to edit. Magnetic film had no visual reference. The editor had to rely solely on the sound itself. When deciding where to edit in a sound or move the sync of a Foley cue, the editor would mark the place to cut on the mag itself with a white china marker, and then cut with a splicer, hang the piece of sound on the rack of a “trim bin,” and perhaps replace that piece of mag at a spot later in the track. She or he might have to “flop” the track, so the sound would not play against the sound head, if the purpose of replacing the tape was for sync only. Otherwise, the leftover sound would be interjected into the new cue.

In the days of editing on magnetic film, the library sound effect that would be added was placed in the track being edited, and it was edited in to fit the action of the scene. The editor had to be so very experienced and skilled that he or she could imagine how this effect would play along with the subsequent effects that would be edited in future tracks and layered to create the sonic magic. The audience might think the helicopter was one sound, but in reality, it was created by many tracks of complementary sounds, one by one, on the mammoth monster all editors have a love/hate relationship with: the Moviola. The editor did not have the luxury of playing all the tracks together while editing. Thus, a real working knowledge of how the sounds would all play together, along with the imagined Foley and background tracks, was essential.

Now we have digital workstations. We can see the waveforms of every bit of sound, we can magnify the wave to “fine cut” a sound effect, or we can pull back and see the entire session of tracks and edits. There are many advantages to the new technology. However, it is helpful to understand how the more fundamental technology of mag taught the editor to be selective, nuanced, and patient in the quest for the right combination of sounds or the appropriate way to approach sync in editing Foley.

THE INITIAL APPROACH

Editing Foley is a different skill than editing library sound effects. The task for the Foley editor is to take the already performed tracks and finesse them. Rather than creating sound effects for the overall design of a scene, the editor is fine cutting the Foley so it flows elegantly from cue to cue. This might seem, at first blush, a simple task that any neo-

phyte editor with an elementary understanding of Pro Tools can adequately accomplish, but that is not the case.

Just as the picture editor must be judicious in not overcutting a scene and risk sanitizing a performance, the Foley editor must not overcut the Foley and risk sanitizing the character of the walk. Foley walking is an acting performance. It is the sonic extension of the actor's intent. Thus, as much of the feel of that performance must be preserved as possible, just as the actor's speeches and facial expressions must be. The editing must be sparse and specific, and it should honor the actor's and the artist's original intentions.

The specific techniques for editing Foley are based on the idea that the fewer edits you make, the better. With that in mind, all experienced editors follow some conventions. First, look at the entire cue. Don't start editing right away, no matter how tempted you are. The inclination is to start "fixing" the sync as soon as something seems out. But once you start cutting, you are affecting the rest of the cue. Since this is a performance, you need to watch the entire performance at least two times. What you will notice is where the "sweet spot" of the cue is. You will see where the tricky part of the sync is and where the really important visual emphasis is. It is not important to line up every impact of sound. What is critical is to view the performed cue in context. Notice what other sounds will be in the scene. A footstep cue is more important if it is in isolation than if there is dialogue on top of it. Also keep in mind that the level the cue will be played at in the final mix is not the level you are editing at.

Once you have really watched the cue, in context with the scene, take notice of where the sync goes out. Is it at the beginning? Does the entire cue seem a little late all the way through? This is the most common issue and the easiest one to fix. It is possible that all you have to do is pull the entire cue up two frames. The cue might fall beautifully into place at that point.

Some Foley artists are irregular in their sync. You might notice some footsteps right in sync, then one or two fall very late, then one is early, then they fall back in good sync again. Don't panic. Look at the footsteps that are out of sync. Can you move several of them with one edit? The main goal is to avoid cutting every step. If you do that, you injure the organic life of the cue. While the goal is always to get the best sync on stage, the performance dictates the direction of the editing.

LIFE LESSONS IN EDITING

Many years ago, I was the Foley artist on a baseball film. I got an angry phone call from one of the editors cutting my Foley. This was back in the day when editors would each cut the sound effects, dialogue,

and the Foley on one reel, so several editors would be cutting my Foley. I did not know this man, but he was an older gentleman who had cut mostly dialogue and sound effects. He was horrified at my sync. At this point in my career, I was well respected for having some of the best sync in the business, so I was surprised at his anger.

He stormed into my stage, which was costing the studio a pretty penny, and insisted I come to a cutting room and look at the Foley. I complied. We viewed my unedited version, as I had walked it, and his version as he had cut it. It bears noting that he had told the assistant to order another duplicate (dupe) of the unedited Foley, again at great expense, so he could make his point.

"It looked pretty good to me."

He played the Foley as I had walked it. It was a footstep cue. The main character had a simple walk throughout the reel. It was not challenging or complicated. It looked pretty good to me. Then he showed me his edited version. The reel, which was magnetic film, had lots of splices in it. I had already learned that you could tell how well Foley was walked and cut by how many pieces of splicing tape you could see in the reel. My heart started pounding. I wondered what on earth had gone wrong.

He had cut virtually every step. He had no guide track to follow, so he was matching every step to what he perceived was the footfall. The steps he had cut made the character look like his knees did not bend when he walked. I don't remember much about what I said. I know I tried to defuse the situation. I think all I could say was, "I actually think what I walked looked fine."

This editor stormed out, and I thought I was in big trouble. I was prepared to be put in my place and was concerned that perhaps I should have been more subservient. Had I been even more insecure or more easily intimidated, I would have believed his perceptions to be correct and changed the way I did my job. As it was, I was shaken and nervous at the altercation, which seemed unnecessary to me, but I kept going.

Luckily, the supervising sound editor reassured me. He was comfortable with my quality of work and was satisfied with my professionalism. I felt like I had dodged a bullet, but I was later informed that this editor's confrontational style was well known and that my resistance to his interference was appreciated.

About a year later, a beginning Foley editor, who was smart but inexperienced, asked me to look at some Foley he was cutting. It was of a dancer doing some ballet on a hardwood floor in toe shoes. His edited version was so confusing that it took hours for us to figure out what went wrong. He had started cutting at the first sign

of a sync issue. He did not know dancing, and he did not know what to do as things got more and more out of sync because he started hacking away. Once again, this was on magnetic film. So once he started cutting, the subsequent sync was affected. Nowadays, with nondestructive editing, you can undo what you did and start over. But then, we could not.

I can't remember how many hours I sat there, trying to decipher where the dance sounds should fit with the picture. It didn't help that the Foley artist who performed the cue was a former dancer but with questionable sync. I believe I was of little help to the poor editor. But I learned a valuable lesson about cutting Foley before planning what you want to do

"Do the gross cutting first."

with the cue.

Later, when I began editing, I realized that once you start performing surgery on Foley, you are lost. It is better to relax and take your time. Assume that most of the work will be in good sync, and only cut what really draws attention to itself. Do the gross cutting first. There is plenty of time to go back and fine cut.

Scott Hecker started cutting Foley when he worked with Bob Rutledge. Because he had been trained so well, he did not make the typical rookie errors: "I would look at a cue before cutting and 'hone in.' You have to figure out where you are going to make your edits and where you are going to get back in sync before you start cutting at all." Scott defends the practice of having new editors cut Foley: "It is a good place to learn to edit because it's synchronizing sound to picture and nine times out of ten [it is] a literal application, whether it's someone setting down a teacup or pounding on a door." Scott also cautions, "But if you reduce the art of Foley editing to purely that, then you're missing 80 percent of it."

Mark Pappas has worked with Scott frequently. When he began editing, he made plenty of mistakes, and his reels would come back from the stage needing fixing. Mark had asked advice from other editors who gave various tips. Some said to match the cadence of each individual step. Some said to focus on being more rhythmic. He wasn't sure which way to go.

In the earlier days of editing, when severe budget cutbacks were not the driving force they are now, there would be time for Mark to have someone check his work to guide him. I remember that process well. After cutting a unit of magnetic film, I would run the unit with my supervisor to make sure it was ready to go. Later, as a supervisor myself, I checked every reel cut by my editors, unless the editor was very experienced.

Nowadays, the chance to check work is rare, so the wise Foley editor is painstaking and meticulous and asks as many questions in the begin-

ning as possible. As Mark says, "It was surprising how tedious it was. You cut that sequence and you almost get done with it and you play it back and it takes about 10 seconds and you've been sitting there for hours working on it!"

EDITING FOR SYNC

Mark doesn't always watch every sequence before editing it now. He has developed a methodology that, over the years, has worked for him. His years of experience has enabled him to start cutting from the top of a cue. He knows all the artists and is well versed on the strengths of each of them, so he can anticipate where the sync issues will probably come up.

Since most Foley artists do not always have perfect sync, the editor will only be concerned if the sync is noticeably early or late, unless it needs to "top production" or be combined with another track. The conventional wisdom is that a frame late is virtually imperceptible.

There is an alternative theory about sync. The theory is that sound travels more slowly than light, so effects and Foley should be edited slightly early to compensate. If you watch a symphonic or choral performance at a distance, you will notice the conductor's arms are ahead of what you hear. She or he is conducting into the next measure by the time the sound reaches the part of the audience that is far away. This is what supports the theory of editing sound one or two frames early.

