

EDITFEST 2008

BY WALTER FERNANDEZ JR.

AMERICAN CINEMA EDITORS

American Cinema Editors held its first-ever festival last summer bringing together some of the top editors in the film and television industry to discuss their craft, work, experiences and road to Hollywood. The two-day event was geared toward giving students, assistants and others interested in editing an uncommon opportunity to hear from and speak with successful working editors. Advances in technology afford the modern editor many conveniences and advantages never thought possible two decades ago, but with that, some important elements of the process diminished. The apprenticeship period, which was once an essential step for many aspiring editors in learning technique, is one of those elements. EditFest provides these tyros direct access to film professionals that are otherwise confined to their own solitary workspaces. Universal Studios and Hollywood's Egyptian Theatre played hosts for individual panel discussions that comprised EditFest.

WELCOME TO EDITFEST - OPENING NIGHT

The festivities kicked off on Friday, August 8, on the Universal lot where current ACE President Randy Roberts moderated the opening night forum of some of ACE's most devout members: Tina Hirsch (*"The West Wing"*), Maysie Hoy (*The Joy Luck Club*), Bonnie Koehler (*"House M.D."*), Carol Littleton (*E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*), Stephen Lovejoy (*"Eureka"*), and Michael Tronick (*Hairspray*). Rather than cover myriad topics in one night, Randy decided to have the panelists engage the audience with their own journeys of how they got to where they are now.

For most of the guest speakers, editing was not some driving force in their adolescence that pointed a clear trajectory toward the future. The pursuit of artistry is hardly ever a straight, narrow line. Maysie Hoy had a much different approach that relied more on serendipity and gumption. Hoy started out as an actress and landed a role in the Robert Altman classic *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* that was shooting in her native Vancouver. The part would transform her life and she quickly made her way down to Los Angeles. After being handed random jobs behind the scenes of Altman's films, she began assistant editing on none other than *Nashville* and remained an itinerant extension of Altman's camp into the '90s.

In Carol Littleton's case, growing up in Oklahoma, her first ambition in life was to escape the dust bowl. She made her way to Paris where she took up the oboe and studied music. There, the reclusive lifestyle of a classically-trained musician practicing in a room for hours, for days on end, couldn't compare to the moments spent walking along the Seine or enjoying lunch at the Place Vendome. Why waste away her days cooped up in a practice room when she could be outside embracing a life that was so much more forgiving, so much more inviting. She changed her major to literature, but said that she would continue playing the oboe as long as she didn't have to practice. In Paris she met a fellow who would later become her husband. Together they moved to Los Angeles so that he could attend film school at USC. She went to UCLA to study literature but began taking entry-level jobs in film. When she walked into the editing room she was mesmerized by what she saw. The concept of putting all the pieces together seemed like trying to orchestrate a symphony. She was smitten. The irony of it all was that an editing room looks very similar to a practice room. Interestingly enough, she never paid her dues as an assistant and after her fifth and sixth films, *Body Heat* and *E.T.*, respectively, she would never have to.

Timing is everything in editing as it is in life and career. Bonnie Koehler was an art history student at Stanford when the call for a career rang loudly her senior year. With her colleagues heading to law



SEE WHAT SOME OF THIS YEAR'S ATTENDEES ARE SAYING!

This is a wonderful resource for editors to share with other aspiring, working, or just curious editors their story and their work.

One of the great things about this event is that it's a great opportunity for networking or just being able to converse with editors whose work you admire. It's a real big deal. It's like an actor meeting their favorite actor/actress or a musician meeting their favorite musician.

This event needs to continue every year—it's kind of like an editor's own Comic-Con. This event served the needs for people who love editing, want to get tips on editing or just share tips with other editors.

It also allows other editors to meet one another. Editors are always trapped in a box in which they don't get to meet other editors. So maybe someone working in TV who wants to get into Film can come to EditFest and meet those Film editors and vice-versa.

To make a long story short thanks. I never would have figured out on my own how to get in contact with all these editors. I'm from out of town and it's hard to get your foot in the door but with EditFest you meet so many great people it's hard not to come out on top.

Peace and Blessings,
Saleem

I was an attendee at EditFest and I'm a student from Video Symphony.

Many thanks to you and everyone at ACE for organizing and running EditFest. I learned so much from all the editors. Also, I was impressed with how friendly you and each editor were at this event. Thanks again for making EditFest such a great experience.

