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# Tributes to Ray Harryhausen

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*from friends and colleagues on his 90th birthday*



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## Rick Baker

How many people get to celebrate their 90th birthday? How many people have it celebrated in such a glorious way? How many people have influenced so many individuals and set them on a path that changed their life?

You are a unique person, Ray Harryhausen. A unique person whom I idolize, as do so many others. You can make a metal and rubber puppet come to life and you do it a frame at a time, 24 frames a second.

You have shown us what fantasy worlds look like, how monsters move and you have influenced a whole new generation of filmmakers and effects artists.

You and your work changed me from a perfectly normal young man to the strange old man that I am today who plays with monsters and makes a living at it.

Thank you soooo much for that!

Happy 90th Birthday, Ray. Thank you for being such an influence in my life.

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## Jon Berg

Dear Ray, my warmest wishes to you on this remarkable day of celebration! My deepest regret is that I am not there to offer them to you in person. To paraphrase Dave Allen, I feel like the biggest jerk in stop motion.

Speaking of Dave, I know he would have loved to have been here with you as well as Forry Ackerman. Forry; that dear person who was the gateway for so many of us to learn who was making those wonderful movies we all saw as kids. I *know* they would both wish you a heartfelt Happy Birthday!

I thank them both; Forry for introducing you to me in the first place, and Dave for helping get me my first job in this very unique 'business'. But Ray, first and foremost I thank you for igniting a lifelong passion for stop motion, movies and the wonderful possibilities in making the impossible not only plausible but awe inspiring.

Long ago you gave me the unique honour of referring to me as 'Jahn Bergh' (pronounced 'Yawn Bear-g'), a singular approbation for which I am truly thankful!

Correspondingly, I can never think of you Ray without two words coming instantly to mind: animation and inspiration.

Thanks Ray! *Happy Birthday* and congratulations from Jahn Bergh!

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## Martine Beswicke

Dearest Ray, I am so sorry to miss your grand night. I have many fond memories of working with you. In particular, I remember a scene on *One Million Years B.C.* in Lanzarote, when you were on the back of a flat-bed truck directing a motley group of skimpily leather-clad actors, brandishing our spears at non-existent prehistoric predators. There were moments of hilarity amidst the great acting, but we were all incredibly excited and honoured to be a small part of your innovative genius. I also remember that you very kindly allowed me to see you at work with your models. Awesome!

I send you much love and hugs which I shall deliver in person on your birthday. Have a wonderful evening.

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## Honor Blackman

I am really sorry not to be able to share this marvellous celebration of Ray's life and work with you all this evening.

I think of Ray more as a magician than a man of immense imagination and a brilliant technician. There we were, we thespians, acting our socks off in the ordinary world while he was holed up in his studio of magic, weaving his spells, hoping that we were all doing him justice.

I couldn't possibly have imagined that forty-odd years later this classic, *Jason And The Argonauts*, would be enthralling not just youngsters but all ages, generation after generation. It was such a bang watching my very small grandchildren glued to the screen and sudden cries of 'There's Nonna!' Then they turn to look at you and can't quite work it out. To be truthful, I think they recognise my voice rather than my person since (this is tongue in cheek) I don't wear my hair like that now!

The location in Italy was great, as was dear Don Chaffey, our director, and I really fancied the idea of sitting up on high with Niall MacGinnis controlling the events on earth; my children tell me it was the role I was best suited to!

To have my bust sculpted (I use the term in the artistic sense) for the figurehead on the prow of the ship, the *Argo*, I was laid on a table in just my bra – above the waist – told to throw my arms backwards and raise my front off the table as far as I could while they took photos from all angles. It took ages. I wonder what happened to those photographs? Do you think they'll turn up on eBay one day or might we find them in that wicked Ray Harryhausen's bottom drawer?

I wish you a wonderful evening Ray, a very happy birthday and many, many more, and I send you a great big kiss.

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## Judi Bowker

Unfortunately I am not able to be with you in person, only in spirit, but I wish you all good on this significant day.

I remember your tireless and patient presence on the set of *Clash Of The Titans*. Invariably courteous, utterly charming but equally quietly determined to get your own way, which if I recall you did – every time!

A great artist and a great gentleman. God bless you, Ray, and I wish you a great evening.

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## Bob & Kathy Burns

There is more to greatness than achievement. You have achieved greatness in the work you have given the entertainment world and the challenges you have undertaken to provide the very best in stop motion animation film making. But the pinnacle of achievement is to inspire. You humbly lead, guide and teach. You encourage. In that lies your true greatness.

Evidenced by the very numbers here to celebrate with you, coming from many countries, the honour they bestow is but a tiny portion of the adoration of the very many more who wish you well. The precursor to the word 'greatness' is 'respect', and you are one of the most respected men we know. There are terms 'legendary' and 'historical', and, yes, they apply to you. But it is in your inspiration that your warmth carries hope to so many who reach to

achieve. We have met so many young boys and girls, not even teens yet, who are setting up animation tables and shooting with their hand-me-down cameras. They look to you, the master, for the examples of their efforts.

