The Foley Grail

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

Second edition

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Chapter 3

Single or Married?
Foley Used Independently or
Combined with Sound Effects
When most professionals started utilizing Foley in their soundtracks, what they usually had in mind was replacing or enhancing the footsteps of the characters and performing a few hand props. This was the original role of Foley. It is essential 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. Additionally, Foley is becoming relied upon as a viable option for special sound design. As is true with any art form or craft, it evolves and morphs into something more than its original purpose. Foley can stand on its own in a track and assist to create the reality of the story world, it can be layered atop the production track to enhance the story world, and it can be combined with the edited sound effects to create a hyper-reality.

**SUPPORTING REALITY**

When Foley is performed to replace or enhance the footsteps, you can assume that it is going to be played with the production track. Thus, your 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.

"Consider the story. The story dictates everything."

This is also the time when the artist is handling a performance to duplicate—as closely as possible—the sound captured when the sound effects library was recorded specifically for the film. The personality and feeling of the scene and the movement of the character on their own—give or take a shot or two—can be assimilated out of the scene with no sound effects. Foley, however, is not the same as the sound captured sound effects library. Foley is ordered specifically to fit the personality and feeling of the scene and the movement of the character on their own—give or take a shot or two—can be assimilated out of the scene with no sound effects.

When a Foley effect, either with the actor making the sound or with the actor creating the sound, is being used, it is important to remember that the sound engineer is responsible for the sound quality. The Foley artist is responsible for ensuring that the sound matches the action on screen. This means that the sound must be recorded at the same time as the action on screen. For example, if a character is opening a door, the hinge squeaks should be recorded at the same time as the action. If the character is pulling the chair away from the table, the chair legs should move in unison with the action. The Foley artist must ensure that the sound matches the action on screen. This means that the sound must be recorded at the same time as the action on screen. For example, if a character is opening a door, the hinge squeaks should be recorded at the same time as the action. If the character is pulling the chair away from the table, the chair legs should move in unison with the action. The Foley artist must ensure that the sound matches the action on screen.

**ENHANCING REALITY**

Sometimes a supervising producer will edit the sound effects library to fit the needs of the film. In Sylvester [1985], the scenes had already been edited. The producer was not certain how to use the sound effects library in the film, so an alternative, the Foley sound effects library, was used. The Foley artist was responsible for creating the sound effects that matched the action on screen. This means that the sound must be recorded at the same time as the action on screen. For example, if a character is opening a door, the hinge squeaks should be recorded at the same time as the action. If the character is pulling the chair away from the table, the chair legs should move in unison with the action. The Foley artist must ensure that the sound matches the action on screen.

Ken Duvall prepares to work with two props together to create a different resonance in the Foley effect. Photo courtesy of Steve Lee, Hollywood Lost and Found.
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. The Foley artist has to duplicate—as closely as possible—whatever the actor is handling. 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 Foley artist is recreating a prop that is in the scene already, then the goal is for the Foley to be indistinguishable from what is already in the production track.

Foley, however, has been increasingly used to complement edited sound effects. A car crash, for instance, might be created partially from the sound captured in production, partially from edited effects from a sound effects library, and partially from some field recordings that were ordered specifically for that scene. The Foley might then be asked to add the personality and life of that particular car crash. It is even possible that tireless and talented Foley artists would create that crash entirely on their own—given the time and access to the ideal props—for an assortment of reasons. The lesson here? There are no rules. There are conventions that are used but do not dictate the only possible approach.

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], professionals refer to it as a single effect. However, it becomes a married effect if it is going to be layered with another prop, or preedited 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? Keep these distinctions clear. Which part of the sound team is responsible for which part of the sound?

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. When the Foley is supporting reality, less is more. The Foley is not the star.

**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* [1985], which is a film about a girl and her horse, some of the scenes had excellent production horse footsteps. The supervisor was not certain how his library horse footstep effects would work, so as an alternative, I Foleyed all of the horse footsteps. Now this has been done before, but sometimes editors would edit horses in from various library effects for time and cost-efficiency. The supervisor had decided
to have additional “coverage” from several sources so the decision could be made during the final dub. 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. You should do whatever works best. Enhancing reality means you are working with the reality of the sound, but adding to it to give it an extra bit of character so it works better with the story.

