

Thank you, Mr. Foley Podcast Transcript

stories2music Podcast #3 (11/21/19)

Welcome to the stories2music podcast. I'm your host, Kathy Matthes.

Think about the last time you saw a movie. Were you aware of all of the sounds in the film, or did they blend so well that you didn't notice them? Did you notice the footsteps, the door squeaking open, a slap on the face, or pouring a drink? If these sounds were done well, they didn't draw attention to themselves. They were the sounds you expected to hear for the actions you saw on the screen. These reproductions of everyday sounds are added in post-production to films, TV series, video games, music videos, and other media. They are created by sound effects artists and Foley artists.

In the current field of sound design, there are two types of sound effects—non-human made sounds—such as explosions, car crashes, sci-fi sounds—and human-made sounds (called Foley sound effects)—such as weather sounds or breaking glass) In films, Foley sounds are often recorded by the Foley artists as they are actually watching the film. Sounds effects can also come from sound effects libraries.

According to Jack French from his Old Time Radio Research Group website, “The manual sound effects, despite their limitations, continued to be an important part of the sound effects artists' repertoire. Some sounds, which have to be done a variety of ways, are better done manually, including footsteps and knocks on doors. A knock on a door can be timid, authoritative, fast, slow, or in a panic so it was much easier to do this one manually.”

“Likewise any sound that could be created simply, would be favored over cuing up a record. So in addition to door knocks, footsteps, and telephone sounds, other sound effects were created manually including: twisting cellophane (for a crackling fire), squeezing a box of corn starch (for footsteps in snow), blowing through a straw into water (for boiling water), pulling wet cork from any bottle and then pricking balloon (for opening champagne), squeezing folded sandpaper (for breaking eggs) and rattling flash bulbs in a can of water (for cocktail shaker.)”

In the Golden Age of Radio during the 1930s and 1940s, it was the heyday for Foley sound effects, and they were done live during the radio broadcast. French says that “A ‘real’ radio sound effects artist didn't have the luxury of post-production. They did it ‘live’ alongside the actors. Although some effects were on prerecorded discs, they still had to be performed live.”

French explains that the sounds basically fell into two broad categories: a) those that advanced the action or helped move the story line, and b) background or mood setting sounds.

For example, in this first excerpt from the Chevrolet Motor Company's 1938 Back of the Mike film that depicted a behind the scenes look at the making of a Western Radio show and how sound effects were done, the sound of the car driving and the phone ringing advance the story

line. In this second excerpt, the background farm sounds an example of background or mood setting sounds. “Both of these types of sounds were produced with a combination of manual and recorded sounds.”

French says that “In addition to a large stock of recorded music . . . to fit every scene, there were sound effects records to replace the ‘real thing.’ These would usually be sounds of objects too large or too expensive for a radio studio, such as a car engine, an airplane, a canon, large crowds, explosions, and an ocean liner. It was also necessary to have recordings of sounds of creatures who couldn't read a cue: crickets, frogs, cows, elephants. However, many good soundmen could, and did, imitate with their own voices the sounds of dogs, cats, horses, parrots, and others.”

According to the [Media Heritage](#) website: “The original ‘Foley Artist’ was none other than Jack Foley, himself; a sound technician from the silent film days of Universal Studios. When the ‘talkies’ came about in the late 1920s, Foley struggled to have early film stars heard on film because of the primitive nature of carbon microphones and sound horns. So Foley devised a way to add or ‘augment’ voices and sound effects synchronized to early sound-on-film. That his name has been immortalized for the process he invented is a tribute to his skill and creativity.”

On his Vintage News website, [Martin Chalakoski](#) provides a short bio of Jack Foley.

“He was born in Yorkville, New York, on April 12, 1891. He was a grandson of Irish immigrants and grew up in the Seagate section of Coney Island, where he attended public school. His first job was as a general order clerk working on the New York docks. During this period, he met Cary Grant, who was a stilt walker at Coney Island, and later, dissatisfied with the weather, he decided to move to California to work as a double and a stunt man in a small filming studio where he made a lot of contacts.”

World War I interrupted his career. He served his country as a member of the American Defense Society. After the war, he was “helped by his many studio contacts in Hollywood, where aside from directing he sold scripts to Universal and found a hobby that soon came to be his trade in life.”

“Jack said that he and his crew always aimed to create the perfect sound that would fit the personality of the character they were filming the scene for. By doing so, the Foley crew was not just some ordinary noise creators, they were genuine performers.” “For Foley, the job wasn’t merely footfalls and the movement of clothing, it was the same as acting and he always aimed to reproduce the personalities of the characters he filmed to the best of his abilities. He wanted to become them and let the sound of their walk that he made expand the character and with that the story as a whole.”

