

In 2008 Pixar released Wall-E, a movie that blends together sci-fi space adventures with a sweet and tender love story between two robots.

But Wall-E is also the first Pixar movie to feature live action actors, with Fred Willard's character and of course the clips from the 1969 musical Hello Dolly.

Why were these live action elements included and how does it help us to fall in love with Wall-E as well?

[Intro]

When Wall-E was first announced in 2007, having just released the highly acclaimed Ratatouille, people were excited to see this brand new idea! But there was scepticism around using live action elements. They stress they're not doing something like Happy Feet but I remember being worried this was an early sign of Pixar starting to transition into making exclusively live action movies. But no, they remain animation-first and were busy working on sexy cars. Hey, it's not my fault they give the cars big kissy lips! Stop judging me!!

People from the Real World have appeared throughout Pixar's history. Soul has famous mentors, Cars features many celebrity car-sonas like The Queen and The Pope, Finding Dory has Sigourney Weaver voice herself, Coco references Frida Kahlo, Toy Story 3 mentions Lincoln Logs meaning Abraham Lincoln exists, Toy Story 1 has a Mickey Mouse clock meaning Walt Disney exists and wait, if Disney exists does Pixar exist as well - does the Toy Story movies exist within Toy Story? AAAAAARRGGH!!!

But this was real life actors within a Pixar film. And I don't mean celebrity voice actors like Usher playing an usher.

The only time this has happened since is the audio of a shopping channel in Up and Luca including a clip of the 1958 film "Big Deal on Madonna Street".

But even in those instances, the real world people didn't play as big of a part as they do in Wall-E.

So let's look at these Hello Dolly moments and see what they really bring to the world of Wall-E.

God can you imagine how weird Wall-E would have turned out if he found a different film?

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The History of Hello Dolly is really bizarre.

In 1835, there was a short farcical play called "A Day Well Spent", which got extended to a 1842 German musical "He'll Have Himself A Good Time". THIS got a British adaptation in 1981 called "On The Razzle" and an American adaptation as a 1938 comedy called "The Merchant Of Yonkers", but that flopped so when it came to Edinburgh in 1954, it was rewritten again this time to alter the minor character of Dolly into the show's centrepiece. And this formed the basis for a musical adaptation in 1964 called "Hello, Dolly!"

Given how many adaptations it took to get here, it's honestly a miracle this production even exists! Which goes to show, if at first you don't succeed just wait a hundred years and someone else will fix it.

Oh hey, that's the plot of Wall-E!

While developing Wall-E, director Andrew Stanton wanted to juxtapose the apocalyptic, futuristic setting with some jolly old-fashioned music. French swing music was considered but scrapped after it was featured prominently in 2003's *The Triplets Of Belleville*. That's when a song on his iPod played "Put On Your Sunday Clothes" from *Hello Dolly*. Stanton had actually starred in a high school production of *Hello Dolly* so he was very familiar with the show so once the rights were secured, it was decided to work it in.

Wall-E was already pretty developed by this point so the movie took a little engineering to now feature two songs from *Hello Dolly*. "Put On Your Sunday Clothes" and "It Only Takes A Moment". A third song, "Dancing" was considered for Eve and Wall-E's space ballet but the composed soundtrack worked better.

So scenes had to be reworked demonstrating the effect this movie within a movie had on Wall-E. Such as humming the song or using the lid of a trash can as a hat, which introduces another element. We're not just hearing the music, we're also seeing it. And it's at its most effective when Wall-E watches "It Only Takes A Moment".

When it comes to storytelling, Pixar are among the world's best, but for the story to work we have to empathise with and care about the characters. And for this to work, the character has to have a clear goal. Woody wants to be the favourite toy, Marlin wants his son back, Carl wants to keep his promise. The more this goal is rooted in emotion, like insecurities, paternal instincts or sorrow, the more pro-active they will be to take action and the more invested we are as we follow their journey.

But what about Wall-E? They have no clear face to emote with and they have very little spoken dialogue. How do we make their goal clear? And how do we make it emotional?

Even before the inclusion of *Hello Dolly*, holding hands was already the planned way of expressing Wall-E's desire and longing for love, especially after a whole sequence showing just how alone he is. Stanton cites the book *Manwatching*, a study of human expression, like how a gesture in one country might be offensive in another. But one commonality in all cultures is showing affection by holding hands. A perfect universal understanding no matter what the language. Wall-E says nothing here because they don't need to, this small gesture says it all. And it only takes a moment to know how Wall-E feels. Although this required a little cheating, creating a fake close up of this one very brief moment they hold hands. Art is a lie, nothing is real.

But did they need to use this live action footage? Couldn't they just reanimate it, they usually animate whatever's on tv? What about Fred Willard? Nothing against the beloved comedian, but did he really have to be live action too?

I've seen people say the live action humans felt a little jarring which I can kinda see. Same with the toddler-like animated humans on the spaceship *Axiom*, a change in tone after the first 30 minutes of the film. Like seeing the generations of ship captains get less real life human and more cartoony the longer they stay, getting more and more complacent to the luxuries of technology. And losing something of themselves in the process. Their humanity.

There's another moment that utilises live action elements. When the captain is learning more and more about Earth, mirroring Wall-E's own reaction to Hello Dolly, it also starts to unlock a forgotten sense of wonder and yearning.

"I don't want to survive. I want to live!"

And that's what the live action elements bring to this film. Humanity. Can't get more humanity than actual people I guess!

They could have just animated all the live action elements, but replacing the natural with the artificial is what made this mess in the first place! So let's keep it real!

Some audiences balked at the environmental messaging of the film which Pixar deny was the aim but you know it's there stop being cowards, but there's a definite clear anti-consumerism message, how capitalism is destroying the planet, hey Disney take notes. And despite the crushing isolation and a programmed sense of thankless duty, the little robot managed to find humanity just laying around in the trash. The plant might be the mcguffin to show life is returning to Earth, but it's Wall-E who brings back the humanity. Their caring, curiosity and wonder is infectious, breaking people out of their own eternal loops and repetitive routines, stepping out of line, rebelling against the system, against their directive, to find their own happiness and gradually save the Earth too.

And it began when Wall-E met Dolly.

When Michael Crawford was cast for Hello Dolly, he had to fight to keep his role, the producers had tried to redub his singing, particularly in "It Only Takes A Moment", but director Gene Kelly fought for him and his voice remained in the song. Upon seeing Wall-E, Michael Crawford took Andrew Stanton out to dinner and told him a story he never knew about "Put On Your Sunday Clothes", the song that starts the movie.

While recording the song, he was struggling to land that punch of "out there". Gene Kelly told Crawford, "Kid, you gotta sing this like it means more than the world. This is bigger than the universe, just think of the stars." That was the recording they used. And in a moment of beautiful divine harmony, the opening of Wall-E has Crawford singing to the stars. Which I think restores a little faith in humanity.

[Reveal Eddie with sexy car]

I said stop judging me!!