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. Body falls never sound like they would in real life. This is where it is essential to enhance reality. When a body fall is in a film, it is for the purpose of creating dramatic effect. So you want to create a body fall that is hyper-real. It sounds bigger and louder than a real body fall, but not so illogical that it takes the viewer out of the story. Notice I keep stressing the story. Sound supports the narrative. Always.
In *Die Hard* (1988), 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. Supervising sound editor 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. However, this scene was full of action combined with humor to reflect what was included in the script.

**REPLACING REALITY**

When a film or show requires a newly imagined aural reality, the Foley needs to reflect that reality with the imagined characters. This happens most often when the character is not a real person, but is a monster or sci-fi character, vampire, or some other creature that needs an imaginary sonic life. Foley is an imperative at this point. When Foley takes on this responsibility, the artist needs to thoroughly understand the narrative in total. What happens to this character? Where is the character, and how do the others relate to this character? Nothing about this character is simple. This is a challenge and can be great fun.

In *Predator* (1987), the mysterious hunter's feet had to be performed first in Foley, then married to a heavy impact edited from sound effects. The result was a very heavy sounding footfall, with more impact than we can artfully get on the stage, but with a naturalness

*Walter Spencer and Mike Horton marrying footsteps and props. Courtesy of Walter Spencer and Hi Fi Foley.*
and liveness that matched the character. It should be noted that Kevin Peter Hall portrayed the predator 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. This is a critical point. Foley artists will not see the real character when these situations arise. These odd characters are not meant to be human, and you will work with someone dressed in odd leotards or such and connected to wires and cables. You will not see what will be the final rendering. Once again, find out what the character will ultimately be. It might be Andy Serkis working his motion-capture magic.

Dave Stone, who co-supervised Predator with Richard Anderson, recollects another illustration of a married effect for replacing reality:

> "They create and edit with their bodies."

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, Foley artists have been asked to perform their Foley with such precision that they are like sound editors without Pro Tools. They create and edit with their bodies. The sounds they make are sometimes expected to stand on their own. But often, their performed effects will be married to edited sound effects that they have never even heard. Flexibility is a useful quality of a Foley artist. You might need to focus on sync or you might need to create an imaginary sound with no regard for sync whatsoever.

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. Alan Splet, the late and very great sound designer was forever shooting new sound effects in the field or on a Foley stage for each of his films. Fresh sounds for his projects was one of his goals. They are now all in his library, which is faithfully tended by his widow and fellow sound maven Ann Kroeker.

**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* (1985), the spider’s footsteps had to be unique. Tim Sadler, the Foley mixer, had been a music engineer, and would have creative ideas that derived from that past career. John Roesch and Tim came up with a plan to have a very musical sound for the footsteps. While I am not exactly sure what Roesch used, David Stone remembers, “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, Stone and supervisor Mark Mangini figured they would marry the Foley with a designed sound effect by Pospisil. But as they recollect now, they think they relied totally on the Foley because it was so inventive.

Charles L. [Chuck] Campbell, a well-respected supervisor, was known for requesting special sounds from the stage. Roesch had created

*Walter Spencer does it all at once. Courtesy of Walter Spencer and Hi Fi Foley.*
many remarkable customized effects for Campbell using the Foley stage as a laboratory. Campbell would be at every Foley session and pursued his contribution as a Foley "director." Not only did he reportedly have Roesch and his partner audition shoes for each character, but he gave a lot of input to how he wanted the sounds designed. Roesch and Ellen Heuer performed many of the sound effects in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988) on the Foley stage for Campbell. The result is dazzling. The time and money was as well. However, there is no arguing with success.

In the professional film world, this is an expensive and time-consuming prospect. It is more practical and efficient to utilize a sound effects library for the more typical sounds found in a scene. Also, a creative and dedicated editor can create magic with some imagination and well-tuned Pro Tools for the majority of the requisite sounds in most film and television projects. Yet, there are those who prefer to use the Foley stage for sound design.

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.