For the exemplary life you've led, for the gentleman you are, for the good friend you've always been, we salute you on your birthday and wish you many, many more in good health and with a happy heart.

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## Desmond Davis

*Clash Of The Titans* was filmed in three locations in Spain, three in Italy, in Malta, Gozo, Cornwall and Pinewood Studios. During the location shooting, Ray filmed the back projection plates he would need later in his studio, and supervised the actors' moves when they were required to energetically fight fresh air into which Ray would later add two-headed dogs or six-foot scorpions by that alchemy he has made his own.

After the close of shooting, I was often in the cutting-room in Pinewood working with Timothy Gee, the editor. I would sometimes creep quietly into Ray's small stage and stand in the shadows and watch him at work. A Mitchell camera with a single frame device was linked to a background projector which advanced it frame by frame in sync with the camera. The small articulated figures (in memory) not more than eighteen inches high were in front of a translucent back projection screen and lit by a couple of spot lamps. Ray had extreme knowledge of these tiny figures because he had designed, engineered and constructed them himself.

With a click Ray would shoot a frame then, with the finesse of a ballet dancer,

move forward and make minute changes to the arms, legs and faces, each in turn, to advance the action. These moves had to be made with extreme care and great precision and with arcane knowledge of how these changes would flow into a continuous smooth movement. Remember there are 24 frames for every second of film and that's more than 1,400 frames for every minute. So Ray's output per day was measured in seconds rather than minutes. So it's a slow and painstaking process that requires great patience, technique and a special sort of artistry. Ray always referred to his work as 'my art'.

Sometimes I sit in cinemas and see the latest special effects and animated films and very accomplished they often are, using computer generated imagery. But then the credits roll and armies of designers, computer nerds, techies, model makers and specialists of every description scroll up the screen in a never-ending succession. Sometimes the credits seem longer than the movie and I think back to Ray, a lone figure in a darkened stage, silent except for the occasional click of his camera. No army made his animations – just a single magician.

Congratulations, Ray, on your 90th Birthday.

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## Rolf Giesen

### *Cave Artist of the Virtual Age*

Although I know that Ray never was into computer graphics and animation, and doesn't use the internet or communicate by emails, the influence of his art had a strong impact on future dreamsmiths. It has culminated in a mix of live backgrounds and actors with

the stunning imagery of stop motion fantasy and having both worlds interact, with the awesome highlight of the heroes of myth and legend, like Jason and Sinbad, encountering artificially manipulated skeletons.

While his interest is mainly focusing on classic paintings and sculptures, quoting Gustave Doré et al, with a German father being a mechanic and engineer (Harriehausen is a rare but not uncommon German name), a career in filmmaking, in the tradition of Willis O'Brien and George Pal, may have saved his life in World War Two, doing his duty in the Army Signal Corps. His vision as an artist might be called conservative but they will prove a link in the art history of mankind between a bygone mechanical age and the current digital era.

In fact, I am convinced that we are on the threshold of virtualization, that in the next centuries mankind will become virtual, with the human brain substituting as interface. Maybe later generations, technically advanced as they are, will look upon our early efforts as childish stuttering, as we do now entering a stone age cave and seeing cave art as one of the earliest expressions of mankind.

In this regard, Raymond Frederick Harryhausen (or Raimund Friedrich Harriehausen in German language) is a cave artist with a number of disciples who made the transition from mechanical to virtual, and helped to found the digital age: Dennis Muren, Peter Jackson and James Cameron. Today there is an inflation of digital images. Once you've seen them you have forgotten. Ray's 'cave art' is different: you will not forget them, they will stick in your mind for a lifetime and will continue to find their admirers in the digital age.

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## Gordon Hessler

I am so sorry that I am not able to join you in this celebration of Ray's birthday. Happy Birthday Ray! May I share with you just one thought about Ray's genius?

Today, when you watch a special effects epic and the end credits roll by, suddenly they change to two columns to accommodate all the names of the special effects crew that has become too large to display sensibly. As this endless credit goes by, the audience are already leaving the theatre baffled and mostly bored about the different department names assigned to so many technicians required to make such a film today.

On Ray's pictures in his Dynarama process, there is only *one* credit – Ray's – because he creates and produces all the work alone, without any help.

You at BAFTA and the BFI are all film buffs I know, and you all know that motion picture film runs at 24 frames a second. This means that Ray has to supply 1,440 images just to get one minute of finished film. Working in a small studio alone, probably no larger than a large portrait studio, he superimposes on the finished film his magic creations – the Skeletons, the Hydra, and even the Goddess Kali with her six hands each holding a sword – moving the extraordinary armatures he has created, one frame at a time. The complexity before, during and especially after shooting is unimaginable and one mistake in his studio is a disaster in time. After finishing his picture I was able to direct another film before he was ready for me to return for editing. Yet the total film budget of his films wouldn't come close to paying just the special effects budget of a film today.