The flaw in this reasoning is that in modern film viewing, the listener is not far away from the point of reference in the soundtrack. The mixed track is coming through a complement of speakers intended to engage the ear from different places. The sound is close to the audience. It is not traveling more slowly than the picture. It makes more sense to cut the sound to fit with what you see and not try to compensate for the rate of sound and light travel.

An important aspect of cutting Foley is to play it with the production track. You will see quite quickly what does not work. If you cut it in a sterile environment with no concept of the big picture, you will get caught up in minutiae. It is so important to understand that Foley is a craft of subtlety. It will not be what the audience watches. It needs not to draw attention to itself. Badly performed and badly edited Foley always draws attention. Good Foley lays in beautifully, as though it happened in production. It is essential to listen to the Foley alone while you are editing it. But before you leave the cue, and go to the next, listen to the edited version with the production track. That will teach you a lot about what you did right and what you need to do better.

MODERN TIMES



With every technological advancement, the Foley editor will necessarily make adjustments in the editing process. With magnetic film, we would edit one unit of recorded Foley at a time and keep in mind the other complementary tracks. It was not possible to hear them all together during the editing process. The editor would have to wait until the predub. Today, we can hear many tracks of Foley at once and have a clear perspective on how they will all sound together.

Before digital workstations, editors would simply cut the sound. Now it is not uncommon for the supervisor to require the editor to utilize the volume graph and present a premixed version of the Foley. While this is a time-saving practice for the dub, it imposes the perspective of the editor onto the mixer. Most mixers would prefer to have the stage time to finesse the volume of the Foley while having the sound effects, music, and dialogue close at hand to contribute to the overall balance of the dub.

It is also possible for a neophyte editor to have a false sense of competence with the digital workstation. The tool one uses is not what determines the quality of the product. The tool is meant to make the craft easier, not to take the place of artistry and experience. Digital editing encourages speed, so the editor might not develop the skill to shape the cue to perfection. Mark Pappas relates his experience of moving from magnetic film to digital editing:

I feel we were more of craftsmen before. The last thing you would want to do is get a reprint, because that meant taking it out and filling the hole with leader so you could keep the same length, then sending it [the cue] out. Then once you got it back, you'd put the sound back up. It was a lot more laborious to do something like that. Instead, we would go through and try to make everything work any way we could.

Digital editing, however, has made conforming previous sound edits to new picture changes much easier. Instead of putting one unit at a time up and changing each edit, the entire session can be updated with a few edit changes in the Pro Tools. All the tracks can be viewed and conformed quickly. "It might take a day to update cue sheets with new footages [with mag]. Now, as soon as you're done cutting and changing, cue sheets are done too because they print out," Mark explains.

"You need to listen to it."

One thing I have noticed about beginning Foley editors is that they want to cut according to the waveforms on the computer screen. Let's go "back to heads," as we say, and think this through. Foley is sound. You are editing sound. You need to listen to it. If you watch the wave and let that dictate your editing process, you are missing most of the purpose of sound. Sound needs to accompany the picture. Watch the picture. Listen to the sound as it accompanies the picture. If it works, leave it alone. If it does not, then, and only then, do you need to look at the waveform.

Editing prop cues has more in common with library sound effects than footstep cues. Many of the edits will be to tighten sync or clean out unwanted aspects of the prop cue. However, once again, it is a performance with a personality that is particular to the scene. If you focus on the perfection of the edit rather than the impressionistic flow of the prop, you risk overcutting and taking the life out of the performance.

In today's world of the Internet and CDs, it is common to order an array of sound effects from a company. This is actually a good way to get some basic effects for any sound effects library. So the obvious question becomes, why not just buy the stock Foley effects offered as a set as well? To my mind the answer would be that ordering any stock effects is a good idea with which to begin. However, you now have a sound library of Foley effects and will still have the performance issues. Once performed Foley effects are saved into a sound library, they become sound effects. They are valuable for any pedestrian cues that your project will need. However, they will not be a good substitute for the specific peculiarities of a performance. Always keep in mind the importance of the organic nature of the Foley performance.

Chapter | thirteen

Fix It in Post:

The Dub



It would probably not occur to the typical cineaste that the topic of the rerecording mix would be an important aspect of Foley. After all, once the Foley has been cued, performed, and edited, it would seem that the focus shifts to the more elaborate and dramatic sound effects for dubbing purposes. However, what any filmmaker or film sound fan must remember is that all roads lead to the dub. Since the mixing process is the final destination of all sound, as the line in *Death of a Salesman* states, “Attention must be paid.”

THE PREDUB

Predubbing postproduction sound has traditionally been the territory of the rerecording mixers. We find ourselves in a time when the new technology has led to the belief that anyone with a Pro Tools can design, edit, and mix sound as well as any professional. That belief may sell equipment, but in practice, it is the aesthetics, craftsmanship, and experience that determine the quality of the soundtrack, not the equipment.

There has been, until recently, a convention of three mixers on a dub stage. One was primarily responsible for dialogue (typically the head mixer), one was in charge of music, and one was in charge of Foley and sound effects. We will examine this classical approach and how it still affects the workflow even as technology has blurred the lines of job responsibilities.

For most of my career in sound, I would prepare my Foley with the purpose of it serving the needs of the rerecording mixers on the stage. It has always been the case that the buck does indeed stop there. Regardless of who has recorded the production sound, who has supervised the sound editing, who has designed any special sound effects, who has shot the ADR with the actors, who has composed and edited the music, and who has had responsibility for the Foley, it is the rerecording mixers who have the director, producer(s), picture editor, and sometimes a studio committee on the dub stage passing judgment and counting hours and dollars. The production company and studio are always represented by those who are more concerned with audience screenings and weekend openings than with the labor that was required to bring all the sounds to the stage. The rerecording mixers are often the only sound experts ever seen by most of the powerful in the film industry. They are the firewall for all of us.

With that in mind, it should not be any surprise that the rerecording “dubbing” mixers are the ones who hear the complaints and see the temperament of the stage sitters. It only makes sense that those involved with the editorial team need to understand the pressure that these

“A good predub makes the final dub ...”

heroes are under most of their workdays. Consequently, a clear comprehension of the dubbing process, and how it relates to the Foley artist, mixer, and editor, is essential.

The first days on the dub stage are primarily for predubs. This is, of course, in addition to any temp dubs that have occurred. The predub has, in the past, been the critical and time-consuming aspect of the dub. Mixers meticulously analyze and scrutinize each sound and finesse the timbre and quality of each piece of the track. It requires patience and focus. A good predub makes the final dub, which is the last chance to get it right, like cutting butter. As Dave Stone says, "The predubs are like rehearsing a symphony orchestra; details are everything. The final dub is the concert!"

During the predub process, the mixers are taking one category of sound and mixing the many tracks down into groupings of six tracks. Dialogue would traditionally be mixed down into six mono tracks. ADR would have six tracks of principals and perhaps another six of group ADR. Hard effects might have three to eight sets of six tracks, including any special design effects. Background effects (BGs) would have one set of six tracks. Foley would have six tracks of footsteps and six tracks of props. Cloth would be split off onto its own track and be played at the final dub, not at the predub.

Many predubs would ideally start with the dialogue. Everything starts with what is in the production track, so the dialogue predubs would often be given a week or more to truly finesse the tracks and make them sparkle. Next might be ADR, then sound effects, then Foley. Music wouldn't show up until the final mix. Today, as schedules are more squeezed and time is tighter, it has even become acceptable for one stage to be predubbing dialogue while another is working on Foley. Also, the three-person team is rarely used anymore. Nowadays, two people dub the entire show. Of course, on small, independent films, it is not unusual to have one person dub an entire show. This is not desirable for the final result, but is economic.

"It all starts with the production dialogue."

Richard Portman spent most of his years as a rerecording dialogue mixer. He would listen painstakingly for hiss and hum on the tracks: "It all starts with the production dialogue. If it is recorded well, then everything else is much easier." Most rerecording mixers would probably agree with Richard. While his background as an engineer makes him more sensitive to the technical recording quality of the production track, most mixers prefer the production dialogue mixing to be the template used for all remaining sound effects.

Some mixers like to predub the Foley against the dialogue tracks. Others prefer to mix the Foley against the sound effects tracks. This is

advantageous because both effects and Foley might have coverage on a scene, and they may need to be played against each other to see which covers the material best. Often, the decision to marry the Foley effect with the edited choice can be made in predubs. As Dave Stone reminds us, “The purpose of predubs is to cull down many units.”

“Time, of course, is always the issue.”

Michael Semanick likes to take a lot of time to predub his Foley. This is probably because he had mixed Foley for quite a while before becoming a rerecording mixer. He likes to play the other elements against the Foley in predubs: “When I’m predubbing, I’m trying to use whatever I’ve got to balance against.” Time, of course, is always the issue. Michael has been lucky in that he usually gets the time he requests to predub: “Just on *Sweeney Todd* alone, I took about two weeks to predub the Foley, I think, because it was so important. I spend more time than they ever want to give me.”

Most of the time, mixers are under intense time restraints. Foley might normally be allowed three days to one week for the typical Hollywood feature. As schedules tighten, dubbing schedules are compressed, and even three days will be considered generous. Even with a short schedule, the best mixers listen to the tracks they predubbed the previous day with fresh ears in the morning. Ears become tired, and tracks sound different after proper rest.