Yet, this practice is finding a resurgence in the Foley world. Foley artists are asked to create more and more of the effects on the stage. As editors are limited with time for their tasks, they ask more of the Foley artists. The upside is that the Foley effects are fresh and personal to the film. Field recordist and editor Charles Maynes sometimes thinks of Foley today as being in the "post-Chuck Campbell era." He cites sound designers such as Ren Klyce as continuing the practice of having a lot of sound designed on the Foley stage. Maynes remarks, "Ren really takes advantage of what Foley can bring to the table." Maynes adds that Foley is "largely used to make up for what production does not provide." The downside is that Foley time is expensive and it takes a great deal of time to create sound for a film. Another possible issue with this approach is that there might be sound editors back in the cutting rooms working to make magic with the library effects 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 pre-dubbed and the effect was effectively covered. The lesson here? Communication. Again, who is responsible for what in the soundtrack? Remember, there are conventions, but no hard and fast rules.
Hang it as a Unit:
The Knack for Sync
The quality that causes the most anxiety for the beginning Foley artist is invariable sync. The ability to match the footfall of the character or match the action of the prop on screen is enough to cause any beginning Foley artist some trauma. Even the most experienced and talented Foley artists whose names appear on screen for all of the major films have had this anxiety. So if this is a major worry for you then you are in good company.

The first time I entered a Foley stage was an unforgettable and strange experience. 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. He proceeded to throw me some curve balls. 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 sure I would never hear from these people again. But I did hear from them again. And thus, my temporary gig turned into an over two-decade career.

**PATIENCE AND PRACTICE ARE YOUR FRIENDS**

Why do I relate this story? Because the pressure you will feel trying to do Foley cannot be anywhere near as terrifying as it was for me. I survived. So will you. I got better at it. So will you. Patience and practice are your friends. Sync takes both. So does life.

When I first worked on television shows 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 ten-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 at a piece of cloth, a pair of shoes, in sync to our footsteps. It added, rather crude. As time called full coat and one of four tracks of sound. No character now and then.

**WHEN SYNC WAS K**

In television, the time we had for the typical film scene was much time to cue or cut. I get a show the night before a Foley. There would be visitors who always hoped the room would be quite minimal, placing a track that had two cues into the track meant after had better sync than anything. Thus, it was better to let one room that would save time today, when characters can available in digital record editing, one can still spot that has not been cut before or the time restraints in television production.

When Foley artists have to walk in excellent sync form with such precision time to edit the Foley and compliment the supervising is so good, we can hang it necessary, and the staff doing the “hard” effects that also limited time to pull off on their own, our ability.

In feature films, the emphasis is to have style and time of Foley. A Foley editor will tighten or the luxury of time afforded Foley to have creativity. The Foley can be performed or spent at a great deal of time on their Foley “hung.”
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 stand-
ards, rather crude. 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 aired weekly and there is not
much time to cue or cut. Many times, in the 1980s, Foley artists would
get a show the night before it aired and have a few hours to shoot the
Foley. There would be virtually no time to edit the sync. The sound ed-
tors 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 edit-
ing 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 impres-
sionism 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, their ability
to walk in excellent sync becomes a premium skill. The ability to per-
form 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 edit-
ing the “hard” effects that were required in the show. Because there was
also limited time to pull library effects to be edited, 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 im-
portant 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. With
the luxury of time afforded to feature films, 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.”
LANDING GOOD SYNC WILL PAY DIVIDENDS

For those who began their Foley careers in television, their sync is reliably accurate. However, once these artists have been in Foley for several years they have 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 those who trained in the trenches of television 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.

Today, television, and episodic shows are even more demanding because schedules are shortened, and demands are increased. The more you are able to do with Foley, the more you are expected to do. This is the nature of how any art or craft works. In these challenging economic times, landing good sync will pay dividends that are not necessarily concrete, but always valuable. The best way to get any sync issues worked out is with practice. Budding Foley artists can practice to television shows or even while they are streaming films. In these days of technological convergence, there is rarely a time when you can get away from a projected image on an electronic device. Practice and play with your craft. I confess to practicing even now by mimicking what others do in public. True story.

"The more you are able to do with Foley, the more you are expected to do."

