

The Art of Foley

A Foley Artist 'recreates' sound effects for film, television and radio productions on a Foley Stage in a Post Production Studio. Using many different kinds of shoes and lots of props - car fenders, plates, glasses, chairs, and just about anything found at the side of the road - the Foley Artist can replace original sound completely or augment existing sounds to create a richer track.

Almost every motion picture and television show you have ever seen contains a Foley track. "Don't they record the sound when they film?" Sure, but there are many reasons why Foley is an intricate part of a soundtrack.



What It Isn't Foley...

Foley does not cover sounds like car engines, explosions or other mechanical stuff - driving a car around in the studio or blowing up a building is usually not possible although we have tried! We don't do birds, laser blasts, dog barks or rain storms either!

These are the domain of the Sound FX Editor who draws upon a sampled Sound FX library and computer technology. Everything from helicopters to thunder can be layered and mixed in to an SFX track.



While a Sound Editor can do very precise and repeatable effects, they have a harder time when it comes to footsteps for example, since every step is different and unique, the pace changes and the mood of the step is always different. With a good pair of shoes and years of practice, a Foley Artist can perform an actors walk perfectly on the first take while making it sound natural! In fact, one of the great ironies of Foley is that if you can tell it's Foley, then it isn't very good!

Let's say in a scene the actor grabs his gun, walks to his motorcycle, starts it up and drives away...

- Foley would recreate the sound of the leather jacket and jeans as the actor walks, footsteps (heavy cowboy boots!), the gun pickup and handling, handlebar grab and bike moves - and maybe some key sounds as he puts them in the lock.
- The Sound FX Editor would create the roar of the motorcycle engine starting and driving away, a tire squeal and background ambiances (birds, wind etc.)
- In an ADR studio the actor would rerecord his line, "I'll be back...", which was inaudible on location with the motorcycle engine running. The Dialogue Editor would conform the production and ADR into one.

When played together, the tracks produce a seamless tapestry of sound.

Foley generally consists of three elements: Clothing Moves, Footsteps, Specifics.

Each element is added in stages to a multi-track recorder and synchronized with the picture.

When played back together, the result is a natural sounding scene with no dialogue or soundfx.

The Moves Track is a layer of sound that recreates the clothing rustle of actors as they walk, run and move. Listen to your pants (or dress) when you walk around the room; reach for a glass or wave your hand - you make noise all the time! People tend to scratch, pat and touch themselves and each other - the moves track covers these too.



Feet are very difficult to perform. It takes a lot of practice to get the exact feeling and timing while standing stationary - you can't walk across the room because the microphone needs to be fixed and besides, you don't have that much room!

If the sound is not a Clothing Move or a Footstep then it must be a Specific! Anything an actor touches or effects is considered a Specific and recorded as a separate element often involving layers of sound. Specifics are the real fun in Foley. They allow you to paint with sound, recreating the actual movements in an enhanced way. Much of the magic associated with sound effects is considered a Specific. From face punches to body falls, Specifics are also a lot of work!



Creating sound effects also involves some unique time tested tricks such as:

- Corn Starch in a leather pouch makes the sound of snow crunch
- A pair of gloves sounds like bird wing flaps
- An arrow or thin stick makes a great whoosh!
- An old chair makes a controllable creaking sound
- A water soaked rusty hinge when placed against different surfaces makes a great creaking sound. Notice how various surfaces act as a sounding board to amplify and change the sound: this is an important principal of Foley and sound creation!
- A heavy staple gun and a other metal parts make can make a good gun sound
- A metal rake makes a great fence sound (and when scraped across metal makes a great metal screech - if you can stand it!)
- 1/4" audio tape when balled up sounds like grass (walk on it!) or flowers
- A wet balloon makes a weird sound when rubbed: this is funny more than practical!
- 'Flubber' (they sell it in toy stores) is great for wet swishy sounds; so is gelatin and liquid hand soap.
- Frozen romaine lettuce makes a great bone or head squishy noise
- Coconuts shells cut in half and stuffed with padding makes great sounding horse feet: it takes some skill to make good sounding ones (not too hollow or thin) but it works!
- Cellophane can make the sound of crackling fire (the effects editor should do the fire but in a pinch it does work)
- You will need a wooden door - apart from door knocks and other movement sounds, they make great wooden boat noises when laid across a heavy wooden stool (the stool gives the door a resonance and helps with the creaking)
- A heavy rolled and taped up telephone book makes a good 'body punching' surface