

THE MAGAZINE FOR FILM & TELEVISION EDITORS, ASSISTANTS & POST-PRODUCTION PROFESSIONALS

# CINEMAEDITOR

THE TELEVISION ISSUE 2

IN THIS ISSUE

**JERROD CARMICHAEL  
REALITY SHOW**

PLUS

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both of an era and of an unexpectedly complex man.”

*The Telegraph*



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD



**H**ello Editors from far and wide. Welcome to a new issue of *CinemaEditor*! But before we dig in to the stories, some headlines from ACE headquarters.

ACE's Annual Meeting was held on June 9 at the always hospitable Garland hotel. And for the first time ever our New York editors zoomed in from Blue Table Post in Brooklyn. We covered a lot of ground including a touching tribute to the passing of ACE member Edgar Burcksen, ACE, NCE. We also heard from a number of the committee chairs and welcomed our new members. Since last year's meeting, ACE has proudly welcomed 98 new members into our organization. Many were present, including Kamal El Mallakh, a new International Partner Member who traveled all the way from Cairo, Egypt, to attend the meeting! It was a great morning and afternoon.

The ever popular EditFest returns! Mark Sept. 7 on your calendars for our in-person EditFest LA and Oct. 5 for the virtual EditFest Global. We are forever grateful to our good friends at Walt Disney Studios and Disney Digital Studio Services who are once again hosting EditFest LA, this time at the historic Grand Central Air Terminal in Glendale – a great space to hear panels, interviews and to mingle with your favorite editors. And the same goes for our virtual event on Oct. 5, discussions, panels, a chance to bond up with editors from all over the world and enjoy breakout rooms with ACE's top editors. A highlight for me will be the screening and discussion with Walter Murch, ACE, on his latest passion project *Her Name Was Moviola*. If you've ever wondered what it was like to actually edit with film, then you must check out Walter's movie. It will give you a crash course in how it was done. I remember myself and let me tell you ... it was a crazy way to cut.

Also at Editfest, ACE will be making a very exciting announcement about a new educational endeavor called The ACE Editing Experience in Collaboration with Netflix. If you've enjoyed cutting the dailies from *Gunsmoke* you're going to love The ACE Editing Experience. So get your EditFest tickets now!

Like a piñata it's time to crack open this issue and discover all the goodies inside, including interviews with editors Geraud Brisson, ACE, and Daniel Martens from *Lessons in Chemistry*; Sam Williams from *Slow Horses* and Peter Oliver from *Baby Reindeer*. Plus an in depth interview with editor, producer and director Eli Despres, ACE, who has brought us humor and tears with his shows, *Jerrod Carmichael Reality Show* and *Couples Therapy*.

Lastly, it's election time at ACE. If you're a member interested in getting more involved in our amazing organization, toss your name in the hat and run for a seat on the board. Our organization, like any other, thrives on the passion and dedication of its members. So don't be shy!

Election time also means I've come to the end of my second and final term as President. It's truly been an honor and a privilege. I have so enjoyed working with the rest of the board, plus Jenni and the ACE team. We have a great organization filled with incredible people. I am so proud of our beloved ACE and everything it stands for. Let's keep at it! Be bold, be brilliant and keep on cutting! **CE** – KEVIN TENT, ACE



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Official Periodical of American Cinema Editors, Inc. Founded November 28, 1950.

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**Matt Allen** is the recipient of the Eric Zumbrennen Fellowship (2020-2021). In late 2022, he finished editing the feature film entitled *American Murderer* starring Tom Pelphrey, Ryan Phillippe, Idina Menzel and Jacki Weaver. His feature film assistant editor credits include *A Man Called Otto*, *Christopher Robin* from Disney, *Bloodshot* and *Sweet Girl*. As an associate member of ACE, he always enjoys working with and being mentored by other ACE members! He hopes to work with another ACE member on a film very soon!

**Harry B. Miller III, ACE**, is a feature, television and documentary editor. His recent credits include *Turn: Washington's Spies* and *The Predator*.

