



Andy Serkis

IT'S A **SERKIS** OUT THERE!



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Animation has come a long way since the early days of cinema. It first came into being in the 1800s with inventions like the galloping horse Zeotrope, but it was Walt Disney's sound-synchronised animations and the introduction of audio that modernised cartoons, giving them just the element of life that they were missing: the human voice.

However, in the last 20 years producers have been able to develop animated characters even further with the use of some amazing technological advancements. Performance capture (sometimes referred to as PCap) is a phenomenal and powerful way to capture an actor's output. It is a place where technology and acting are intertwined. It brings the magic of theatre, film and animation together to create

memorable and sometimes iconic digital avatars. Motion capture includes the recording of the movement of the body and head whereas performance capture also records the hands, fingers and face.

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Initially used in early video games, motion capture involved wearing a suit with retro-reflective markers. The information from the actors' body movements was recorded and then put into a computer which generated a skeleton image. Performance capture saw the addition of facial markers into this mix.

This allowed for a multi-layered approach to character development. Much like the many smaller parts that combine to build a Russian Doll, there are many layers that are involved in building a realistic character performance.



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A big part of the rollout of performance capture is due to the amazing performance of Andy Serkis who was cast as the iconic character of Gollum in Lord of the Rings. Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings trilogy is generally acknowledged to be one of the greatest cinematic adaptations of all time. Andy was originally only supposed to be voicing the character of Gollum. In the early days of motion capture there would be an actor to voice the character and another actor to create the body and the movements for that character.

When Andy started voicing Gollum he was very physical and used his whole body to get into character. Peter Jackson saw this and decided that he wanted Andy to do the physical body of the character too. And this is where performance capture was born. Andy not only created an incredible character that will go down in history, but he also changed the way motion capture and performance capture was done, forever.

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Performance capture allowed Andy to

perform as an actor in a space without restrictions in the same way he would on a theatre stage or on a film set. His performance very much legitimised performance capture and also gave credibility to many unusual characters which are otherwise not often seen outside of cartoons.

"I see myself in every single character that I play... I may not be manifested on screen, but with every acting decision, and every in-the-moment beat, you're not just conveying a look, but also a thought and a feeling. You're embodying the character and giving soul to it."

Andy has gone on to play many more iconic roles using performance capture including King Kong in Peter Jackson's adaptation of the story of the

giant ape, Ulysses Klaue in The Black Panther film and the leading role of Caesar the chimpanzee in the Planet of the Apes trilogy. It does not end there though.

Now there are performance capture production companies all over the world. After Lord of The Rings Andy Serkis went on to build the Imaginarium Studio in London. The VoiceOver Network, in fact, held our very popular performance capture workshop in this very studio in 2019. (If you would be interested in doing our next performance capture workshop please email workshop@thevoiceovernetwork.co.uk.)

The world of performance capture and motion capture has been ever changed by what Andy brought to the industry. We have since had iconic performances by Benedict Cumberbatch who played the Dragon Smaug, Victoria Atkin who played Evie Frye in Assassin's Creed Syndicate and the roles in modern day productions are endless.

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