Best Regards,
Paul Stoico

school or medical school, her next step was not paved. Almost like army recruitment, she saw a poster of an attractive young man holding up a camera promoting Stanford's summer film institute and signed up. After completing the program, she packed up her short film and her liberalism, and headed to San Francisco to pursue a career. She opened up the phone book and found the number to American Zoetrope. Shortly thereafter, she walked into the Zoetrope offices and demanded that Francis Ford Coppola look at her film. George Lucas, Philip Kaufman, Van Morrison and others also happened to be in the room. This brazen act was met with respect rather than disdain and she was soon editing in Zoetrope down the hall from Walter Murch, A.C.E., and Richard Chew, A.C.E. Her trim bins were always neat, organized and labeled, so refined that Richard Chew took notice and hired her to help out on *Star Wars*. A few years later she was the sound editor on *The Empire Strikes Back*.

As in life there are always pitfalls and new priorities that derail us along the way, often times for the better even though they initially feel like doom. Michael Tronick recalled that the very room we were sitting in, Screening Room 3 on the Universal lot, was referred to as the "Dramedy Room" in that here is where comedies go to die. He was referring to an initially rather poor preview screening of the film *Midnight Run* where the laughs for the dark comedy were minimal at best. Maysie Hoy left the industry for nearly a decade to raise her family but when her husband fell on hard times she decided to return to editing and work her way back up. A year of unemployment followed and she was hired onto a project from which she was later summarily fired. She had never been fired from any job before. She went home dismayed, wondering what this could possibly mean for her career. Her husband reassured her and said, "If you're in this business long enough, something bigger and better will happen to you." As if out of a movie, his last few words were drowned by the phone ringing. It was the call for work on the Oliver Stone-produced film *The Joy Luck Club*.

The course of one's career can be arduous at times but there are those few that help us along the way that make all the difference in the world. Stephen Lovejoy wished that he had told editor Edward Biery how much of a positive influence he was in his life. Biery loved to edit and for him the worse the film was, the more he got excited about the project. Lovejoy knew he wanted to be like that. There is a lot to be said about motivation and it was a theme that resonated throughout the evening and the festival. Tina Hirsch worked for free at a trailer house learning how to edit wherever she could and she owed much of her opportunities to generous editors who let her cut scenes. Randy Roberts was working as a second editor on the movie *Straight Time* when both the director and editor left the project leaving him alone in the editing room with Dustin Hoffman. After working together on this film, Dustin called up producer Robert Evans and told him to hire this kid for his next movie. Hollywood is a town where who you know can help tremendously, but sometimes taking advantage of a less than perfect situation can be even greater.

The cocktail reception that followed out on the patio gave the audience a prime opportunity to mingle with the editors and possible future employers. Everyone stayed well after they stopped bringing out food and Avid technologies was on hand with a demo booth of their latest technologies. The night was a success.

PRIME CUTS

Last year the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences inaugurated the first-ever Prime Cuts event. The showcase brought together some of the top editors in television to discuss their work, much in the tradition of ACE's annual Invisible Artists, Visible Arts forum before the Oscars. This year, Prime Cuts was made to coincide with EditFest and kicked off day two at the Egyptian Theatre.

Shawn Ryan, creator and executive producer of "*The Shield*," served as moderator for the panel, which included: Maris Berzins ("*Project Runway*"), Gregg Featherman ("*Entourage*"), Chris Nelson ("*Lost*" and "*Mad Men*"), Tatiana S. Riegel ("*Pu-439*"), Andrew Seklir ("*Battlerstar Galactica*") and Leo Trombetta ("*Pu-439*"). Television editing does not get the same amount of respect and attention as film editing does, which is really a disservice to the craft. Editing for television is often more strenuous and unforgiving than film and even though most television shows have to cut for commercials or account for shorter running times, there is an art to making it all work.

Ryan focused mainly on their current work and processes in an often-chaotic atmosphere. Chris Nelson brings his expertise to this year's Emmy Winner for best Dramatic series "*Mad Men*" as well as past Emmy winner "*Lost*." Both shows have the kind of following people blog about but Nelson finds "*Lost*" a bit more challenging and interesting to edit because it is so conceptual and obtuse in its storytelling. He recalled trying to edit an episode in which fifty percent was spoken in Korean. Not knowing the Korean language, he kept asking any Korean speakers if the actress in the scene was any good. On "*Lost*," some of the major plot points, especially for season finales are kept under

wraps even from the cast and crew until moments before shooting. Consequently, the editors will have multiple endings to put together in order to keep the spoilers at bay. Andrew Seklir has recently been made the supervising editor of *"Battlestar Galactica"* where he has worked steadily since 2004. Seklir works at making sure the special effects do not overwhelm the story and that when scripts often run long, he can shave them down to a respectable running time.

