

THE ARTISANS OF SOUND: STUDYING THE FOLEY ART IN THE CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

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Abstract

This paper, titled "The Artisans of Sound: Studying the Foley Art in the Contemporary Scenario," delves into the intricate and often overlooked craft of Foley artistry in the modern film industry. Foley art, named after sound pioneer Jack Donovan Foley, plays a crucial role in enhancing the realism and emotional impact of audio-visual content. By creating everyday sound effects in a studio, Foley artists fill the auditory void left by imperfect field recordings, thereby transforming cinematic experiences. The paper explores the history of Foley art, tracing its evolution from the early days of cinema to its current significance. Through detailed examples, the research highlights the process of Foley sound production, where artists mimic sounds using various techniques and objects to enhance audience immersion. The study further discusses the significance of Foley in maintaining the continuity and believability of film scenes, as well as its role in producing a seamless narrative flow. Additionally, the paper examines Foley as a career, discussing the skills and training required to enter the field and the potential for growth in the audio and post-production industries. This research provides insights into the indispensable contributions of Foley artists to modern cinema, celebrating them as the unsung artisans of sound.

Keywords: Foley art, sound design, post-production, Jack Donovan Foley, audio-visual production, sound effects, ADR, Foley artist, film industry, Foley career.

INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone in the world has experienced audio-visual content, whether it is a movie, serial, or some sort of web series. The world of audio-visual cinematics is so vast that there are uncountable efforts that are made to make audio-visual content more realistic and livelier. Unfortunately, some of the efforts go unnoticed but play a crucial role. Among them are the efforts of unsung heroes known as the foley artist.

Just imagine watching a movie with just verbal dialogues between two individuals and without any sound effects. Imagine a cowboy walking into the room of wooden flooring without the sound of his leather boots, imagine a horse running without the iconic sound of its feet striking ground while walking and the crackling sound of metal clips from its saddle, imagine a gun being fired and you don't listen to the sound of its shot? Don't you feel the movie will be lifeless and you won't be entertained? Yes, you will. While a movie is made all these sounds are not recorded on the spot but surprisingly, they are created manually in a studio. Yes, it is true and this is called the Foley Art. And the person who creates such sound effects in a studio is known as a foley artist. "Foley is the art of creating everyday sound effects artificially in a studio using different objects" Etymologically the word foley is named after named after Jack Donovan Foley, a pioneer in the post-production of sound effects, the foley art must have evolved when someone has felt a void in sound effects of an audio-visual content and tried to make it more effective to audience.

HISTORY

Jack Donovan Foley was an American citizen born on April 12, 1891, in Yorkville, New York, to Irish immigrants Margaret Donavon and Michael Foley. Around 1914 foley moved to Bishop, California where he worked for the American Defence Society during World War I. While working for the American Defence Society, foley was assigned to guard the water supply of Los Angeles, ensuring it was not poisoned. Later, foley started looking towards the film industry and contacted his source. Initially, Jack Foley worked in the vast spectrum of jobs in the industry, he worked as a stunt man to a director of a silent movie for Universal Pictures (informally as Universal Studios, also simply



Jack Donovan Foley

known as Universal). Slowly as the technology took a flight the sound was introduced into film. In the latter 1920s, many production companies started to record videos with verbal dialogues, the need moment production companies began looking for people who could incorporate sound in their movies. Eventually, foley started working for this new emerging dimension of the film industry. From 1925 to 1929 he worked for many films such as The Phantom of the Opera (1925), The Jazz Singer (1927), and Tarzan the Tiger (1929) in which he voiced the first iconic Tarzan yell “EEE-Yawh”. In 1929 foley gave the sound effects to a movie named “Show Boat” This is when the process of creating sound effects was named the Foley effect. For the next 30 years, foley worked for numerous movies such as Dracula and Spartacus. Later viewing his efforts, he won many prestigious awards. Jack Foley’s face was never revealed on the silver screen but his work gave life to numerous movies. At the age of 76 Foley passed away in November 1967.

FOLEY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

“Foley” can be simply defined as the replacement of the sound recorded while filming with the same, Enhanced, or much cleaner sound effects. The sound recorded while filming is known as the “field recording”. The whole process of creating sound effects and then adding them to the principal video post-production is done by the person known as the foley artist. While a film is being recorded, the sound captured in the field recording contains too many unnecessary noises that might give the audience an unpleasant experience. To counter the problem the profession of foley artists came into existence. The foley artists mimic the exact actual sounds as expected in the scene using common objects. The quality standards of a good foley artist impact the audience which makes them feel the scene is more believable and more realistic. Using the foley sounds the gaps between the verbal communication of the subjects in a movie are also filled and the void filled by these sounds makes a movie more entertaining which results in an uninterrupted experience. The perfectly produced and balanced sounds give an amazingly emotional and mental effect as intended by the crafter or director. Whether it is a horror scene or a scene in a joyful environment sound plays an integral role to carry out internal emotional expressions.

PRODUCTION OF SOUND EFFECTS

Foley artists study the filmed content and try to mimic the same sound. The intensity and balance are decided once the foley artist has reviewed the scene. Creating a sound effect needs a lot of precision and attention. A single extra element of sound can be easily identified and differentiated by a viewer which can highlight the fact of a sound piece being artificially generated. Foley artist not only records the sound effects but also, they record dialogues by the actor or a replaced actor post-production. This process of replacing dialogues and re-recording them is known as “Automated Dialogue Replacement” which is shortly known as the ADR/Post Sync. The process of ADR is done for improvisation in the audio quality which provides better clarity for the viewers over the words spoken. It is also sometimes used to change or modify the accent, misspoken words, foul language which might have to be censored post-production.