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 within the recording session. David Jobe, a veteran Foley mixer, will sometimes improve a minor sync issue by moving a footsteps 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. If a mixer has the ability, the tools, and the desire, this can be a quick fix.

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. I hasten to add, however, that in my opinion, as more work a bit in each especially in hard economic times, the aesthetic is the salient point is the sync. In the world where the salient point is that the sync is in the moment, and not the economics, the aesthetics and style of the work is important.

"Economics trumps boundaries especially in hard economic times."

PERFORMANCE

When a Foley artist on the character exists by the picture editor, or the perspective of the artist is hitting the right cuts, the perspective of the artist is hitting the right cuts, the perspective of the artist is hitting the right cuts, one might think that the Foley is the reason why Foley was developed.
to add, however, that Roulo’s purist attitude is becoming the minority opinion, as more projects require mixers and editors to cross over and work a bit in each other’s sandboxes. Economics trumps boundaries especially in hard economic times.

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 footstep 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.

This brings up an interesting issue—that of the digitization of Foley. Will there be a time when Foley is simply edited in? Will Foley artists become unnecessary? Since Foley is a performance, and is particular to each film, each character, and each story world, I would surmise that for the most part, quality would dictate that Foley artists would still be indispensable. Yet it makes sense that some will forgo the Foley artist and try to cut in the effects and footsteps to save money even if quality is sacrificed. One practical skill that an experienced Foley artist learns is how to fool the eye when a picture edit—for many possible and excellent reasons—leaves a character stepping twice on the same foot. The skill required to Foley the walk so the gait of the character is smooth from one side of the cut to the other side requires decision-making that is specific to the scene and edit. This decision is a human action that exudes artfulness and craftsmanship.

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 foot step 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 over articulate. Too much heel-toe will sound like tat-da, tat-da, tat-da. Neither sounds good. A character will have some heel-toe footfalls, some plops, some scuffs, and some minor weight shifts. Mastering these will help with your sync.

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.

THE AUDIENCE IS WATCHING THE FILM IN REAL TIME

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, 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

While sync is critical, the performance of the character is crucial. The feel of the character will actually help you with your sync. 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 is key. Whereas live-action sound games do not. The key to anticipating the sound is to hear and then to anticipate the sound. The sound is a part of the sound; the sound is an important part of the performance. That is what the player's choice will evoke.

Often, when someone is given a cue to pull when his or her scene is about to hinge, the cue is not so forgiving. Foley takes time and care. When performing, a stimulus is essential to make the sound the important part of performance. That is what player's choice will evoke.

Most of our computer projects get good sync, patience, and a critical eye. The feel, character, and rhythm in the craft blend the editor.
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* (1991) 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. Additionally, when performing a similar action in a game, with only a slight change, it is essential to make the difference the important part of your performance. That is what the player's choice will evoke.

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. Foley that is one frame early "feels" funny. Foley that is two frames early is noticeable 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.
Chapter thirteen

Hearing the Sweet Spot:
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 magnetic film 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 magnetic film 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 a sound effect on magnetic film, the library 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 magnetic film 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 neophyte editor with an elementary understanding of Pro Tools can adequately accomplish, but that is not the case.

"It flows elegantly from cue to cue."
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 Foley 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 twice. 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 a 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 had not worked with this particular editor before, so he was not familiar with how I worked, nor was I familiar with him. But I knew he had more often edited dialogue and sound effects. He had issues with my sync. He told me he was bringing my performed version of the Foley and his edited version down to compare. Mind you, while this was back in the 1980s, when there was more time for finessing, this was still a pretty odd request.

He came onto the Foley 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.

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. Experienced Foley editors had already taught me that you could tell how well Foley was walked and edited by seeing a few, but not too many, splices on the side of the film reel. So I knew something was very wrong. I wondered if the Foley had been improperly duplicated. I wondered if the equipment on the stage had slipped the sync. I knew the mixer and I had been meticulous. I was stymied. Then I saw what had happened.

