

# NM Film Business: Lara Dale, Foley Artist

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By Meredith Hughes



## **Intro**

Since the film tax credit was implemented in New Mexico 14 years ago, three major production studios have sprung up, two in Albuquerque, one in Santa Fe, each offering something different to the buyer, all three helping to promote New Mexico.

In a 2014 interview in *Variety*, I-25 Studios' head Rick Clemente of Corrales said, "For producers, the decision is more about the economics between Louisiana, Georgia or South Carolina versus New Mexico."

The New Mexico Film Office website puts it this way: "New Mexico continues to offer one of the most competitive incentives package in the industry which includes a 25 percent or 30 percent refundable film production tax credit and the film crew advancement program. Post-production services rendered in New Mexico also qualify for the 25 percent refundable tax credit even if the project is shot elsewhere."

Vendors, crews, actors and extras, therefore, have had several years to hone their skills in New Mexico, and the early bet by then-Governor Bill Richardson appears to be paying off. Things wobbled in January 2011 when incoming Governor Susana Martinez threatened to scale back the incentives. But other than capping the package at \$50 million, she's now a fan.

Several Corrales-associated people, young and older, are involved in the film business, including Ann Lerner, head of the Albuquerque Film Office, Clemente, Seri DeYoung, whose short film *Still Life*, was featured at the Cannes Film Festival recently. Others include sound artists, horse trainers, riding teachers, set builders and more.

Local actor Vic Browder recently taught a three-month acting course for the Corrales Arts Center. In *Corrales Comment's* December 3 issue, the son of Chris Allen and Paul Knight, actor Alex Knight, was profiled. This issue features a Foley artist.

## **Lara Dale**

First off, as Corrales-based Foley artist Lara Dale put it, "Without the post-production sound known as Foley, a film would be flat. Sound is the stuff that makes your movie."

The name comes from the innovations of Jack Donovan Foley, the fellow who took the 1929 silent film *Show Boat* and turned it into a musical. The work comprises the everyday ordinary sounds we expect when someone walks across a room, washes her hands, or uncorks a bottle of wine.

While boom mikes capture actors' voices during filming, they also pick up planes flying overhead and cars backfiring, and other such noise that would be inappropriate, say, in a flick about the Wild West in the 1860s.

Secondly, Corrales Foley artist Dale emphasizes that the sound something makes has nothing to do with what it looks like. A waved feather duster, for example, is a small flock of birds taking wing. Passionate smooching is Dale kissing her own hand, in front of a Sennheiser Mic 416, her microphone of choice.

Radio programs back in the day were accustomed to producing "sound effects" live and on cue, using a range of gadgets and props. Jack Foley began as one of those guys, but eventually helped figure out how to make sounds that could be recorded for films. Today such sounds are recorded on individual tracks and synchronized with the visuals.

Surprisingly, given their importance, post-production sounds are budgeted as an afterthought, and yet they are the least expensive element in a complete film package, according to Dale. And, astonishingly, as Irish Foley artist Caoimhe Doyle put it, “Today 80 to 90 percent of a film’s sound is re-created,” added in at the end, with the actors “re-voicing” their parts.

Working with sound engineer Josh Reinhardt, another Corraleño now based in Los Angeles, Dale works out of her home with a seriously long extension cord reaching a jam-packed storage space in her garage, or out of a couple of suitcases or wherever needed.

As she points out in a slight exaggeration perhaps, almost the entirety of Peter Jackson’s New Zealand-filmed, *Lord of the Rings*, was post-produced “from a kind of shed in New Zealand.” Those three films too had close to 100 percent of the dialog re-recorded and engineered.

Brought up in Corrales, an alum of Corrales Elementary, Dale was early on trained as a dancer, and headed to New York as soon as she could. Only to break her foot.

One career dream over, she did odd jobs and gigs, including a year as a model. She impulsively introduced herself to the agency as “from London,” and since “from London” models like Kate Moss were then in vogue, she got an opening. Having never been to London, she was hard pressed to talk much about it, though whatever she uttered was in her best Brit accent.

Back in the West, she lived in LA and Berkeley until finding her way back to New Mexico.