Gregg Featherman began editing super 8mm when he was 9 so it seems this was in his blood. Part of what makes his work so successful on *"Entourage"* is his ability to edit multiple genres and overlapping dialogue. There is a fair amount of improvisation on the show and often times it is interrupted by documentary style scenes and film scenes, which are interwoven within one scene. The art is making the scene feel fun and smooth without feeling disorienting or too busy. Featherman championed his assistants for making it possible for him to do the complicated job. Tatiana Riegel echoed his sentiments and added what a pity it was that fewer and fewer assistants are receiving the proper apprenticeship training. There is nothing like sitting in the same room with an editor and looking over his shoulder and learning the craft one-on-one. Tatiana vaults back and forth between television and features and came to discuss a not so uncommon occurrence in someone's editing career. Some three years ago, Riegel edited a television movie called *PU-239* and then went off to work on *Lars and the Real Girl* and *There Will Be Blood*. While she was off doing other work, the creative forces behind the project felt they wanted to make some significant alterations to the narrative structure of the story. Initially the two main characters didn't meet up until half way through the picture, but now the powers that be wanted their lives to be interwoven throughout the narrative in a more Tarantino style convention. Unfortunately, Tatiana was already committed to her current project so editor Leo Trombetta stepped in to make the changes. Coincidentally, Riegel and Trombetta were working down the hall from each other as Leo reedited the movie.

Getting work is usually a hustle because it's freelance and many editors do not have agents hunting down meetings for them, so word of mouth and a great reel are very important to an editor's career. While actors have the audition process and headshots, editors really have their personalities to go off of. Riegel commented a meeting is usually when the directors decided whether they could see themselves working with you for months in a closed space and discuss every minutiae of footage. Your reel often gets you a meeting but it's your personality that will carry you far. Stephen Lovejoy commented in the opening night panel that he got his first job based principally on his manner. The hiring manager didn't care that he had made a film but was impressed that Lovejoy was well dressed, looked him in the eye and answered all this questions. This is true of most jobs, but the intimacy between a director and an editor is a delicate interplay. Albeit brief, their dynamic plays a powerful role in the fate of a film or television show.

Maris Berzins has the distinction of editing for non-scripted television. This means that there is no script for him to jump off from or month of production where he can survey the contestants, challenges and judges. For every episode, he must sort his way through 120 to 150 hours of coverage. He credits the field crew for supplying him with enough good coverage so that he can put together a tense, fun and interesting hour of television. *"Project Runway"* created a new vernacular for Bravo reality shows that is now mirrored on other networks. Berzins feels the success of shows like *"Runway"* and *"Top Chef"* are due to the fact that extolling talent is at its core. More than just a receptacle for cheap drama or sex, every episode is an exercise in creativity. He hopes that his skills in reality television will not pin him as a one-trick pony and that he could easily translate to scripted fare if and when he makes the move.

SUMMER BLOCKBUSTERS

The next panel returned to Universal Studios and picked back up again with 4 summer blockbuster editors: Mark Goldblatt (*Starship Troopers*), Mark Helfrich (*X-Men: The Last Stand*), Dan Lebel (*Iron Man*) and Rick Shaine (*The Incredible Hulk*). ACE Vice President, Alan Heim moderated the afternoon discussion by highlighting the differences between editing a conventional movie and a Hollywood summer blockbuster. Invariably, there were three common attributes that set them apart from the rest: (1) budget, (2) special effects, and (3) an immovable release date. All the editors agreed that it was better to be brought on early because it gave them a chance to work with the pre-vis (pre-visualizations) which gives the editor an idea of what is expected to be shot and where special effects will come in. Unfortunately for Shaine, he was brought on late in to *Hulk* and was expected to disregard the already established pre-vis in favor of something new that he would have to conjure. The experience was not ideal but Shaine felt that an editor not being too heavily involved early on, particularly with the creation of the pre-vis is good. For him, the changing role of the editor that is now heavily involved in the pre-production aspect of a film is damaging to their overall objectivity in postproduction.

SEE WHAT SOME OF THIS YEAR'S ATTENDEES ARE SAYING!

"I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the ACE EditFest. The young filmmakers and students were truly inspired by being close to ACE editors and by our collective window onto the creative process.

Hopefully, EditFest will become an event each year. I was inspired by all the editors who participated. We do not have an opportunity to work together, so it was great to be renewed by each editor's enthusiasm and dedication. Our styles and backgrounds may differ, but we are all committed to the same craft."

Carol

"I had the privilege to attend EditFest...as I'm sure you heard many times now - it was fabulous! Not just the stellar panelists (who blew my mind and rocked my world), but the entire welcoming, wonderful vibe. The facilities, timing, and overall organization was so impressive. And, you picked a great volunteer staff...both nice and competent (a winning combo).

I learned so much, made new friends and am truly fired up to put it all to work on this craft and art I love so much. So, many thanks for a tremendous effort and a fantastic event."

Kind Regards,
Rene Claire Spencer

"Just wanted to say THANK YOU VERY MUCH for allowing us to attend the EditFest. It was well done and very informative; I definitely learned a lot.

Your staff did an excellent job organizing it."