When the mixer predubs Foley, he or she will be able to use time more effectively if the preparation by the editor has been appropriate. The tracks need to be tagged properly and sheets should be printed out. Some dubbing mixers just watch the meters, some look at the sheets and mark them up with notes on where they assigned the tracks in the predub, and some prefer to look at the Pro Tools. These preferences can be generational, as many of the most prestigious mixers learned in the days of magnetic film. But even the younger ones have decidedly different methods for dubbing. The conventions for laying out the tracks, however, are similar because the system is meant to utilize time efficiently. Once again, all rerecording mixers with any experience in the professional world will be looking for principal footsteps in the leftmost channels, background footsteps in the next channels, and finally props, with similar types of props in similar tracks.

If a film has been through several temp dubs, as most of them are today, then the predub process has happened several times already. A temp dub is used for the purpose of putting in whatever effects are deemed necessary for an audience test. Until recently, temp dubs were a standalone endeavor, and fresh material would be designed and edited for the actual dub. Today, it is more typical that the temp dubs are precursors for the final dubs and sometimes take the place of predubs.

A clever editor will keep the material from each previous temp dub and simply add the new material in.

THE BLENDING OF MIXING AND EDITING

Sometimes Foley editors have been asked to predub some of the material in the Pro Tools to save time and money on the dub. Rerecording mixers have their choices limited if that is the case. Just as the mixer is limited by any perspective painted on the Foley stage, the same is true for any panning or perspective added “in the box.” This is a particular problem because the space from one side of the screen to the other in a dub stage is far larger than on a monitor, and the panning decisions done in a Pro Tools by an editor may not translate well to the large screen. Once again, the decisions demanded by the marketplace do not always lead to the best result.

At one point, the Nearfield Monitoring System was designed to improve the accuracy of the panning done by editors. The hope was to simulate the stage experience enough for the editor to make the panning acceptable on the dub stage. Most mixers still prefer the panning to be done on the stage itself. As Michael Semanick notes:

The problem I've had is what has happened in London and a few other places. The panning is not quite accurate. People think they can do it all with this one box. With the Pro Tools, they're trying to do everything in it, and right now, it just doesn't sound as good to me.

A convention that is disappearing on the dub stage is that of having an editor on the stage to tweak a cue while in the predub process. The director may want to hear an alternate sound, the sync may be suspect, or the mixers may have a suggestion to improve the combination of cues. Whatever the reason, it has always been the practice to have an editor stage sit when his or her reel is up in case fixes need to be made.

“There is a flow to the dub ...”

More and more, because of time, budget, and technological changes, it is not always the case that an editor will be on the stage all the time. Nowadays, the director might ask the mixer to make a quick edit. This is problematic. Not only are most dubbing mixers more comfortable and experienced mixing rather than editing, but the flow of the dub is disturbed noticeably when the mixer has to change tasks and get into edit mode. There is a flow to the dub that allows maximum creativity and efficiency from the mixers.

Now that the technology used for mixing and editing is the same, there is an assumption that anyone who has a Pro Tools can do both crafts. That assumption can lead to the conclusion that one person can do the work of two, so why hire two? As we become more of a society

that favors fewer workers doing more tasks with the use of technology, the natural consequence is that the people in authority prefer to believe that a mixer can edit and an editor can mix.

This is true in one way. It is possible for the same person to operate the Pro Tools, or another editing/mixing system, and do both tasks. That does not, however, lead to the conclusion that the person is talented, skilled, or experienced at both crafts. Mixing and editing are very different skills and require very different gifts. While there are those who can and do perform both professions well, it is more likely that a person will have an interest in and the talent for one over the other. The view that the two crafts are close enough in skill set to be interchangeable shows a lack of understanding of the crafts and what is required to be an expert.

Michael Semanick relates an incident involving a supervisor who wanted him to edit some effects on the dub stage. Michael was uncomfortable doing that. The supervisor had released the editors, and some cues needed to be reedited. Perhaps the editors were released for budgetary reasons. Regardless, it was a problem for Michael. He explains, "I'm an old dog now. I'm part of the old group of rerecording mixers who still want the editor on the stage to edit for me. I don't want to have to do it. I want to mix it, and that is becoming a rare thing." This is an interesting comment from one still in his forties.

The editor insisted that Michael can and should do the editorial fixes. Michael did so, but he found it caused him to slow down his mixing process:

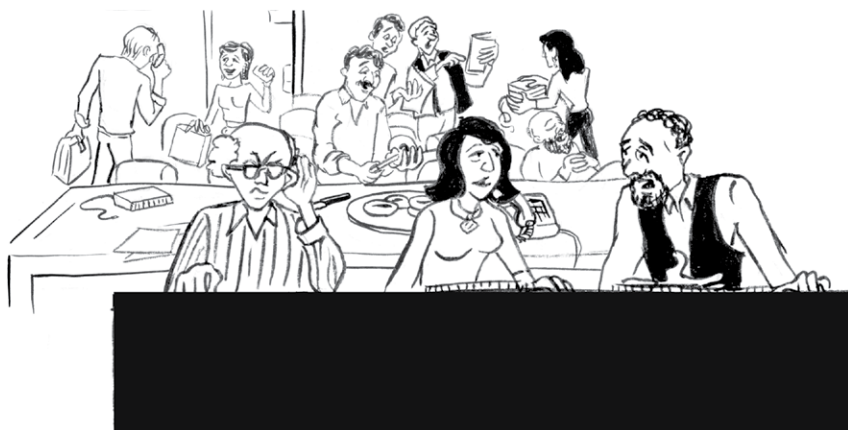
The mix took longer because we didn't have an editorial crew. But I think he [the supervisor] was making a point that the editors all want to edit and mix: "Well, you know what? The mixers can edit and mix too."

THE FINAL DUB

When the predubs are complete, the final dub begins. This process is a bit different in that there will often be a committee of various players who contribute opinions regarding the final mix. While the predubs are more intimate, the final dub is often a cacophony of opinions. This final dub is the last chance to get all the sounds right and all views aired.

With the accelerated schedules and intense emphasis on technology, it is becoming ever more routine for the final dub to be a continuation of a predub or even a temp dub. The lines are blurring. This makes it harder for the mixers to keep their focus on the specific task. The final dub should ideally be the place for the integration, massaging, and finessing of all "food groups." It is the finely developed and applied glaze on the well-crafted pot, as it were.

Foley is often not the focus at the final dub. The final dub often focuses on where music should be played and how the sound effects



and Foley should be used in relation to the music. However, there are still opportunities to make changes in the Foley. It is not unusual for the director to decide he or she wants to hear something different in a scene once the music is added and the entire film is viewed.

It is often the case in smaller budget and independent films that the tasks of editing and mixing are being combined into one vocation. As the industry changes and expands to include games and the Internet and younger professionals have been trained in the methods of both crafts, it seems apparent that one person will do more of both the editing and the mixing. For now, we are in a transition from the old school to the new thinking. Things are changing. However, the workflow will not change markedly, so it is helpful to understand the classic way films have been mixed so we adapt the old to fit the new with awareness and prudence.

Michael Semanick says it best: "I'm using all the new technology. I'm just using it where it should be used. I use it where it sounds good!"

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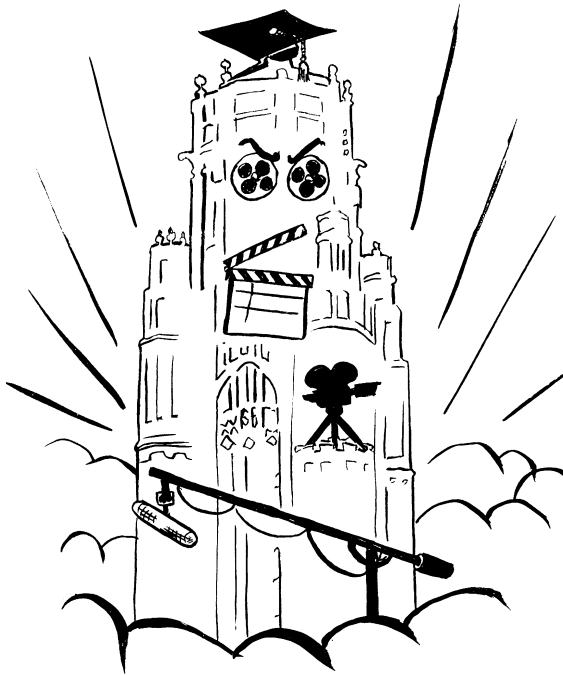
Looking Forward

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Chapter | fourteen

The Ivory Tower:

The Film School



Recently, there has been an explosion of assorted varieties of film schools. This is, on the whole, very good news. Film is the most widely available form of literacy. People from the majority of the cultures on the planet have access to film or television in some form. Websites, pages, and blogs have proliferated at an astounding rate of speed. Games, both online and packaged, are the fastest-growing form of entertainment. Masters of fine arts are graduating from universities and arts schools after studying narrative film, documentary, animation, web design, games, graphics, and cinema studies. Ph.D.s are analyzing, studying, hypothesizing, and delineating all sorts of film-oriented material. All of this attention to film and related media is a wonderful validation to those of us who have devoted our careers to the entertainment industries.