“Jack found himself creating footsteps and body movement sounds for stars such as Laurence Olivier, Rock Hudson, Kim Novak, and Sandra Dee. When later in his life he shared some of his work experiences he said Rock Hudson had ‘deliberate’ footsteps, James Cagney’s were ‘clipped,’ and Marlon Brando’s were ‘soft,’ so they needed to be filmed accordingly.”

“Throughout his life he found himself working on many projects and films, most notably *Melody of Love* in 1928, *Show Boat* the year after, the acclaimed *Spartacus*. The film *Operation*

Petticoat won the Motion Picture Sound Editors' Golden Reel Award as an appreciation of his work in Hollywood.”

Now that audiobook publishers are creating full-cast audiobooks with voice actors, music and Foley sound effects and radio dramas (both the original ones and new ones) are experiencing a renaissance through podcasting, the art of Foley is being revived. It is vital part of these productions because of the way sound effects affect the imagination.

In his 2014 article, “Old Time Radio’s Second Wind,” **Justin DeFreitas** explains that “Much of the pleasure of Old Time Radio (OTR) is in rediscovering the intimacy of a medium you can listen to anywhere—in the car, at the beach, or, as virtually any radio enthusiast will attest, in the dark You can relax in a dark room, close your eyes, and let the story paint itself. Let it exercise your imagination. You are able to enjoy the characterizations from great actors, the sound effects and great music, but you are given the freedom to use your own imagination.”

In his 2015 article, “Theater of the Mind Makes for Great Radio, Ads and Broadcasts,” **Bob Leighton** explains that the “theater of the mind is a powerful thing Theater of the mind is you mentally finishing the story. It requires imagination And imagination isn’t limited to visuals or images – but rather extends far beyond into to feelings, emotions and all other senses.”

Communications professor Dr. **Emma Roderer** has done excellent research about radio dramas and how sound effects increase imagery in the imagination. In her article, “See It on a Radio Story: Sound Effects and Shots to Evoked Imagery and Attention on Audio Fiction,” she states: “The main function of sound effects in a fictional story . . . is precisely to create an audio reconstruction of reality, imitating reality’s actual sounds so as to create in the listener’s mind a specific image of the phenomenon that it is intended to represent.”

In her article “Voice, Narrative, Place: Listening to Stories” **Isobel Anderson** explains that “we may hear the sounds of a car crash, such as breaks screeching to a halt and voices shouting when listening to a piece of radio drama, but it is our imaginations that fill in our other senses, such as what we might see, smell, taste and feel.”

Sound effects have such a powerful effect on the imagination that Dick Jordan made a short YouTube video to prove that a story could be told and understood using only sound effects! Let’s listen to “Imagine This: A Story Told With Sound Effects.”

It’s clear that we *can* understand the story from just the sound effects.

Now, let’s try an experiment . . .

In a previous podcast, I explained how music (especially film music) can enhance a narrated story. The music tells the listener how to “feel” about the story. However, sound effects make the story real. So let’s test that idea.

We’ll be using the stories2music story “The Rescue.”

First, listen to the story excerpt with narration and music, but no sound effects.

Next, we'll listen to the story with added sound effects.

Hopefully, you were able to experience the differences. The story itself is emotionally-charged. The music grabs the emotions with a sense of urgency and foreboding. Finally, hearing the panic of the car horn, the screeching tires, the screams of the poor horse trapped in the barbed wire and his labored, frightened breathing all bring the story to life.

Listen to the full "**The Rescue**" story on the stories2music website at www.stories2music.com

Chalacoski provides these final words: "Today, Jack Foley is given credit for developing a unique method of performing sound effects that is widely used today. We accept these sounds as implicitly authentic, even if in reality we know they are not. . . The quality of a movie, therefore, correlates greatly with the extent to which the sound recorded and "glued on" afterward in the editing room is well done. No other has done this better than the master illusionist himself, Jack Foley."

Thank you, Mr. Foley, for creating the marvel of sound effects.

To read the articles mentioned in this podcast, read the blog post "Thank you, Mr. Foley" on the stories2music blog site.

See you next time!

Credits

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Theme Music: "Follow Your Path" by James Copperwaithe. Courtesy of West One Music.

"The Rescue" written and narrated by Kathy Matthes. © 2018 by Kathy Matthes. All Rights Reserved. "Tides of Change" music by Bill Conner. Courtesy of West One Music.

Sound Effects

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Squeaking door sound effect by Julien Matthey. Creative Commons Attribution license. Retrieved from <https://freesound.org/people/Julien%20Matthey/sounds/456190/>

Thunderstorm with Light Rain and Cracking Thunder (Storm Ambience Sound Effects). Sounds of the Earth: Thunderstorm. Nature Sounds. Purchased from <https://www.amazon.com/Thunderstorm-Cracking-Thunder-Ambience-Effects/dp/B00J9NTJWE>

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