Ray is a remarkable gentleman, a Californian anglophile inspired by the classic Greek adventure tales and its culture that he admires so much. His films have brought us so much happiness in our present troubled world, and they will always be with us.

In closing, you're fortunate that I am not with you today: you would have to kick me off the rostrum to stop me talking about Ray, because I could go on all night!

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## Laurie Johnson

Happy Birthday, Ray! I'm so sorry that I'm unable to be with you tonight at this so well deserved tribute. Of course, it's many moons since we worked together with Charles Schneer on *The First Men In The Moon*, but I well remember visiting you often in your solitary studio and watching you meticulously and painstakingly manipulating your creations. I thought that you treated them more as a father would than a technician. You seemed to welcome my visits then and I wish I could be visiting you again this evening.

On this, your special night, two of our very much missed friends come to mind – Bernard Herrmann and Miklós Rózsa – who were also great admirers of your unique talent.

Congratulations, Ray, and God Bless.

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## Randal M. Dutra

Harryhausen.

The name is legendary and conjures up so many memories and moments of rapture. All of us have been profoundly moved, motivated and inspired by this man.

How many individuals can claim such an influence on so many of us for so many years?

Ray's unique artistry matches his technical abilities; thus he is a Renaissance Man by even the most rigorous of definitions. We see Ray's finished product and, like the audience watching a fine ballet, we are held so completely under the spell that the 'terrible toil' is well hidden. How many hours, days, weeks, months, years were spent in periods of preparation and self-imposed isolation that allowed for such laser-like concentration and industry? Ray has logged more hands-on frames than probably anyone else in the business. Yet he kept his passion stoked even as he patiently and minutely manipulated his iconic creations, giving them lives that have since burned into our collective conscience.

For a Master Course in Animation one need only to view – and re-view – the opening beach sequence in *The 7th Voyage Of Sinbad*, where the Cyclops makes his first appearance. He roars with a thunderous fury and purpose that continues to galvanize audience members clear to the back row! It's all there: stunning character, impeccable timing and wonderful acting choices. That's entertainment!

There is a reason that Ray Harryhausen is beloved. He has given so much of himself; the Harryhausen legacy is secure for the ages. Ray has kept stop motion alive; he made many of our careers possible. Nowadays, it literally takes legions to achieve what he did. Even as we continue to explore what is beyond the doors that Ray boldly opened for us, we will never capture his magic in quite the same way.

Happy 90th Birthday, Ray, and may you continue in good health!

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## Tom St. Amand

A day seldom goes by when I don't think of the tremendous gift you have given to all of us who grew up loving your work and your movies.

I still treasure the childhood memories of which films like *Jason And The Argonauts* were such a part, and I think of you as a favourite uncle who was always there when you needed a helping hand.

May God bless you and Diana on what I'm sure will be a joyous birthday.

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## Harry Walton

Ray Harryhausen was and still is the single most important and influential person in my life. Ray's unique ability and vision has brought life to some of the most memorable images in motion picture history.

Thank you, Ray, for the inspiration that led me on a life long career that I enjoy to this day. Happy 90th Birthday, and for many more to come.

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## Douglas Wilmer

A humble tribute.

In *Jason And The Argonauts*, as I am sure you know, I occur in the first few minutes of the film, well before Ray's most spectacular work comes into play. I did of course meet him daily, without being fully aware of what was to be his immense responsibility for the future amazing success of the film.

I remember well that he was charming and most self effacing, and in no way did he

ever appear to give himself the importance that was certainly his due.

By the time I next came into contact with him, in *The Golden Voyage Of Sinbad*, I had, of course, seen and been totally amazed by his miraculous work in *Jason*, and so I knew what to expect. As my role in *Sinbad* was largely that of elder statesman, my principal function was, so far as I remember, to shelter the cowering leading lady, while Sinbad did his stuff in defeating a succession of Ray's incredible monsters.

Not myself being in any way of a technical turn of mind, I was never able to begin to understand the filmic processes employed so amazingly by Ray in superimposing his super-imaginative creations.

It goes without saying that the actors' reactions in these frightening situations had to be left entirely to the script, our imaginations and, of course, the director. The focus of our reaction to any of these situations had to be most carefully orchestrated by him, as none of Ray's menacing beings were actually there and visible to us. They were all miraculously inserted by Ray in the laboratory after our reactions to them had been filmed.

I owe him a great thank you, for having created the two splendid films in which I had the honour and great pleasure to take part.

I send him my warmest, best wishes for his 90th birthday and humble congratulations on his life's work, and can only regret that I am unable to be present to do so in person.



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