There are, of course, the normal and anticipated challenges that come with such an explosion. The rate at which these schools of learning must create new courses and find faculty for the classes, to meet the demand of the ever-growing number of film and media-loving students, causes uneven curricula and a varying quality of teachers. It becomes necessary to delve into what is happening in the film production, animation, and cinema studies programs around the United States so we might better understand this phenomenon. By doing so, we can discern what might be the next steps to improve the programs around the country so our young people get the best possible preparation for their futures in the changing world of film and media.

WHAT KIND OF FILM PROGRAM IS IT?

There are three main categories of film school in the United States. The first is the more traditional film or cinema studies schools. These programs focus on the analysis and compiling of past works in film. The tenured and full-time faculties in most of these programs are composed of Ph.D.s who have spent many years studying the bodies of work of filmmakers, the history of the art form, the specifics of the development of the industry, and the lives and processes of the artists and craftspeople involved. These brilliant academics have devised their own critical lexicon for discussion and have raised the discourse of our beloved business to a level never anticipated by your average person working on a studio lot.

The second type of film school focuses on the production of film. These programs may have a bias toward independent filmmaking, documentaries, or mainstream film. Some have a concentration in animation. A few have concentrations in the specific disciplines associated with film and media. What they have in common is plenty of courses that are intended to train the budding filmmaker in the particular disciplines required to actually produce a live-action or animated film.

Some programs revolve around the latest technology, and others prefer a fundamental approach using simple technology that is less expensive.

There is a third category that is, in reality, a hybrid. This type of film or media school is a “high art” approach to filmmaking, which is a production-based program with a cinema studies approach. For the sake of discussion, the focus for this kind of program can be referred to as “film art.” These programs lean toward the design aspects of film rather than the pragmatic day-to-day production of a movie. They have qualities of both types of programs but are not purely one or the other. While they are fascinating variants of the other two types, they present their own sets of criteria that may or may not satisfy the needs of a student wishing to make a career in the profession of filmmaking.

ACADEMICS AND EXPERTS

In examining film programs, one needs to reflect on the purpose of the individual programs, what resources are available, and what the vision of the chair or steering committee might be. It is also essential to understand the anticipated student bodies and the regional differences between institutions. For example, one would expect a film program that is based on production to have a higher number of available professional faculty members in Los Angeles than would a program in Oregon. If a production-based program wants to attract professionals to the faculty, then incentives to get the professional faculty interested must be addressed. If the program is going to primarily focus on the study of film, then the research experience of the Ph.D. is important. The master of fine arts (M.F.A.) is a relatively new terminal degree in film and is usually someone who has studied a graduate production program with others from the academic world and perhaps a few professionals. The emphasis is often on independent filmmaking, with M.F.A. candidates producing a thesis film written by, directed by, and crewed by other film students. Thus, a faculty member who is an M.F.A. is valuable for the general overview of independent filmmaking, which is attractive to many film students.

There are, of course, the students who want the experience of working with mainstream film professionals. These experts rarely have an advanced degree, as they have spent the better part of their adult lives making a living in “the business” and therefore have a great deal to offer as the expert specialists who have a depth and breadth in a craft that far exceeds what any college experience can offer. Some programs make room in their faculty profiles for such experienced professionals, while others prefer the emphasis to be on the expertise of the M.F.A. Still others want the prestige and research expertise of a Ph.D. to be prevalent in the curriculum. There are good reasons for any of these

approaches. It would seem, however, that a balance of all three areas of emphasis might make a more powerful and dynamic film program, whether it is studies based or production based.

At this time, few film programs utilize this approach. More often than not, there is a bias toward studies over production, production over studies, Ph.D.s over M.F.A.s, and academics over professionals. Another complication is the resistant academic community that requires a terminal degree for any candidate seeking a full-time faculty position. Clearly, universities that are strict with this requirement and have no method for providing an equivalent status for the accomplished professional will not be able to offer such valuable expertise to their students.

"The professional has the opportunity to contribute ..."

When the film professional is utilized in a film school, it is often as an adjunct, or part-time faculty member. This may seem to some an ideal situation. The professional has the opportunity to contribute to the program while remaining a viable working expert. However, too often, by having the professional filmmaker serve as an adjunct, she or he has little input into the direction of the program because that is the sole privilege of full-time and often only tenured faculty. While this type of exclusivity has been the tradition in higher education, it can lead to a program that lacks the savvy perspective a career professional can provide. Conversely, the vocational schools that provide professionals as the key instructors offer courses that have a strong focus on pragmatic skills but may lack emphasis on the intellectual and critical thinking skills that are vital to a truly educated graduate. Also, the emphasis of the "across the curriculum" approach that embodies modern colleges and universities is not typically included in the perspective of the working film professional.

In the university setting, program committees might spend years refining the "platforming" and sequencing of the courses and curriculum offered. Even within the individual course, there is a need to carefully construct the tasks to allow a gradual understanding of content and development of skill. Often, the professional will have a different set of criteria for that result or might not even be thinking with that mindset. This can lead to a course that is disjointed and even overwhelming for the student. Add to this the intensity and speed with which the media and methods change, and keeping a course relevant becomes quite a challenge.

The faculty member who has come from the training or education provided mostly from another academic institution rarely has a real sense of the professional culture or workflow. It is fairly typical that those teaching in the university setting know their specialty well but have less understanding of another's. When M.F.A.s or Ph.D.s try to

design the curriculum required in a profession, they may be operating more from the perspective of the educator, generalist, or theorist than from the perspective of the specialized craftsperson. This lends support to the argument that both the academic faculty members and the professionals should be included in all curriculum planning. They each have their strengths and are a wonderful illustration of the story of the blind men describing an elephant. They can talk about the one part of the animal that they have touched, but they draw incorrect assumptions about what they are touching. They are accurate with their small piece, but they never get the whole picture without each other.

HOW PROFESSIONAL IS THE PROFESSIONAL?

It is sometimes, unfortunately, the case that a less-than-scrupulous professional fakes his or her credentials to obtain a faculty position at a college or university. The scenario is often that a person who has either had minor success in the industry or has worked in film but had not acquired an exceptional skill set will utilize the opportunity to jump onto the film school bandwagon for some sense of professional accomplishment or financial security. This person greatly exaggerates his or her experience and talents and can talk enough of the talk to fool the typical university committee that has much less experience with the industry. The academic community is very trusting when it comes to claims made by such candidates. Since most academics are used to conforming to high standards of ethics and avoiding plagiarism, they do not expect these actions from professionals who are used to puffing up their experience and talents to get the next gig.

Some instances of inflated claims can be impressive to the academic who does not know the culture or lingo of the craft. There was an incident where a candidate claimed to work on several films with an award-winning supervising sound editor, in a general position of "sound." One quick email to the supervisor revealed that this candidate was unknown to him. It is likely that the candidate worked in some capacity that had nothing to do with actually making the film but was around the facility at the time. There have been reports of candidates claiming to win an award that actually went to someone else. I had the experience of having a Foley editor claim he supervised the Foley on a film where I was the lead Foley artist. I had actually been given the task of supervising, and this editor had edited on only a few films before this major film. The irony was that I was an advisee for the committee that would have approved his entrance into the professional organization to which he was applying, and I had the unfortunate task of correcting the record.

It is not all that difficult to sufficiently vet a candidate from the professional world. An email to a supervisor on any film in the area in

which the candidate claims to have worked takes care of the matter. It is an expected convention to ask film professionals about the work of others. We do not use résumés or demonstration reels to hire sound professionals in the film industry. We make phone calls and send emails and simply ask if our colleagues know someone who can fill a position. If we get a name of someone to hire, we make a call to someone we trust who has worked with this person and ask how the person's work and attitude is. Our follow-up is simple, yet effective. While the academic culture is more formal, the entertainment world is casual and direct.

The interviewing faculty members often do not know that the claim of working on a film does not translate into having been actively involved with the process. Simply put, well-intentioned academics can be misled because of a lack of familiarity with the culture from where these candidates come. When professionals are included in the interviewing process, however, these misrepresentations can be more quickly identified.

Film schools can be an attractive magnet for a less-than-successful film professional. This type of candidate will have done just enough professional work to impress an interviewing committee but not enough to have a true command of the skill set required. It is not uncommon to find faculty members who have carved out a secure situation but do not have the academic or professional bona fides. The reason is supply and demand. Film schools are burgeoning and need faculty. Unemployed filmmakers need work.

There are several obvious problems with this trend of the less experienced professional as faculty member. One is that once someone gets into the university faculty pipeline, it is easy to platform one position into a more prestigious one. The nature of the academic world is such that once you become part of an academic department, unless you do something egregious or are terribly impolitic, you can stay there. Some people have learned to stay employed by being political rather than skilled. This is not news to anyone over the age of 14.

An even more precarious issue is that of competency. The person who has worked a bit in the film world but has not truly become a veteran and has misrepresented his or her expertise will mislead others into incorrect assumptions. Many film schools use terms inappropriately and teach improper techniques. The students, unless very aware, will be lulled into thinking they are learning the proper tasks. When they leave the school, they will be in for quite a shock. The projects they worked on, that they were so proud of, will be of such inferior quality that they will have no credibility in any workplace. We owe our young filmmakers more than this. In this day of outrageous tuition costs, these hopeful and enthusiastic youngsters deserve our best efforts to have the information and training be first rate and consistent.

