

THE SOUND OF MOVIES

In modern movies, nearly every sound effect you hear was created in postproduction. Footsteps, gunshots, kisses—they're all recorded by "Foley artists," named for movie sound pioneer Jack Foley (1891–1967).

These highly specialized technicians often have to improvise... and some of their creative solutions may surprise you.

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK (1981)

We Hear: A giant stone ball rolling out of a cave, chasing Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) at the beginning of the film

Actual Sound: A Honda Civic coasting on a gravel road

MEN IN BLACK (1997)

We Hear: The beating of a dragonfly's wings as it flies down the road during the opening credits

Actual Sound: "We ended up using a little toy fan that I found in Toys 'R' Us," said Foley artist Dustin DuPilka. "We wrapped the handle in cloth to muffle the motor, then snipped off the fins and replaced them with duct tape. We put three full days of work into [the two-minute scene] and it came out pretty nice." (They first tried recording a real dragonfly, but director Barry Sonnenfeld thought it didn't sound "real enough.")

NOTTING HILL (1999)

We Hear: William (Hugh Grant) kissing Anna (Julia Roberts)

Actual Sound: The Foley artist slobbering on his forearm. (The sounds of many famous movie kisses were also achieved in this manner.)

THE PERFECT STORM (2000)

We Hear: A faint thumping sound as Linda (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) gives the eulogy for the fallen fishermen

Actual Sound: Mastrantonio's heartbeat. Because there were so many extras involved (as well as other unwanted noises), her microphone needed to be placed very close to her. It was *so* close that the sensitive mic accidentally picked up her heartbeat. When director Wolfgang Petersen reviewed the dailies, at first he couldn't

figure out where the low thumping sound was coming from. When he did, he loved it, and he kept it in the final mix.

E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL (1982)

We Hear: The squishy sound of E.T.'s feet as he walks

Actual Sound: Foley artist John Roesch squishing a wet T-shirt stuffed with Jell-O

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS (2002)

We Hear: The massive Uruk-hai army yelling war chants and banging on their chests just before they attack Helm's Deep

Actual Sound: 25,000 cricket fans during a match between New Zealand and England. Director Peter Jackson walked onto the field at halftime and prompted the crowd to speak the Uruk-hai words when they appeared phonetically on the Diamond Vision screen. Sound engineers then recorded the enthusiastic fans beating their chests and stomping their feet in unison.

THE EXORCIST (1973)

We Hear: A crackling sound when Regan (Linda Blair) spins her head all the way around

Actual Sound: A cracked leather wallet with old credit cards still inside it. After trying many different tactics to create the effect, sound designer Gonzalo Gavira borrowed a crew member's aging wallet and twisted it until it made the desired crackling sound.

ICE AGE (2002)

We Hear: The mammoth walking through the snow

Actual Sound: A log dropping into a pit full of dirt and pebbles

THE STAR WARS TRILOGY (1977–83)

We Hear: R2-D2 "talking"

Actual Sound: A recording of sound designer Ben Burtt making baby sounds, run through a synthesizer

We Hear: The sound of a blaster (laser gun) being fired

Actual Sound: A small hammer hitting a guy wire—a tightly pulled metal wire that's holding up a radio tower

We Hear: Darth Vader's menacing breath

Actual Sound: Burtt again. This time he put a small microphone inside an old SCUBA regulator and recorded himself breathing.

We Hear: TIE fighters whizzing through space

Actual Sound: The sound of a car driving on a rain-slicked road...combined with the squeal of a young elephant

AIRPLANE! (1980)

We Hear: A propeller (but we see a jet plane)

Actual Sound: A propeller plane. Writers Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, and Jerry Zucker wanted to use footage of a propeller plane for the exterior shots, but the studio balked because the inside of the plane was obviously a passenger jet (the studio was afraid viewers would be confused by the joke). Reluctantly, the writers relented and used a model jet for the exteriors, but they did keep the humming noise of a prop plane in the final mix whenever the jet is seen flying (mostly to amuse themselves).

TITANIC (1997)

We Hear: Very little. After the ship sinks, Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Rose (Kate Winslet) are clinging to life on a makeshift raft in the ice-cold water.

Actual Sound: Water and celery. The quietest scene of the film was one of the most challenging to provide sound for. Other than the voices of the actors, director James Cameron wanted only two noises: 1) "surrounded by water" and 2) the sound of Rose's hair as it freezes. Sound designer Chris Boyes couldn't find any place in or near the recording studio quiet enough to get the first sound, so he took a camping trip during a break from production and brought his recording equipment. At 2:30 a.m. he recorded the calm water of a lake at night with his most sensitive microphone. That was the mood Cameron was looking for.

For the sound of Rose's hair freezing, the Foley artists froze some celery stalks and then recorded the ice crystals popping on them. "Between the frozen hair and the presence of water," said Boyes, "I think we leave the audience with an absolutely chilling emotional moment. And it worked out magically."