**Adrian Pennington** is a journalist, editor and marketing copywriter whose articles have appeared in the *Financial Times*, *British Cinematographer*, *Screen International*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Premiere*, *Broadcast*, *RTS Television* and *The Guardian*. He is co-author of *Exploring 3D: The New Grammar of Stereoscopic Filmmaking* (Focal Press, 2012) and his favorite film of all time is *Gilda*.

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# WHAT'S NEW!

## NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### CONNECT COMMITTEE LUNCHEON



Among the recent ACE Connect Committee activities was a Pacific Post-hosted lunch at Marino Ristorante with Life Member and Academy Award nominee Lynzee Klingman, ACE, joined by five ACE members: Spenser Reich, ACE; John Rosenberg, ACE; Sandra Montiel, ACE; Leigh Folsom Boyd, ACE; and this writer, Scott Vickrey, ACE. Discussion included her credits from the Academy Award winning documentary, *Hearts and Minds* to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *War of the Roses*, *Little Man Tate* and *A River Runs Through It*. This included some entertaining stories about her working relationships with directors Milos Forman, Mike Nichols, Jodie Foster, Danny DeVito and others. It is rare that one editor has worked with so many talented directors on so many successful films. I had the privilege of working with Lynzee, as an assistant, on two films, and saw firsthand her skills as an editor and in listening and collaborating with directors and peers. This lunch was one in a series that the Connect Committee arranges and hosts, to enhance the interactions between ACE members who may not otherwise have a chance to meet each other. This lunch was truly special. – SCOTT VICKREY, ACE

### CINEMAEDITOR

Coming up next: The Awards Issue



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### WELCOME

American Cinema Editors would like to welcome new ACE members:

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# WHAT'S NEW!

## NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS



### TRIBECA 2024

ACE recently participated in the Tribeca Film Festival, which included a sold out film editing masterclass with Christopher Tellefsen, ACE. During the discussion, the Academy Award-nominated editor drew on samples of his work across three decades, including *Metropolitan*, *Kids*, *Flirting with Disaster*, *Capote*, *Moneyball* and *The Menu*. Jamie Kirkpatrick, ACE, moderated the discussion.

Also at the Festival, ACE partnered with Brown Girls Doc Mafia (BGDM) to present “Making the Cut: Lessons for Emerging Editors.” Panelists included Christina Sun Kim (*New Wave*), Kristina Motwani (*I-800-On-Her-Own*), Nesa Azimi (*DRIVER*) and Siyi Chen (*Made In Ethiopia*). Miki Watanabe Milmore, ACE (*Satisfied*) moderated the conversation.



### ACE SOCIAL COMMITTEE

The ACE Social Committee presented an afternoon of wine tasting on May 19, hosted by editor Jasen Frisby, co-owner of Sequence Wines, at Vintage Wine + Eats in Studio City. Last spring, the committee's schedule also included a hike to the Hollywood sign and games of pickleball.





### LIFE LESSONS

*The Life Lessons column was created for veteran ACE life members to share their personal musings, views and recollections about their experiences in our business. This quarter's column is written by Michael N. Knue, ACE.*

**T**im Zinnemann called me to see if I would be interested in working with him on the sequel to *The Crow*.

Tim was not the original producer, but was brought in because *The Crow: City of Angels* (1996) needed help getting finished. There were lots of cooks in this broth and Zinnemann was tasked with sorting through potfuls of ideas to get to one good cut. Ed Pressman and Jeff Most were the producers of both Miramax films, so Bob and Harvey Weinstein were executive producers.

The problem with sequels is that they exist in the shadow of the original. There are so many expectations that invariably go unmet. Even if they are good films, they lack uniqueness.

*The Crow: City of Angels* had the double difficulty of its dark pedigree. The star of the original, Brandon Lee, had been killed in a prop gun-related accident during the filming of the original. Since the main character, Eric, is a ghost seeking revenge on his killers, Brandon's death haunts *The Crow* legacy, ridden with fiction melding into reality. *City of Angels*, a romance with its own avenging angel, would additionally have to please an audience of hardcore Goth-horror fans.