HOW DO WE TEACH SOUND?



The author discussing Foley techniques at the Denver International Film Festival, October 1989. Photo courtesy of Larry Laszlo & Associates, CoMedia.

It is not unusual that the film program offered at a school undervalues the contribution of sound. Often it is seen as something that is “added on” after the movie is finished. Ask any sound professional worth the paycheck, and you will be told, “Sound is half the movie.” Offering one or two sound courses does a great disservice to the students and is insulting to the craft. Sound is complicated, involved, time-consuming, and expensive. Film programs that spend the money and take the time to teach it right will bring forth students who are competent and employable. The avenues available for those proficient in sound are vast. Games, websites, interactive media, advertising, radio, local television, and independent and documentary film all need good sound. As more consumers have quality entertainment centers and computers, the marketplace reacts by making sound more important and highlighted. Even our sports broadcasters make use of finessed sound to draw attention to a replay. Someone is designing it, editing it, mixing it, and finally, playing it in real time.

“... the importance of the aesthetics of sound ...”

Another set of issues that typically arises in the film school curriculum relates to the use of technology. We now live in a highly technological society. It is relatively inexpensive for the interested consumer to purchase consumer or “pro-

sumer" hardware and gadgets that closely duplicate, at least superficially, the tasks accomplished by the expensive and hard-to-master professional filmmaking gear. This leads to a false sense of skill for the user. In the educational context, it often contributes to the concept that if one has the equipment, one can edit film or sound, run a studio or stage, mix or engineer, or any combination of these tasks with just the right button, software, or plug-in. Often overlooked is the importance of the aesthetics of sound. While many of our young people can indeed learn the hardware, software applications, and plug-ins relatively quickly, the process of shaping the style of the sound effects, including Foley and special sound design or field effects, takes years to develop. Add to that the myriad of choices and complications of beautifully nuanced mixes or final dubs as we call them in the trade, and you have a skill set that is not really attainable in the course of acquiring a B.A. or even an M.F.A. What we can hope to achieve in our film schools is a broad exposure to the genres, styles, and goals of sound for film, and we can hope that our graduates retain their intellectual curiosity for a lifetime.

It is no surprise that we find ourselves in this predicament. Our modern society revolves around making items obsolete so we must purchase an upgrade or a new device entirely. Also, there is a great deal of profit to be made by convincing your enthusiastic 19-year-old that he or she, too, can become a filmmaker. It is essential to remember that while necessity used to be the mother of invention, as the late George Carlin had reminded us, it is today the reverse: invention is now the mother of necessity. Things are now designed and invented, and we are *sold* the conclusion that they are now necessary.

DEFINING THE SKILL SET

It would seem logical to anyone reading about filmmaking that there is a certain talent, skill, and craftsmanship required to be a highly sought after film professional. This is still true, no matter how many tripped-up computers, keyboards, mixing units, or microphones one collects. Simply learning hardware and software does not make someone talented, skilled, intuitive, creative, or artistic. Actually the reverse is more often true: the more one relies on bells and whistles to do the job, the less likely that person will ever develop the true craftsmanship to dazzle the discerning filmmaker or filmgoer. It takes years to become a good sound or picture editor, Foley artist, mixer, or location or field recordist. It requires hard work, patience, and lots of errors to learn these skills properly.

One can fast-track the way to becoming a sound editor by using software and plug-ins that help do the job, but the exceptional professional can do it with little technical support. The technology actually

clutters and distracts from the process. Any veteran sound professional will tell you that technology is the tool that *helps*, not *makes*, the skilled craftsman. Today's youths have grown up with computers and are impatient to use all the tools to *get there quickly*. We older adults must always slow them down and remind them that skill takes time to acquire.

"There is an emphasis on specializing in the industry ..."

It is not unusual for a university to conduct a search for a candidate for an "audio" position. This terminology is misleading to a film sound professional. Audio in the context of the film industry refers to an engineering perspective. It implies knowledge of wiring, signal processing, microphones, and all things electronic. It does not, however, refer to the aesthetics, design, editing, and mixing of soundtracks for films, television, animation, or games. We "sound people" in the industry are sound professionals, not audio professionals. There is an emphasis on specializing in the industry, and while some do cross over, in general, someone who is an expert in sound editing, Foley, ADR or mixing is not an "audio" person. Even some engineers in the film industry refer to themselves as working in sound, not audio.

This brings us to the issues of gender. In this era of political correctness, it may be surprising to learn that there is still a large gender gap in higher education regarding the integration of women into film sound programs. It might seem obvious to the reader that any university program would be designed to have a balance of male, female, and multicultural faculty. Sadly, this is not always the case. There is still a bias toward the male perspective of filmmaking and technology that can often ignore the important contributions made by women professionals in the field of sound. With most programs being headed by men who have been influenced by the male-dominated film industry or the male-dominated film schools, this imbalance is still an issue. It is very important to remember that women will attend film schools and will want to see women teaching some of the classes. The male perspective in film, games, and animation is just that: a perspective. The female perspective of the stories to be written, directed, edited, and produced enriches any program.

"... film is still a liberal art ..."

Part of this bias stems from the mistaken belief that sound is about technology and that men are more comfortable and skilled in the latest hardware and plug-ins. This assumption ignores two basic aspects of sound for media; one, many women are technologically inclined, and, two, sound design is primarily about the art and craft. The tools will change, but the need for aesthetics, taste, and style will always be present. The tools assist the art form and the craftspeople. Additionally, it is important to remember that film is still a liberal art, whether it is

included in communications, media, or computer science. All genders, cultures, and races have contributed to the evolution of media, and they will all study it.

Anyone in film school is aware of the term “sound designer.” Ask anyone what that term means, and you have the makings of quite a conversation. The term was coined by Walter Murch. This was his description of himself. Walter is in the unusual position of having worked for directors who let him edit both picture and sound. These crafts are usually done simultaneously and cannot be done by one person. But for Walter, who worked mostly in the San Francisco area with directors who utilized a different business model, this was a choice he made. By being the picture editor, he was able to conceptualize the sound while being around the set during production. He was close to the action and could have input during production regarding sound.

Walter’s work on *The Conversation* is a good illustration of why this can be effective. It is not, however, common practice. There is usually neither the time nor the budget for the supervising sound editor to be on the payroll from the beginning of production, let alone preproduction. George Lucas has often spoken about why he feels it is deleterious to the filmmaking process to wait until postproduction before employing the sound supervisor. He is a strong advocate for early influence from the supervising sound editor, along with the picture editor, from the beginning of production. There are many mistakes made in production that make more work in postproduction. With the intelligent input of a Ben Burtt, a Randy Thom, a Richard Beggs, or a Gary Rydstrom, the venerable Mr. Lucas has avoided many problems. Also, Randy, Ben, Richard, and Gary have been able to anticipate issues and begin pulling effects early for the most creative design work.

In the 1980s, “sound designer” referred to the gifted individual who was called on to design special sounds for unreal events, futuristic sounds that were imagined or to create a layer to complement a set of library effects. John Pospisil has spent his entire film career doing this and earned, along with Steven Flick, the Academy Award for *Robocop*. John P. designed and Steve Flick pulled and combined the “kits” of library effects for his editors to assemble. They are both brilliant, but they do different tasks.

Nowadays, the term sound designer is tossed around with abandon as a form of prestige and cachet. Any person who has a Pro Tools and some competence at using the tools can “design.” The person can be a recent graduate from a film school who likes music and plays with sounds to be put to an avant-garde film piece or he or she can lay down strange sounds in a track to accompany a film. This does not mean the person can edit one real-world effect for a film. The point is this: the term, on its own, is meaningless. One must know the exact context with which it is being used. Recently, an independent producer hired a

sound designer for his film, thinking the person would take care of all the sound effects in the film. What actually happened was the “designer” cut fancy underscored effects and a few sound effects but could not supervise the others working on the sound. Therefore, there was no communication about who was covering what. There were no consistent versions of the production dialogue to work with, so the dialogue editor, who also cut many of the effects at the last minute, the ADR editor, the Foley editor, and Foley artist had no idea “who was on first.” The final dub, needless to say, was a mess. This sound designer graduated from a respected film program with an M.F.A. and is a well-intentioned and devoted worker. However, he did not truly know the job. He had not been tutored by a professional.

In the film or games industries, the professionals are specialists. If the specialty is sound, then the professional usually does only sound. Even within the sound community, there are specialists. One edits dialogue more frequently. Another is known for sound effects. Still another has made her specialty Foley editing. In the academic world, the Ph.D. is a specialist and the M.F.A. is a generalist. The M.F.A. has a basic understanding of the ingredients of a film but has not necessarily been allowed to focus on one specialty.

FOLEY CURRICULUM

So how does all this relate to Foley and its place in film education? At least half of the sound effects edited in postproduction sound are typically from the Foley stage. On every feature and television show, even in some cases documentaries, the footsteps of the actors, the cloth movement of the actors, and the props touched by the actors are enhanced or replaced. They are mixed in with the cut effects and blended. The Foley artist is expected to do more of the custom effects than ever before.