He had cut virtually every step. He had no production track to follow, so he was matching every step to what he perceived was the footfall. The steps he had cut bend when he walked. thing very important to Foley editors. Luckily, was comfortable with professionalism. Still, dialogue editing and Foley engineers, asked me to dancer doing some bad version was so confusion went wrong. He had to, did not know what she was trying to, poor editor.

I can’t remember where the dance sound Foley artist who performed. These two stories are about the entire cue prior to the cue. Before you is good and where it is. the Foley artist was doing.

Later, when I began surgery on Foley, you. Assume that most of really draws attention of time to go back and do more good sync the less. This philosophy are “topping product the production track perfection. You need a different.

Scott Hecker starter and Foley artist. He did not make the cutting and “honed in make your edits and we start cutting at all.” F
The steps he had cut made the character look like his knees did not bend when he walked. I tried to defuse the situation. I learned something very important that day. Dialogue editors edit very differently than Foley editors. Luckily, the supervising sound editor reassured me. He was comfortable with my quality of work and was satisfied with my professionalism. Still, I did not really know what was different about dialogue editing and Foley editing.

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 editing from the top of the scene. 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 did help that the Foley artist who performed the cue was a former dancer. So I could tell what she was trying to do. However, I believe I was of little help to the poor editor.

These two stories provide valuable lessons about cutting Foley. Look at the entire cue prior to editing anything. Plan what you want to do with the cue. Before you edit one frame of sound, be sure where the sync is good and where it is loose. Don't start editing until you know what the Foley artist was doing.

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. Most Foley artists, even the beginners, do more good sync than bad. Assume you can do more good by editing less. This philosophy will work for you most of the time. Unless you are "topping production"—editing the Foley to be in perfect sync with the production track—you do not need perfection. You need excellence. That is different.

Scott Hecker started cutting Foley when he worked with veteran editor and Foley artist 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." Hecker 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." Hecker’s advice is even more critical with digital sound. Finding yourself entranced with the sound waves and wanting to match them will cause you to lose sight of what Foley is all about. Foley exists to breathe life into the character. Overediting can suck the life out of the character.

Mark Pappas has worked with Hecker frequently. When he began editing, he made plenty of mistakes, and his reels would come back from the stage needing fixing. Pappas 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. However, upon further reflection, these editors were saying the same thing, but with different expressions. They are emphasizing the "feel" of Foley rather than the sterility of sync.

In the earlier days of editing, when severe budget cutbacks were not the driving force they are now, there would be time for Pappas to have someone check his work to guide him. After cutting a unit of magnetic film, he could run the unit with his supervisor to make sure it was ready to go. Nowadays, the chance to check work is rare, so the wise Foley editor is painstaking and meticulous and asks as many questions in the beginning as possible. As Pappas 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 ten seconds and you’ve been sitting there for hours working on it!"

It is easy to get caught up in the weeds when you are first editing Foley. As with any new skillset, you will have a tendency to look at every single step, every piece of a prop, every pop, every sizzle, every breath, and forget that the sounds go by so fast the audience won’t notice. Also, remember this: Foley is only one aspect of the sound design in the scene, and the sound is in concert with the dialogue, the music, the acting, the cinematography, and the set design. All things considered, unless the scene is a dialogue film with nothing but Foley in the scene, you really can relax and look for the sweet spot with some levity.

**EDITING FOR SYNC**

If you have the time to preview the scene before you edit any Foley, by all means, do so. Any film for a festival, or an independent screening, or film school project should allow you the time to really examine what you are doing. However, as is true for most professionals, Pappas 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 have etched all the artis •

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experience have 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. Additionally, schedules do not always allow editors to preview as they did in the past. Nowadays, the best editors hone their techniques to find the fastest and best ways to streamline the process as best they can.

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 "top production" or to 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.

One new tool that has appeared on Pro Tools, which can prove to be dangerous is the new edit tool called Beat Detective. It was originally designed for music, to ensure that drum parts were put in sync, but now it can be used for Foley. You can push a button and it will find the silent spot and put cuts there to perfect the sync in the Foley. However, this can result in sterile sounding Foley. Beware of such easy ways to edit sound.
MODERN TIMES
The Foley editor will need to make adjustments in the editing process whenever there is new technology to learn. 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. Every new version of Pro Tools, or any other digital system, there are new plug-ins to add and new shortcuts to learn. This necessarily means that Foley editing does not remain stagnant.