There are numerous methods of mimicking the sound effects which are used by foley artists. For example -

- a wooden piece of stairs is used to extract the sound of a person climbing up/ down the stairs.
- empty coconut shells are strikes against a wooden board is proper rhythm to mimic the sound effect of a horse running.
- swinging a thin piece of a stick in the air in high speed will make a ‘woosh’ sound.
- chewing a piece of a ballon will mimic the sound of person eating a chewing gum.
- A staple will mimic the sound of a gun with muzzle being shot.
- Thin sheet of metal will mimic the sound of lightning in a thunder storm.

- crushing a carrot of cucumber will mimic the sound of something being crushed etc.
- A rusty hinge will produce creaking sound.
- twisting a plastic bottle to produce the eerie ambient noise as in horror films.

Foley sounds make a viewer to even judge the size of something just from listening to the sound or the noise it makes, for example a bigger coin have a less clunkier sound as compared to a smaller coin when dropped, a room filled with furniture and curtains will have less eco as compared to a bigger room with less or no furniture, different size and models of gun will make will produce different type noise not only after being fired but at the time of being picked up as well, a tall masculine man will have a heavier and low pitched voice as compared to thin and weak man.



Image 2- Empty coconut shells being used

In a fascinating fact, foley artist not only creates everyday sound effects, dubs the dialogs, and mimics the voice textures but also create animal sounds in the studio as well. In a scene where there's a role of an animal, the sound effects of that particular animal are produced in a studio. This is done because the animal will not produce its sound at a desired point in a scene and some animals don't sound the way humans expect them to sound. To mimic the voice of animals foley artist sometimes use their own voice to produce the sound of a desired animal e.g., a cat, dog, etc. for example using simple objects like sandpaper to produce the hissing of a snake.

FOLEY ARTISTS IN INDIA

As of the world foley artists in India have been playing a significant role in the Indian Film Industry named as BOLLYWOOD. Some of them are introduced below :-

KARAN ARJUN SINGH

Karan Arjun Singh is a 45 year old noted Indian foley artist who has given sound effects to around 2000 blockbuster movies in India, some of which are "Rangoon" by Vishal Bhardwaj, "Tiger Zinda Hai by Ali Abbas Zafar", "Dangal by Nitesh Tiwari", "Sultan by by Ali Abbas Zafar", "Neerja by Ram Madhwani", "Raees by Rahul Dholakia", "Bahubali by S.S Rajmauli" and many more.¹



Image 3 Karan Arjun Singh on the left

KARNAIL SINGH AND SAJJAN CHOWDHARY

Karnail Singh and Sajjan Chowdhary are one of the India's most celebrated foley artists. They have given sound effects to numerous films like Bajirao Mastani by directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Raazi by Meghna Gulzar, Krish 3 by Rakesh Roshan and many more.²



Image4 Karnail Singh And Saijan

FOLEY AS A CAREER

Before choosing any profession, one has to pursue degrees and diplomas but for being a foley artist there is no degree required and also there is no institute or university in India which offers

¹ <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/others/sunday-read/the-sultans-of-sound/articleshow/65456955.cms>

² <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/others/sunday-read/the-sultans-of-sound/articleshow/mumbai/cover-story/the-bully-of-nallasopara/articleshow/65456677.cms>

any course related to it. While no degree is officially required, one can opt for degrees in sound engineering, audio editing, and film technology. Though pursuing these courses is not necessary to be a foley artist in the industry, these courses will help one master software s such as Logic Pro, Cube Base, Adobe Audition, Pro Tools etc. Learning the hardware and having complete knowledge about the mixers, mikes, speakers etc will add a feather to one's hat. Foley sound production being an art and not just a profession requires a lot of practice in the real world, hence to be a foley artist one should assist sound engineers and learn the ground technicality. Doing internships at film studios, production houses, and Foley studios will give a student hands-on skill. Volunteering for filming projects and film festivals will help to find a way into the market and to get some new independent projects.

CONCLUSION

The world of Foley art, though often overshadowed by the visual components of filmmaking, is an indispensable craft in audio-visual storytelling. The Foley artist's ability to recreate and enhance everyday sounds brings films and other media to life, providing a sense of realism and emotional depth that would otherwise be missing. From its origins with Jack Donovan Foley to its vital role in contemporary cinema, Foley has evolved into an art form that requires creativity, precision, and technical expertise.

In today's media-rich environment, where sound plays a pivotal role in audience engagement, the importance of Foley cannot be overstated. It bridges the gap between reality and fiction, making the unreal feel authentic. As Foley continues to develop with advances in technology, it presents exciting career opportunities for those passionate about sound design, offering a unique blend of artistry and technical skills.

For aspiring Foley artists, this field provides the chance to contribute creatively to the entertainment industry without a formal educational path, relying instead on hands-on experience, a deep understanding of sound, and a keen ear for detail. With dedication and a passion for sound, Foley can be a fulfilling career that not only supports the magic of enhancing the experience of an audio-visual content but also honours the legacy of its pioneers.

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Images

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Image1.4 <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/others/sunday-read/the-sultans-of-sound/articleshow/mumbai/cover-story/the-bully-of->

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