Film students need to explore deeply the delicate balance created in a soundtrack between production effects, edited effects, and performed Foley effects. They need to learn the processes involved with spotting the effects to be recorded, cueing the Foley to prepare for the Foley stage, performing their own Foley (since most of them will be involved with student and independent filmmaking), and editing and mixing the Foley. These skills are not an integral part of sound effects edited from a region list on a Pro Tools. They are custom effects that are particular to the project involved.

The games business is modeling itself more and more like the feature film business and is requiring more from sound effects and Foley than ever before. In games, many sound effects are edited in, but as gaming has included more “movies” or “cut scenes” more Foley is required. Game companies usually hire Foley artists on individual proj-

ects. These artists have to perform the Foley to bits and pieces of the scenes, in variations, with most of the action repeated. Only a few parts of the scenes are different. So the artists must be able to reproduce the same sync and character in varying ways, over and over for the scenes.

"... it takes years to master the craft."

Animation, whether in features, independents, commercial advertising, or web design, relies heavily on Foley. Students post their projects on YouTube and other websites, and the production values become increasingly professional. Foley is everywhere. A lot of it, when not done by professionals, is not believable or tasteful. With education and the beginnings of good training, that can change. Any veteran Foley artist will tell you that it takes years to master the craft. The goal of any film student should be to understand the process and be skilled enough to perform and edit Foley for small projects.

Precious few film schools include a clear curriculum regarding Foley. Typically, the students will be told to go Foley their films for the class, festival, or project. Because the instructors themselves are not schooled in Foley, little time is devoted to the educating or training of the students so the Foley will be appropriate. Too many films submitted to festivals or other competitions have poorly performed and edited Foley. This translates to little, if any, good Foley in the future independent films these young people will produce with few financial resources.

In Los Angeles and New York, where film schools have access to professionals, we Foley artists are often called on to Foley, for free or a small fee, the films that will be submitted for festivals. Film schools in other regions do not have that advantage. It seems unfair to expect the film schools in the rest of the country to be compared to the coastal schools. But the reality is that they are. I have judged many student films for competitions, and the schools with access to professionals use those contacts. The solution for other schools is to aggressively improve the sound curriculum at the schools for the benefit of their students.

To actually include a proper Foley curriculum in a film production program in a college requires a stage, a mixer, and someone who can train students in the performance, the editing, and the mixing of Foley. This is time-consuming and expensive. Since film schools often operate at a deficit, it might seem impractical to devote the time and money to yet another technology-dependent aspect of postproduction. However, if the money and expertise are not part of the program, we will continue to graduate students who have only a cursory understanding of how to really "design" artful and complete soundtracks for films, games, or whatever the new media might be.

One sound course is not acceptable even for the leanest film program. Foley cannot be presented in a week or two of a sound editing or design

course. It takes time to understand how it complements editing and what it is responsible for covering. It takes time and practice to develop any notion of skill in the creation of these custom effects. Film schools are used to devoting years to developing a director or screenwriter, sometimes even a picture editor. The importance of these crafts becomes obvious to any neophyte filmmaker. The contribution of the cinematographer becomes clear to the student after one experience on a “shoot.” Sometimes, there might even be emphasis on production sound, although this is usually a weak area in film school curriculum. However, the less visible art of postproduction sound is often left to the one “audio-visual guy” who has some Pro Tools experience. Foley, while the most engaging and entertaining part of sound effects, is often referred to in brief discussions, with some exposure to a television show where Foley artists demonstrate the craft.

There might be a small room that can be transformed into a pseudo-Foley stage, where students can fake some cues. Clearly, while this may be cost-efficient and certainly takes the stress off of finding an expert who can train the students, this approach leaves an unrealistic impression with the students that Foley is easy and relatively unimportant. As is often said, “Show me your business expenses, and I will show you what you value.”

In the exuberance of developing a film or media program in a university, it is imperative to figure in the true cost of a sound program. This would include the professional technology that is the industry standard; professionals who have perfected their crafts; the space required for recording, editing, and mixing; and the proper courses. The curriculum needs to platform appropriately, with prerequisites and assignments that allow the students to truly have a foundation for the tasks that will be required of them when they seek employment. As a professional who has taught in higher education, I am convinced that the best program for a student who wishes to study film or any related media needs to be carefully planned and responsibly funded.

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Chapter | fifteen

Checkski:

Final Thoughts of Experts



When professional experts are asked their thoughts on postproduction sound in general and on Foley in particular, they sometimes say remarkable things that bear repeating. The following are views and opinions that were expressed by several of these professionals that I hope the reader will take time to reflect on.

MARK MANGINI

(supervising sound editor, sound designer, rerecording mixer, musician):

Sound is a dramatic player. It's not as interactive a process as I think it needs to be.

When asked what he thinks prepares someone to be an expert in sound:

Some of the best training they can get is taking acting and screenwriting classes.

JODY THOMAS

(Foley artist, story editor, creative executive):

It's really empowering to get to work with people I think are great, and that we get along and have a good time.

KARIN ROULO

(Foley and ADR mixer, engineer):

When commenting on what a good Foley artist looks for in a footstep cue:

You look at how [she or he] is portraying the character.

ROBERT DESCHAIINE

(Foley and ADR mixer, rerecording mixer, facility manager, actor):

There are different ways to approach a project. Some thought as an editor, and others did it as an artist or actor.

DAVID E. STONE

(supervising sound editor, animator, educator):

Everything that moves and causes friction has a different context.

MICHAEL SEMANICK

(rerecording mixer, Foley and ADR mixer, music engineer):

You've got to pay attention to the artist and the picture.

You can make it your own and sometimes you can make it better. A good [Foley] artist can say, 'O.K., that's good . . . now I'll just sweeten it.'

When discussing people's obsession with new bells and whistles in technology:

I think they forget to actually listen.

RICHARD PORTMAN

(rerecording mixer, engineer, educator):

I teach the aesthetics and the theory of sound. My classes are lecture classes and then they [the students] have to come in and sit down and put it all together.

When they [the students] come in, they know nothing. That's the great strength. They don't come in with something on their minds and then you have to destroy that before you can teach them what to do.

First you're a writer, then a director. It's a talking book. That's the key. If you can't hear the sound, then that's bad printing. It's smudged.

MARK PAPPAS

(Foley editor):

We have the ability to make things better now, and I think sometimes we do.

I think the most important thing is to be on top of everything with the technology because of how quickly it changes.

Try to search out the people who are the best in line with what it is you want to do.

JERRY TRENT

(Foley artist, dancer):

Most of the real things don't sound like the real things.

You have to know what goes on in making a movie, what goes on off-camera and on.

ALYSON DEE MOORE

(Foley artist):

You can't change someone's actions, but you can change your reactions.

It's kind of like how people eat a corn cob: some people eat straight across, in very neat rows. Some eat around and some eat all over. I'm more of an eating in clean rows type.

When commenting on some good advice she got (from your embarrassed author):

You are the prop.

When asked what her good advice to new Foley artists would be:

Listen to everyone.

DAVID JOBE

(Foley and ADR mixer):

There is no such thing as a perfect mic in Foley.

When asked what he pays attention to in recording Foley:

The aesthetic choices, the quality of how they [the Foley artists] paint the sound, the perspective and richness of the sound.

KEVIN O'CONNELL

(rerecording mixer):

When introducing rerecording mixers on a panel at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences:

These guys are artists. If a light bulb goes out, they call an engineer!

SCOTT HECKER

(supervising sound editor):

Get it in the ballpark.

When commenting on too many cues or choices in Foley:

The last thing I want is what I call 'clogging the arteries.' It's just too much.

His advice to others wanting a career in sound:

Watch as many movies and TV shows as you possibly can and listen to what you are about to endeavor. Go to school on other people's professionalism.

GREG BARBANELL

(Foley artist, editor):

Feeling good about a movie you're working on is a plus.

Keep it simple.

I'm just thankful I found something I'm really good at and that I really love doing.

Learn how to tell a story.

JOAN ROWE

(Foley artist, actor):

I am not someone who listens to the Foley. I want it to support the drama of the piece.

HILDA HODGES

(Foley artist):

After all these years, I still love it.

DAVID LEE FEIN

(Foley artist):

These days will be someone else's good old days.

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PART | SIX

Appendix

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“Post” Script:

An Homage to Our Tutor



Since the beginnings of this craft we have been exploring, many names of notable individuals who have contributed greatly to the development of our craft have appeared. Some of these individuals are gifted Foley artists still working today. Some of them are mixers and editors who have progressed the craft by demanding something more or different than we artists expected to deliver. Some of them are the partners in crime we have worked with over the years and have learned from or taught. But many of us would agree that one name comes up most frequently as the progenitor of modern Foley. That name is John Post.

When John Post first entered the field of sound, he had been in picture editing. He was used to thinking visually about the flow of action and drama. It was typical, in those days of the 1950s and 1960s, for the picture editor to contribute some sound effects to the rough cut before it went to the sound department. This was a time when all film work was becoming unionized and thus more separated. John had his own company at one time, with another editor, Gilbert Marchant. In this capacity, he started learning more about the sound end of filmmaking. Officially, however, one had to change status in the guild to actually be a sound editor, which John eventually did. John became a sound editor at a time when all the editors did a lot of their own Foley.