Before digital workstations, editors would simply cut the sound. Now it is not uncommon for the supervisor to require the editor to 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

Plug-ins are seemingly to purchase your skills, but can with these toys. In a skilled editor, le sound. There is no patience with the determines the quality of the craft easier, not to ing encourages sp the cue to perfect or compress time great fun. Before y to edit simply and magnetic film to c

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Beginning Foley forms on the corn think this through to listen to it. If process, you are
Foley while having the sound effects, music, and dialogue close at hand to contribute to the overall balance of the dub. If you find that you are asked to prepare a mix within Pro Tools, or whatever system you are working with, it is advisable to start conservatively. You can always do more. But patience will help you assess each change you make before you delve into another one.

Plug-ins are seductive. They are developed for one reason: for consumers to purchase them. They are not often necessary, if you develop your skills, but can save you time if you want to use them. Use caution with these toys. Anyone can be convinced that she is a talented and competent editor because of the vast amounts of money spent on technological toys. In reality, you will have proven to be a consumer. To be a skilled editor, learn the classic lessons of editing for storytelling with sound. There is no substitute for experience.

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. As a Foley editor, you can modify, equalize, expand or compress time and change the pitch of a sound. It all sounds like great fun. Before you get carried away with the bells and whistles, learn to edit simply and purely. Papas 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 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 if you want them, they print out," Pappas explains. "You need to listen to it."

Beginning Foley editors tend to 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 waveforms.

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? 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. Foley and edited sound effects each have their intended uses and most ideal applications. You should be clear in your decision to use one or the other, or very deliberately use both as a hybrid.
It would probably not occur to the typical cinemaste that the topic of the re-recording 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." Consequently, a clear comprehension of the traditional Hollywood dubbing process and how it relates to the Foley artist, mixer, and editor is essential. Keep in mind that with the transition to digital editing and mixing, the dubbing process has also been streamlined. I will first give the overview of how the traditional dub would progress. There are variations in this process in Hollywood and other regions. Anyone interested in sound will do well to understand how digital workflows have altered postproduction so drastically, that the conventions are all but gone with the wind.

THE PREDUB

Predubbing postproduction sound has traditionally been the territory of the re-recording mixers. We find ourselves in a time when the new technology has led to the belief that anyone with 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 sound track, not the equipment.

In the Hollywood postproduction system, there has been, until the 2000s, 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.

Foley is prepared with the purpose of it serving the needs of the dubbing 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 has been the re-recording 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 re-recording mixers are often the only sound experts ever seen by the most powerful all of us.

With that in mind, it is a "dubbing" mixers that are the heart of the stage sit the editorial team need to under on most of their work.

The first days on the of course, in addition to - has, in the past, been the Mixers meticulously anal time and quality of each each focus. A good predub must get it right." As David S predubs are like rehearsals orchestra; details are the final dub is the concert!"

Traditionally, when the predub, the mixers would tracks down into groups be mixed down into six principles and perhaps an be three to eight sets of Background effects (BGs) have six tracks of footste which is optional for a do and effects’ dub—would be the final dub, not at the p

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ever seen by the most 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 makes sense that those involved with the editorial team need to understand the pressure that these heroes are under on most of their work days.

The first days on the dub stage were primarily for preubs. This is, of course, in addition to any temp dubs that had occurred. The preub 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 preub makes the final dub, which is the last chance to “get it right.” As David Stone says, “the preubs are like rehearsing a symphony orchestra; details are everything. The final dub is the concert!”

Traditionally, when there had been adequate time allotted for the preub, the mixers would take one category of sound and mix 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 principles and perhaps another six of group ADR. Hard effects might be 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. The cloth track—which is optional for a domestic dub, but invaluable for a foreign “music and effects” dub—would be split off onto its own track and be played at the final dub, not at the preub.

Most preubs would ideally start with the dialogue. Everything starts with what is in the production track, so the dialogue preubs 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. The music—which is typically being composed right up until the last minute—wouldn’t show up until the final dub. Today, as schedules get more squeezed and time is tighter, it has even become acceptable for one stage to be predebbuging dialogue while another might be predebbuging 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.

