

# Foley

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A sound effects technique for **synchronous effects or live effects**.

The Foley technique are named for Jack Foley, a sound editor at Universal Studios



**Foley artists** match live sound effects with the action of the picture.

The sound effects are laid "manually" and not cut in with film.

Foley is an excellent means of supplying the subtle sounds that production mikes often miss. The rustling of clothing and a squeak of a saddle when a rider mounts his horse give a scene a touch of realism that is difficult to provide using other effects methods. A steamy sex scene was probably created by a foley artist making dispassionate love to his or her own wrist.

The good Foley artist must "become" the actor with whom they are synching effects or the sounds will lack the necessary realism to be convincing.

Most successful Foley artists are audiles; they can look at an object and imagine what type of sound it can be made to produce.

The **foley crew** will include the artist or "walker," who makes the sound, and a technician or two to record and mix it.

A **foley stage** often appear to be storage areas for the studio's unwanted junk. Metal laundry tubes are filled to the brim with metal trays, tin pie plates, empty soda cans, hubcaps, bedpans, knives, forks and broken staple guns. These crash tubes are used for anything from comedy crashes to adding presence (brightness and naturalness) to something as serious as a car crash.



Embedded in the floor is the heart of any Foley stage - the walking surfaces (for the production of all types of footsteps)

### **Foley Artists at C5, Inc. Share Their Secrets**

Did you know that nearly all of the films, television shows and commercials you watch have most of their sound added in post -production? In fact, many of the sound effects you hear are created and recorded in a Foley Studio, a sound proof room where Foley Artists record every sound from footsteps, to the crinkle of a leather jacket to the creek of a door.

"During the filming of a movie, the location sound recordist tries to capture only the dialogue and they leave all of other sounds to the post- production crew," says C5, Inc. Foley Artist Marko Costanzo. "What the sound editors cannot produce digitally falls to us."

Here are some interesting facts from the Foley archives of C5, Inc.

Did you know that...

- The sound of a smoldering cigarette is made by pressing a thumb into plain dirt?
- The creepy background sound of Clarice Staling walking down the hallway to meet with Dr. Hannibal Lecter in "Silence of the Lambs" was actually the sound of a lion's den at the Bronx Zoo?
- The sound of a dog walking on a hard surface is made with Lee Press-On- Nails glued onto gloves? The size of the dog determines which thickness of nails to use.
- The Mammoth's footsteps in the upcoming movie "Ice Age" was made by dropping a log into a pit of dirt, mud and stone?
- In "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," the bamboo sticks used in fight scenes came from a sound editor's backyard in New Jersey?
- In Martin Scorsese's "Bringing Out the Dead," an actual welder, torch and all, was brought in to record the sound of a welder cutting away a man who had been impaled on a balcony railing?
- The chains used in "O' Brother Where Art Thou" were liberated from a bar in Vermont by none- other- then Marko "Sticky Fingers" Constanzo?
- The stabbing scenes in "Goodfellas" were made more realistic by using pieces of raw beef, pork and chicken and stabbing them with different knives? Clearly they did not buy the boneless meat because who can forget that sound of the blade hitting the bone?

- The sound of footsteps crunching on snow is actually achieved by Kosher Sea Salt covered in cornstarch?
- The sound of the dragonfly made memorable in the opening of "Men in Black" was made using a small plastic fan with gaphers tape stuck to the blades? The tape was made long enough so that when the fan was turned on, it brushed up against the Foley Artists' fingers.

So, the next time you go to the movies, don't just watch it, listen and experience it, for it is often the sound that heightens our senses. After all, whose heart didn't beat just a little faster as Clarice Starling sat in Hannibal Lector's prison chamber, and who didn't cringe when they heard the twist of the knife into human flesh in "Goodfellas?"

What is it about the sound in many student or amateur films that makes them sound so ... well ... amateur? Even if the fidelity or clarity is good (which it often isn't), there is often something hollow or thin about the sound - the action lacks aural depth. The answer could be that the film makers did not add Foley to the soundtrack.

### **What the Heck is "Foley"?**

Foley effects are sound effects added to the film during post production (after the shooting stops). They include sounds such as footsteps, clothes rustling, crockery clinking, paper folding, doors opening and slamming, punches hitting, glass breaking, etc. etc. In other words, many of the sounds that the sound recordists on set did their best to avoid recording during the shoot.

The boom operator's job is to clearly record the dialogue, and only the dialogue. At first glance it may seem odd that we add back to the soundtrack the very sounds the sound recordists tried to exclude. But the key word here is control. By excluding these sounds during filming and adding them in post, we have complete control over the timing, quality, and relative volume of the sounds.

For example, an introductory shot of a biker wearing a leather jacket might be enhanced if we hear his jacket creak as he enters the shot - but do we really want to hear it every time he moves? By adding the sound in post, we can control its intensity, and fade it down once the dialogue begins. Even something as simple as boots on gravel can interfere with our comprehension of the dialogue if it is recorded too loudly. Far better for the actor to wear sneakers or socks (assuming their feet are off screen!) and for the boot-crunching to be added during Foley.

### **How is Foley Done?**

Foley is usually performed by Foley performers or artists. Ideally they stand on a Foley stage (an area with a variety of possible surfaces and props) in a Foley studio (a specialized sound studio), though any post production sound studio will do with a little modification. The Foley artists can clearly see a screen which displays the footage they are to add sounds to, and they perform their sound effects whilst watching this screen for timing. The actions they perform can include

walking, running, jostling each other, rubbing their clothing, handling props, and breaking objects, all whilst closely observing the screen to ensure their sound effects are appropriate to the vision.

Increasingly, many simple Foley effects are done without Foley performers - the sounds are stored electronically and performed by the post production sound engineer on a keyboard whilst watching the vision. Done poorly this type of "Foley" sounds bland and repetitive, and it is nowhere near as flexible as the real thing, but it is much cheaper than renting a Foley stage and paying Foley artists.

### **Why Do We Bother with Foley?**

Without Foley, a film sounds empty and hollow - the actors seem to be talking in a vacuum (not literally possible I know - but you get the idea). The sound recordist, if they did a good job, has given us the dialogue and excluded everything else, but our films needs more than this for the picture to come alive. We need to hear the little sounds of clothes, furnitures, etc - but we need to control them so they don't obscure any of the dialogue.

Another common use for Foley is adding it to documentary footage. Old historical film seems lifeless when it is screened without sound, and adding it helps bring those long dead images to life. Next time you watch a history documentary that uses silent archival footage, listen closely and you should hear at least minimal Foley effects, mostly footsteps, behind the narration.

Foley can also be used to enhance comedy or action scenes. Watch most comedy films and you'll notice that many of the sounds are enhanced for comic effect, and sometimes the Foley effect is the joke. As for action, most fist fights do not involve the actors really hitting each other, and even if they did we would not be able to record a satisfying punch sound. By punching and variously molesting such objects as cabbages etc, Foley artists can record unique and much more 'realistic' action sounds.

### **Yea, But Why is it Called "Foley"?**

The technique is named after Jack Foley, who established the basic modern techniques still used today. Like most terms that are named in honour of a person, it is customary to spell Foley with a capital "F".

### **Surely Foley is Only for the Major Studios?**

No. Adding even basic Foley sound effects, such as footsteps, clothes rustling, and prop handling is within the reach of even the low-budget film maker. Even if you have to be your own Foley performer, try to add Foley to your film. Sure, your average audience member may not know the meaning of the term "Foley", but they will notice an indefinable realism and professionalism to your film/documentary that sets it apart from the others.

And that's what you want, isn't it?