She became intrigued with Foley in 2010, when she began apprenticing with Ellen Heuer, an experienced Foley artist who had spent years in Hollywood, but came to New Mexico to start Wildfire New Mexico, a branch of an LA firm, in 2009.

Like Dale, Heuer started out as a dancer, then discovered “dancers are really good at Foley.” Timing and rhythm are key to that work, along with ingenuity and “knowledge of where all the best thrift shops are,” as Dale put it. Because props and junk and shoes and random stuff are integral to creating sounds. Dale reckons she has 300 pairs of shoes, of which 50 are her go-to mainstays.

Footsteps, or “feet,” are Foley 101—Dale has a favorite female pair that does “a Marilyn Monroe-type movie star walk,” and a classic black tie shoe that she dubbed “my Jimmy Stewart.”

In her gear area are a few different surfaces on which these shoes have walked, to good effect.

Actual old-time items like stamping devices, worn saddles, and staplers, bathroom brushes, also come into play. As do random rocks.

Preparing holes in sand, and adding rocks works well for recording the sounds of mercenaries on the move, as in the Sylvester Stallone film *Expendables 3*, released in 2014. Dale and Reinhardt, along with their colleague, A. Daniel Jaramillo, handled the Foley.

“We had 10 days to do it all,” said Dale, “And we had to beg for two more days to get it all finished up.” As seems typical with some but not all film projects, the Foley budget was an afterthought. “We are lucky if we make \$10,000 on something like that.”

Dale works from cue sheets that read “Felixa walks x carpet in heels,” then “Felixa walks x dirt in flipflops,” and so on. The crucial timing is, of course, indicated. Dale watches the screen, fitting her moves to what she sees — she is wearing the shoes herself— and the recorded sound is immediately on Reinhardt’s computer, whether in New Mexico or LA.

“Back when I first started,” Dale explained, “I made a huge mistake. I walked in my selected shoes but I went past the microphone. You can’t leave the microphone!” It’s the job of the engineer to modulate the footsteps and sound levels to fit the coming and going motion.

Also crucial to success is remembering what surface you were using in reel 1, that now comes into play in reel 2. Plus, a prop that worked brilliantly once, has to do the same thing over and over. “It has to repeat successfully,” or it’s gone. The aim is to provide the largest and best quality bandwidth of a specific sound to the engineer.

Working on a Bollywood film, Dale had to recreate the sound of a guy pissing in the woods. She tried multiple means of pouring water onto the ground, then ran into a Big 5 sporting goods store where a clever clerk suggested she try one of those light backpacks that dispenses water through a tube to long-distance hikers and runners.

Pointing the tube down at the ground, guy pissing in the woods. Check! (This is known in Foley lingo as “selling it.”)

Layering is key to some effects —like the sound of the ghoulish eating of human flesh, for example. Don’t try this at home.

Layer one: record biting into an orange or tangerine. Layer two: record a wet chamois being squeezed, as apparently it sounds like oozing blood. Layer three: slice hard and fast into a pomegranate. Record. Mix and mingle.

Another layer was successfully achieved in a low-budget film, *Drunktown’s Finest*, picked up by Sundance Channel in 2015. To convey an inexperienced young guy chopping wood, and getting the hang of it, the crew made use of hollow logs, a sand pit, and balsa wood. The latter broken up makes a fine crackle.

Dale’s most recent project? *Yochi*, a film about “a nine-year old selectively mute Mayan boy guards a nest of Yellow-Headed Parrots in Belize’s pine savannah. His older brother, in debt, turns to poaching....”

What she most would like to work on? Orson Welles’ last and still unfinished film, begun in 1970, still incomplete when he died in 1985, *The Other Side of the Wind*. “Imagine recreating Welles’ footsteps....” she says.

Meanwhile, Dale is intent on urging the New Mexico Film Office people to promote the post-production talent here, giving incentives for that aspect of film and television work as well as for actors and crew. And she’s intent on her next gig. A huge industry for Foley that she’s keen to break into?

Video games.

For a look at a film clip pre- and post-Foley, here’s a scene from *Everest*, out in 2015, see <http://tinyurl.com/zjhxq4h>

Dale’s Foley company is [www.footvoxstudio.com](http://www.footvoxstudio.com).