When the mixer would preub Foley he or she would find the time used more effectively if the preparation by the editor had been appropriate. The tracks needed to be tagged properly and sheets needed to be printed out. Some dubbing mixers would watch the meters, some would look at the sheets and mark them up with notes on where they assigned
the tracks in the preub, and some would prefer to look at Pro Tools. The conventions for laying out the tracks, however, were similar to dubbing prior to digital because the system was meant to utilize time efficiently. Rerecording mixers would be looking for principal footsteps in the left-most channels, background footsteps in the next channels, and finally props, with similar types of props in similar tracks. Cloth track[s] would be at the far right of the cue sheets.

Richard Portman spent most of his years as a 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 dubbing mixers would still probably agree with Portman. While his background as an engineer made 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 liked to preub Foley against the dialogue tracks. Sometimes the Foley might be mixed while listening to the sound effects. This was advantageous because both effects and Foley might have coverage on a scene, so they needed to be played against each other to see which covered the material best. Often, the decision to marry the Foley effect with the edited choice was made in preubs. The purpose of preubs was, and still is, to cull down many units to a smaller, more manageable amount.

In today’s myriad of technological possibilities, the preub is not a fixed convention. Depending on the film, the SSE, the mixer, and the schedule, the preub. The dialogue. While sound effects on a dub stage, the film—is still the crisis workflow. The mixer must still monitor what ambient sound dialogue will fit into.

Michael Seman he likes to take a lot of mixed Foley for quick dialogue to play the one he’s preubbing. It’s Time, of course, is get as much as he had the time he might have about two weeks. Semanick on David Fincher which postproduction sound.

Ren Klyce, who worked on Tattoo (2011), is at like it occurred in prefers to allow time concerned with techni- the to get the money. It is time to get the qu- need to do the bes- and Fincher perform schedules were she and the sound effects, different had the material mixers, as he prefers.

Veteran televiso- ules have changed preubbing the dia- preubbing the effect [Benjamin] and Fe
ok at Pro Tools. were similar to to utilize time incipial footsteps next channels, ar tracks. Cloth logue mixer. He cks: “It all starts 1 everything else bably agree with him more sen- tion track, most emplate used for ue tracks. Some- sound effects. This it have coverage her to see which the Foley effect pose of preuds tare manageable preud is not a mixer, and the schedule, the preud might be, in reality, an editor’s session from Pro Tools. The dialogue, however, is still the territory of the dubbing mixer. While sound effects and Foley might preud before ever being presented on a dub stage, the dialogue—which is the most sensitive aspect of any film—is still the cherished territory of the rerecording mixer. While workflows have changed for other sound professionals, the dialogue mixer must still massage the dialogue until it sparkles. He or she might want to preud the dialogue alone, or as Tom Fleischman prefers, have some ambient sound effects to preud against so he can assess how the dialogue will fit into the scene.

Michael Semanick mixes sound effects, and when he preuds Foley, he likes to take a lot of time to preud. 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 preuds: “When I’m preudding, I’m trying to use whatever I’ve got to balance against.” Time, of course, is always the issue. Although Semanick does not always get as much as he would like, there are films he remembers where he had the time he requested: “Just on Sweeney Todd [2007] alone, I took about two weeks to preud the Foley, I think, because it was so important.” Semanick often works with directors such as Peter Jackson and David Fincher who are careful to put more time in their budgets for postproduction sound.

Ren Klyce, who was the sound designer on The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo [2011], is artful in his sound design and likes the Foley to sound like it occurred in production so, from the Foley stage to the dub, he prefers to allow time for experimentation and finessing. Klyce is not concerned with technical perfection as much as he is with a sense of artful randomness in the sound design. Both Fincher and Klyce will negotiate to get the money necessary for postproduction sound so they have the time to get the quality they both feel the professionals, like Semanick, need to do the best sound possible for the film. However, when Klyce and Fincher performed their duties on the episodic show House of Cards, schedules were shorter, so the control they more often exercised on a feature was not available. Several different teams of Foley artists per- formed the Foley, different teams of sound editors edited and preudded the sound effects, and the final mixes were on different stages with different mixers. Yet, Klyce still managed to have the material preudded by the mixers, as he prefers.