By now, the term “Foley” to describe the process was convention. The reason was twofold. During Jack Foley’s time, it became typical to ask for a “Foley” from him. The film business can be at times quite informal, and this was the term used to refer to the performed sound he contributed. The other reason was that by this time, prop sounds were typically edited in for efficiency, since many of the previously recorded prop effects were being saved in a sound library, from which all sound editors could retrieve whatever they needed. Also, they would often edit in the footsteps. But as this became tedious and at times unartful, they would “walk the Foley.” What then transpired was inevitable. Those editors who were better at “Foley walking” would perform the footsteps for other editors as a favor, in return for these other editors cutting various props for various reels.

“John was the bridge ...”

“Posty,” as he is fondly referred to, has helped to birth, in no small way, the contemporary approach to Foley. John was the bridge between the world of Jack Foley, which was the era of the beginning of sound in film, and the later world of heightened technology. John worked at Universal and was the benefactor of the studio system. He was allowed to progress down the path of apprentice to picture and sound editor to Foley artist. He worked on many television shows and features with old-timers as well as the new kids on the block. He came from a time when those who walked Foley had cut sound effects and understood the different needs of each. John had edited sound on a Moviola and was

well aware of what could and should be covered in sound effects and what was the absolute duty of Foley. Because he was a creative sound editor, he knew how to make the most of a Foley prop effect out of any components on a Foley stage.

Another reason John is a legend is because, more than any other from his era, he was a teacher and mentor to a large number of contemporary Foley artists who are lucky enough to be working today. We are in a time when sound has been a large part of a postproduction budget, and Foley is relied on to be a true partner in the quest for the better soundtrack. Many of us learned our craft at John's feet, both literally and figuratively, and were nurtured without any assumption of a debt to repay. John gave us his time unselfishly, with a gentleness of demeanor and a generosity of spirit that is rare in any business, but especially so in such a competitive one as ours.

Some of the Foley artists, sound editors, and mixers that were tutored or influenced by John Post are Joan Rowe, Hilda Hodges, Jim Bailey, Duane Hensel, Kim Fowler, David E. Stone, Warren Hamilton Jr., John K. Adams, David Lewis Yewdall, Richard D. Rogers, Karola Starr, Gilbert D. Marchant, Mike Le Mare, Gordon Daniel, Gail Steele, Jerry Trent, Scott Ganary, Robert Deschaine, Brad Sherman, Richard Kupper, James Dean Fisher, Tommy Goodwin, David W. Alstadter, Bess Hopper, Troy Porter, Paul Heslin, Michael Redbourn, Steve Mann, Jackson Schwartz, Paul Holzborn, and, of course, the author. We all have a greater appreciation for the art and craft of Foley because of this unassuming, soft-spoken, and gifted individual.

"Foley was the only thing that was really fun!"

It never occurred to John to be competitive with the younger and more ambitious artists. I never heard him say an unkind word toward anyone in the field. He was appreciative of others' work and was gracious in his praise. He was as humble a man as I have ever known. As David Fein has said, "We work in an industry that rewards big egos." Perhaps that is why John Post is not as well known as others are. He did not promote himself much. He relied on the reputation of his work and his easygoing nature. John Post loved performing Foley. As he puts it, "Foley was the only thing that was really fun!"

When I first worked with John, I was a scared newcomer and needed a mentor to help me navigate these new waters. John never criticized me when my work was under par, nor did he ever humiliate me when I clearly did not know how to do the job. He taught me by being a creative and hardworking professional who did the work because he loved it. I thrived under his tutelage, as others had before me.

David Stone worked with John on several films including *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, *Christine*, and *Dead Zone*. Dave was assigned to edit dialogue, sound effects, and Foley on various reels. Dave's first time

meeting John on the Foley stage was an encounter he will never forget:

"I let him lead, and it was perfect."

I came to the stage with an inflated sense of self-importance because I had cued the Foley and it was going to be performed by this renowned expert. John was very affable and cooperative from the start. I got into the habit of calling sync and making suggestions about changing sounds very quickly. I think I was playing director. After three or four cues, John stopped what he was doing and said to me, "Tell you what, Dave, why don't you just sit back and listen for about 45 minutes or an hour and watch how I work? Then if you have some suggestions, we'll talk." As I watched, I saw that John had an enormous sense of how to get the work done efficiently and creatively, while maintaining a flow. He had a rhythm of working that could only be achieved after years of experience. I realized I couldn't make any contribution other than facilitating any changes John wanted to make to the track. I let him lead, and it was perfect. I never should have been in charge of his time because he knew what he was doing and I didn't.

On the first day of Foley for *Twilight Zone*, John was having trouble with recording because his stomach was making lots of noises. John was famous for his outrageous and disruptive stomach growls. On the second day, Dave thought he would be helpful and bring lots of nuts for John to eat, to calm down his stomach. John ate a few nuts to be nice, but the problem got worse. The third day, Dave thought, "I know, I will bring soft food." So he brought bagels and cream cheese. John had lost interest in solving the problem with food. "At the end of the editing, I had collected about a thousand feet of beautiful stomach growls. I wish I knew where that reel is now," Dave muses.

John taught many of us to look at the elements of a sound. He taught us to think about what it *could* sound like, not what it *did* sound like. He taught us to split the sound off into tracks, like an editor did. He taught us to have character and "specialness" in our cues. He taught us to think about where edited sound effects would be used, so we would not duplicate those cues on the Foley stage.

John Post is older now. His health is not good, nor is his memory. His personal life had tragedies that weighed heavily on his mind when he was a younger man showing up on the Foley stage, always reliable, always hard working, and always professional.

Postproduction sound is a crazy world now. Someone like John Post would not have an easy time being recognized or appreciated in this world of digital sound where any guy with a Pro Tools in his garage fancies himself a sound designer. But John Post was the real deal. He was that work-a-day guy who quietly did his job and hoped he would be hired again.

Many of us who have had great careers in Foley owe a debt to John Post. The only way to repay that debt is to “pay it forward.” There will always be someone there who needs to carry the torch after us. We treasure what John Post and all the others in our paths have taught us. Now we will honor him and them by doing the same.

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Glossary

A side The part of a scene or angle prior to the edit.

Across the curriculum Educational term that refers to designing courses that interconnect various disciplines rather than studying with a specialized and isolated focus.

ADR (automated dialogue replacement) The practice of recording character's dialogue in a controlled studio, synchronized to picture. Similar process is used in recording Foley.

B side The part of a scene or angle after the edit.

Background Sound effects or characters that are not the primary focus in the scene. Incidental characters or props that contribute to the scene and environment.

Baffle Structure used to mute or deaden Foley effect performed on Foley stage. Usually made from foam or similar absorptive substance. Can be built in or portable.

Bright Refers to the timbre of a Foley or sound effect. Light and sharp in quality.

Cheat A Foley technique that masks an imperfect match in edit or performance (i.e., change rhythm in footsteps imperceptibly or disguise mismatched prop performance).

Cop gear, cop-gear Shortcut term for the combination of props used for gun, club, leather belt, and hand-cuffs worn by police officers.

Cue The specific Foley effect to be performed, usually with precise time code to begin and end the performance.

Cue sheets Paper sheets with specific cues planned and defined for Foley artists and mixers to use on the Foley stage and later on the dubbing stage.

Cut in, cut-in Term of art that refers to editing a sound effect into a scene.

Cut sound effects Term of art that refers to edited sound effects as opposed to performed Foley effects.

Dance Foley Foley footsteps that are specifically dance steps; often performed by Foley artists trained as dancers.

Dead room Foley stage or recording room that is designed to add little or no life or bounce to sound; usually contains many soft walls and surfaces to absorb sound.

Designer Person who actually conceives and designs special sounds for a specific imagined effect, often utilizing synthesizers and plug-ins.

Dirt pit Foley pit filled with specific dirt for performing footsteps of characters walking in dirt.

Dub stage Specially designed room with rerecording capabilities used for the final mixing of all sound elements used in film.

Dummy loader Recordist who loaded recording machines with magnetic film. Machine was called a dummy because it only held film and did not itself record but was connected to recording equipment on Foley or ADR stage.

Effects kit Specific sound effects auditioned and assigned for the sound editor to edit into a specific scene or segment of film. Usually presented by the supervising sound editor.

Fine cut Precise editing of Foley or sound effects, usually the final step in editing a scene or segment.

Flat Term of art that refers to the recording technique that does not add reverb or perspective.

Flop the track, flop a track Technique of taking an edited piece of sound and turning it over so the sound will not engage with the sound head. Used to eliminate sound in a track. In modern computer editing, clearing out the sound is the technique.

Foley dancer Foley artist who does dance Foley.

Foley speak Slang language used by Foley artists, mixers, and others using terms of art that are shortcuts to describe practices and techniques.

Foley walking Technique of replacing the footsteps for characters in film on a Foley stage.

Foleyed Term of art that refers to performed sound effects by Foley artists in sync to picture, as opposed to edited sound effects.

Foley's room Recording area used by Jack Foley to perform his synchronized sound effects.

Foley's stage Same as Foley's room.

Full coat Type of magnetic tape used for recording Foley that had four tracks available for recording at one time.

Grit cling Dirt or other substance that sticks to shoes when used for a gritty surface.

Grit factor Aesthetic choice of how much substance is used to cause a walking surface to sound gritty (e.g., dirty city street).

Gritty surface Walking surface that has an added substance to make it sound dirty or exterior.