Thank you,
Christina

The release date race that comes with a summer blockbuster often leads to a deluge of visual effects delivered every day. As a result, there is often less time to edit and a need for more than one editor. One of the biggest trends in editing summer blockbusters, Helfrich mentioned, is the proliferation of CCBs (could be better moments) in the preview process. The pressure to deliver a movie by a release date that has had millions in advertising and theaters booked for its opening weekend, often leads some scenes in a film that could use more work to be left in, because there simply isn't enough time or money to manipulate it for the premiere. These scenes are often passable but sometimes rectified in the DVD release under the moniker Director's Cut. For the average blockbuster, it takes roughly a year from production to release date. Some blockbusters like *Pirates of the Caribbean* have about six weeks of postproduction which is tight, considering the amount of special effects and characters.

The changes in technology have made it so that these editors can't escape working on the film. A few editors have their editing bays at home and others work from laptops while on the road. Helfrich recalled that on his way to the Maui Film Festival, the studio told him he needed to work. He asserted that there was no way he could miss seeing his film premiere at the Maui Film Festival so they gave him a laptop to edit some scenes while he was on the plane. Looks like there is no rest for the weary.

ANIMATION – A CELEBRATION

The animation panel followed with Tom Atkin holding sway over the room. Atkin was a marketing consultant in the entertainment industry and was no stranger to the animation realm. On the panel were: Torbin Bullock (assistant on *Cars*), John Carnochan (*Beauty and the Beast*), Paul Cichocki (Pixar production supervisor), Axel Geddes (second editor on *WALL-E*), Clare Knight (*Kung Fu Panda*) and Jim Stewart (*Monster's Inc.*). Editing for animation is not too dissimilar from editing live-action but there are a few key elements. Animation editors work very closely with the story department and are often able to order shots. The layout process really makes the movie because it is the phase before animation is added and the final product is assembled. Bullock mentioned that it is the supervising editor that they have the most interaction with because they serve as the liaison with the director and other departments. Clare added that most of her day is spent in various meetings and that she actually doesn't start editing until 6pm. In the end, Stewart concluded that animation "all starts with sound." From whatever the actors breathe into the lines of the script, they and the story department fuse what they can from the materials given and create an alternate world.

BRING IN THE FUNNY

The final panel of the day dealt with editing for comedy. Steven Rasch hosted the event with guests: Craig Alpert (*Pineapple Express*), Janet Ashikaga ("*Seinfeld*"), Dana Glauberman (*Juno*), Jeff Gourson (*Big Daddy*), Peck Prior (*Uncle Buck*) and Kevin Tent (*Sideways*). Like good editing, timing is everything in comedy so an editor that understands delivery is essential to a successful comedy. Prior noted, "Brevity is the soul of wit." Clouding a scene with too many jokes and sight gags would drown out the big laughs that are intended to be the main focus. The old "less is more" credo works when editing comedy. In Ashikaga's case, she learned a lot from Larry David who was very sensitive to every character getting their moment to shine so that other actors wouldn't step on anyone else's lines. Rasch concurred and felt Larry David was a genius about how to bring in levity in "*Curb Your Enthusiasm*" where humiliating or awkward moments are undercut by music cuing the audience that it's okay to laugh at their situations.

Another major aspect of working in comedies is dealing with comedians, which has an added weight, rather than just dealing with regular actors. Often times, comedians are very protective of their work and if they have enough clout they are in the editing room before the editor. Sandler was usually convinced later on that the changes the editor wanted were the right direction. Alpert informed us that Judd Apatow actually records the audience laugh track during the numerous previews and friends & family screenings in order to gauge what is working and what isn't making much of an impression. This is probably why dramas travel better than comedies overseas. When someone is crying or pointing a gun, the effect is pretty clear to everyone. When someone is telling a joke, so much of it relies on the cadences of the voice and the timing, which are relative to every person.

All in all, EditFest was a resounding success for ACE and it hopes to make itself a more potent creative force in Hollywood and in the entertainment vernacular. Holding hands on certain ventures with others and more events like this will only continue to make it more high profile. From the packed houses and great notices, EditFest is ready for its take 2. **CE**

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I wanted to thank you for putting on a wonderful EditFest over the last weekend. I absorbed huge amounts of information. I also came away reassured about my choice to follow my heart by leaving government intelligence to become a film editor. I hope to speak with you again and to be of some help to ACE in the future. Thank you.

Paul E. Alderman

This weekend at EditFest was a magical event, and I am honored to have met you.

I wish you all great success in your editing careers, and look forward to seeing you all again soon.

Thank you Jenni for bringing us all together.

Julia Tomiyama

Thanks again for allowing inner-city filmmakers attend the festival. I enjoyed myself very much and was really inspired after learning that opportunity for many of the Editors didn't just fall from the sky. They really had to pave their own way. It was an amazing two days. I hope we are able to join you again next year!

Shireen