Veteran television dialogue mixer Larry Benjamin relates that sched- ules have changed so drastically in the last few years that while he is preudding the dialogue on a show, his effects mixer is somewhere else preudding the effects. Then, they will “marry up” and put in the music {Benjamin} and Foley [the effects mixer] to prepare for the final dub.

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Schedules are half the time or less than just two years ago. Additionally, they might tweak some sync while in prepub mode.

If a film has been through several temp dubs, as most of them are today, then the prepub process has happened several times already. A temp dub is for the purpose of putting in whatever effects are deemed necessary for an audience test. Until recently, temp dubs were a “stand alone” 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 prepubs. 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

More and more often, Foley editors are required to prepub in Pro Tools to save time and money on the dub. Whether the Foley mixer adds perspective on the stage, or the editor does premixing “in the box,” the dubbing mixer has to make the final product work with what he or she is presented. Perspective is subjective. 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 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. However, the technology has recently responded to the need for better interfacing from editing room to dub stage. The difference between what the editor perceives when mixing and what occurs on the dub stage has been minimized, so the sessions from the editor translate better on the dub stage.

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 prepub 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/her reel is up in case fixes need to be made.

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. Previously, an editor was available to make editorial changes while the mixers continue with the prepub. Nowadays, the mixer might be asked by the director to make a quick edit. This is problematic. Not only were most dubbing mixers more comfortable and experienced mixing rather than editing, but the flow of the dub was disturbed noticeably when the mixer had 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 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, there is the natural assumption that a mixer can edit and an editor can mix. Here, too, there has been vast improvement in the technological response. Fleischman remarks, “Now, it’s not a big deal to go back and change sound effects or put in the Foley.”

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 skillset to be interchangeable shows a lack of understanding of the crafts and what is required to be an expert. Another perspective to consider, however, is the more flexible any editor or mixer can be benefits the project, the workflow, and the economic bottom line. In these challenging times of schedules, finances, and labor consolidation, forewarned is forearmed.

**THE FINAL DUB**

When the predues are complete the final dub begins. This process is a bit different, in that there will often be a committee of various players contributing opinions regarding the final mix. While the predues 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 predu 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 to integrate, massage, and finesse 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, rather the final dub is frequently focused 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 that he or she wants to hear something different in a scene once the music is added and the entire film is viewed.

WHAT DO MIXERS SAY ABOUT FOLEY?

If rerecording mixers are the final arbitrators about what best practices and approaches for Foley might be, then visiting a dub stage and watching how mixers utilize Foley tracks would be an invaluable experience for any Foley artist. Only a few are able to avail themselves of such an opportunity. With this in mind, there are some valuable insights that mixers can impart to Foley artists, be they developing their skills, or veteran artists who need to freshen their perspectives.

Mark Berger, who has won four Academy Awards for rerecording mixing sound on Apocalypse Now (1979), The Right Stuff (1983), Amadeus (1984), and The English Patient (1996), encourages Foley artists to, “ground the actor to the earth.” He adds that Foley “creates a sense of place.” As the dialogue rerecording mixer, he likes to dub Foley using the same settings that he uses for the dialogue in order to create the same sense of space that the character speaking is in. Berger pays a lot of attention to perspective in this manner.

Rick Sanchez, who mixes for movie trailers, wants to remind Foley artists and Foley mixers to be sure to put sync pops on the tracks. While this seems like an elementary piece of advice, he states, “They are not always there on the smaller films.” Sanchez has to work very quickly rerecording the sound for movie trailers. Working without sync pops means he has to be a sound detective and investigate where hard sync should be by finding an impact that he can sync up to picture. This can be a time-consuming exercise that costs him time and money in an already economically over-stressed aspect of the industry.

Miguel Barbosa, who is a Foley artist, editor, and mixer in Spain has discovered that microphone placement is very important. “A Belgian mixer told me that miking very close is not good because you don’t get air [enough distance].”
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