Gross cutting Preliminary editing that gives a general idea of sync and style, to be followed by more refined and specific editing.

Gun life General light rattle of gun(s) to indicate its/their presence in the scene, for dramatic effect.

Gush, gunk, gore Onomatopoeic slang that describes sounds used for horror or suspense scenes.

Hang it as a unit To use Foley as recorded, with no editing. Common practice in television when time is limited. Comes from the recent practice of recording on magnetic tape, when Foley was recorded on full coat.

Hard effects, hard FX Term of art referring to edited-in sound effects as opposed to performed Foley effects.

High end, high-end Bright or thin sound in recording or mixing; refers to a higher-pitched spectrum of sounds.

Hot Term of art referring to recording or mixing sounds with a high level of volume. Used often to describe recording Foley effects that need to play in a loud scene.

In the box Term of art that refers to sound effects being recorded, edited, and mixed in one computer system, or “box.”

“Kits” of library effects Prearranged combinations of sounds from a sound effects library auditioned and selected by supervisor for editors to use to layer for a sound event in film.

Land the cue, land a cue To get the Foley performance accurate and with correct style or character. Usually used to describe an exceptional performance on the first or second attempt or “take.”

Laundry list Term of art for a casual list of requested footstep and prop cues for the Foley artist; it has no time code, details, or specifics.

Leader Film with no sound recorded used as blank in picture or soundtrack; usually found at the beginning of a reel or as a space holder for a future sound effect.

Looping Term of art that refers to automated dialogue replacement in contemporary usage. Derives from the historical practice of recording an actor's lines without synchronization, which could play in a "loop" for listening and critiquing.

Low end Term of art that refers to sounds that are darker and deeper in timbre (e.g., the "low-end rumble" used to provoke mystery or fear).

M&E (Music and Effects) A soundtrack that includes a complete mix of effects, music, and production tracks, with dialogue edited out so that it can be used for foreign films where language must be replaced. Usually a more complete series of effects than a domestic release when original language remains.

Mag Magnetic tape. Used for recording sound, music, dialogue, and Foley before digital recording.

"Marry," married effects and Foley Term of art that refers to effects that rely on both edited effects and performed Foley effects for complete sound event.

Metal "ring off" Term of art that refers to the resonance that hangs on in recording after impact is recorded.

Mouth sounds Foley sounds performed using the mouth; usually supplement other Foley sounds. Often comical.

Multiple tracks Using more than one recording track for various aspects of one sound event.

Optical sound Sound that was recorded on optical film, prior to magnetic tape. Soundtrack was on a stripe on film.

Panning The practice of mixing a Foley effect to have sound travel from one side to another (e.g., from left to right as a person walks across the screen).

Paper life Term of art giving a sense of the presence of paper without specific movements delineated.

Platforming Educational term that refers to a planned curriculum that builds skills and knowledge from the first course to final courses; each course relies on knowledge from the previous course.

Postproduction The process of filmmaking, beginning with picture editing and ending with the final mix or dub.

Predub The process of mixing sound effects, Foley, ADR, and dialogue in their own groups before the final dub or mix where all sounds are blended together.

Predubs The collected sound materials separated by “food groups” into dialogue, principal ADR, group ADR, sound effects, background effects, Foley footsteps, and Foley props.

Pro Tools Digital recording, editing, and mixing system used on a Macintosh computer. Industry standard.

Production track The soundtrack recorded during production, usually focused on dialogue in the scene. Sounds recorded in production are included and utilized as a blueprint for sound effects and Foley.

Pull, pulled Term of art that refers to auditioning and compiling sound effects from a library for use in a soundtrack.

Punch in Technique used in Foley mixing where the mixer picks a precise spot to begin recording in the middle of a prerecorded cue and enters the cue at that point.

Quarter-inch tape Recording tape used in reel-to-reel recording.

Read Term of art that refers to how something is interpreted by the audience.

Recorded “wild” Custom Foley sound effects that are recorded on a Foley stage without sync for a specific purpose. Usually recorded with variations.

Recordist Sound professional who assists the mixer. Historically, duties included preparing the magnetic tape and ensuring quality in the recording. Contemporary recordists most often assist with setting up recording sessions for mixers, troubleshooting Pro Tools, and keeping track of Foley cues.

Ring off, ring-off Residual sound that is recorded after the impact of a prop is completed.

Scuffs Footstep cues that are not full footsteps but have the characteristic quality of muted impact.

Shoe element Quality of shoe(s) used; character of shoe used.

Single stripe Magnetic film that has one track available to record sound.

Snow design Specific combination of substances used to create specific snow sounds, depending on the quality of the weather depicted.

Soundman, sound man Historic term of art relating to the profession of making or recording sounds for film, radio, and television.

Stems Specific groups of dubbed sound material used in soundtracks (i.e., dialogue stems, sound effects stems, music stems).

Streamers Lines that move across the film screen or monitor that alert mixers and Foley artists to the beginning of a cue to be performed.

Sweet spot The prime part of a sound that defines the character of the sound; comes from a sports term, as in tennis racquet.

Sweeten To enhance a sound that already exists; to add a quality that does not already exist.

Temp dubs A temporary mix of sounds to present in a film or film clip, not intended to be the complete soundtrack. Usually used for audience testing.

Topping production Adding Foley or a sound effect with sound already in production; requires precise sync and is played in concert with the production track.

Trim bin Metal bin used in editorial that allows editors to collect unnecessary film or hang bits of film to be replaced in the soundtrack.

“Turn over,” turnover The convention of giving the most recent version of film to those who will handle the next step in the process; usually used in reference to picture editing when the final edited version of film is given to sound editorial for effects, Foley, ADR, and music.

Walk the Foley Slang term of art referring to performing the Foley effects for the film. Comes from the practice of footsteps being the critical part of Foley that needed to be replaced.

Walk, walking Perform Foley footsteps.

Walker Foley artist. Slang.

Watching directors Term coined by Bob Mott, referring to directors that watch what is used to make a sound rather than listening to the sound itself.

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About the Author



Photo courtesy of Larry Laszlo & Associates, CoMedia

Vanessa Theme Ament is a Foley artist and editor who has been performing Foley in films and television since 1980. She has worked on many notable films including *Predator*, *Die Hard*, *Noises Off*, *A Goofy Movie*, *Dolores Claiborne*, *Malice*, *Robocop 2*, and *Platoon*, which won the Academy Award for Best Sound. Vanessa is also a respected singer and songwriter and has written music for films and cabaret shows. She has a B.A. in Theatre from Whittier College and a Master's in Divinity from Starr King School for the Ministry, which is part of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Vanessa has been involved with education since 1978 when she worked as an artist-in-the-schools for the Glendale Regional Arts Council, and she has most recently designed and taught courses in Foley, automated dialogue replacement (ADR), sound effects, working with actors, theology in theatre, play production, and musicals for films. She presently consults and guest lectures at universities, film schools, and film festivals.

About the DVD



(left to right) David Lee Fein, Ken Dufva, Joan Rowe, and Sean Rowe. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.

In 1972, three able young filmmakers went about creating a short film about what would happen if the American public elected a cartoon character for president. This idea was concocted during a tumultuous time in our history, and these young lads were inventive and playful. The result was *A Political Cartoon*, written and directed by Joseph Adamson and Jim Morrow. David Stone was an aspiring animator who was responsible for designing the character Peter President, as well as other sundry cartoon characters. The filmmakers got permission for Bugs Bunny to appear in the film, and Mel Blanc graciously added his voice.

The film was self-produced and minimally financed, and there was a sparse amount of sound effects added. Certainly, there was no Foley. The young men had probably not ever heard the term *Foley* at that point. The sound effects added were basic and supported the humor of the piece.

I thought it would be fun to Foley a scene from this film. With permission from the filmmakers and with the cooperation of all principals involved, we shot footage of Joan and Sean Rowe, David Lee Fein, and Ken Dufva performing the Foley I cued for them. Sean is Joan's son, who has taken up the family tradition of Foley. As for Ken and Dave, they had not worked together in years, and I wanted to reunite the longest-lived Foley artist team for this project. Chace Audio, in Burbank, graciously donated stage time to us, and we brought mixer Ryan Maguire in to mix the show.

The object was not to do what has been done previously: that is, simply show Foley artists performing cues in a staged environment to demonstrate how we do our work. Rather, the purpose of this DVD was to show the process of the Foley artist. How each artist prepares for the cue is a major part of the job that is rarely shown or discussed. Also, the way each artist approaches the work varies. Since this is not just a how-to book but also an exploration of the process and the culture, it seemed to me a DVD showing "a day in the life of ..." might be in order. The result is what you view in this DVD.

Today, Joseph Adamson III is a respected film historian who has written such books as *Groucho, Harpo, Chico and Sometimes Zeppo*; *Tex Avery, King of Cartoons*; and *Bugs Bunny: Fifty Years and Only One Grey Hare*. He has also written the films *W. D. Fields: Straight Up* and *The Marx Brothers in a Nutshell*. James K. Morrow is a celebrated author of speculative fiction books such as *Towing Jehova*, *Only Begotten Daughter*, and *City of Truth*. David Stone is now an Academy Award-winning supervising sound editor, who has shared his cartooning skills as well as his views about Foley in this book.