Ed Pressman gave us several versions of the film to look at. Soft-spoken, gracious, patrician, Ed admitted that too many ideas crowded the cuts. He hoped that as objective viewers we would find a clear way to tell a complicated story. The director, Tim Pope, was around but was discouraged from becoming too involved with Zinnemann and me until we had made a pass.

Nonetheless, I met Tim Pope at his favorite Chinese restaurant in Studio City. He was a tall, gangly, British music video director with no experience in dramatic films. He had been hired for his strong, MTV visual style. In this difficult situation, Tim wanted to make sure I understood his vision for the film. "The first *Crow* was all about dirt," he told me, speaking through his hands covering his face. "*This Crow* is all about water." And the look of the film? "Everything is yellow. Piss yellow." That was it. Those were his directions.

Zinnemann and I watched the various cuts and put our heads together to work on a new version of the film. Although the original editor was no longer on the project, I had convinced Jeff Freeman, who had come on to help

edit just a few weeks before, to stay on. He was invaluable. We cut. We figured. Scenes were rearranged, some were changed, some were left out.

After a few weeks of long days and hard work, we had a cut to show Ed and his fellow producers. They were thrilled. They agreed the film was significantly better and we had cracked the story. I was so relieved, happy to have pleased everyone and looking forward to finishing the film.

The next day, more email praise came in to us from individual producers and execs. However, this time, they each had one or two suggestions to reinstate or remove scenes. We got phone calls encouraging us to return this scene or that moment back to the way it was in a previous version. Everyone had an opinion, but no one agreed.

If we followed these suggestions, we would simply be back where we started.

I now understood the chaotic world the original editor had to work through the previous six months. All the different voices that had knotted the previous cuts were back. Each producer/EP/AP/studio exec had their own pet moment in some earlier cut that they wanted to see back in the film. I suspected these were their individual contributions to the script as it was developed and shot, and they wanted to be able to say, "That's my idea!"

This was not the first time I had inherited a film in progress, and it would not be the last. In each instance, though, I returned to the first cut, the editor's cut, to see what the film is all about. It reflects the best synthesis of script and direction. If the script is weak, you'll see it in the first cut. If the direction is faulty, the first cut points it out. But usually what you see in the first cut is a solid movie that shows the intention of the filmmakers. From there, additional editing hones and polishes the existing vision. It's the lack of a singular, strong vision for the film that causes the confusion. *The Crow: City of Angels* suffered from too many voices.

Tim Zinnemann, Jeff and I, along with an exhausted editing crew, slogged through the myriad of ideas. There were many screenings, and lots of arguments, not the least of which was one that involved Bob and Harvey screaming at Ed, threatening to withhold marketing money. In the end, Tim Z and Ed agreed on an approach and that's how it went. The babble continued but was ignored. The movie was cut, mixed and finished.

*The Crow: City of Angels* was released, but never pleased those Goth fans. Like so many sequels, it merely reflected something original. The specter of the first *Crow*, and all the tragedy that went along with it, hung over the making of the movie. It wasn't unique. It did not have a strong vision. **CE**





## TECH CORNER

### JC Bond: The Media Composer Expert on Settings

BY HARRY B. MILLER III, ACE

"Nowadays, you have to have a degree in computers to set your clock back."  
– *Moonlighting* (1989)

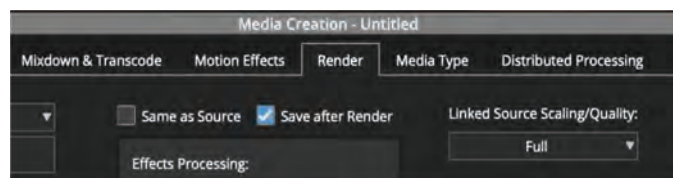
**A**n important part of participating in software beta programs is contributing to the online discussions. I have been testing Media Composer beta software for many years. It gives me a look into interesting new features, and the ability to comment and shape those features. Well, try and shape those features. And I can try and get Avid to fix things that are not working, or that could work much better. Well, *sometimes* I can.

On every beta testing program like Avid Media Composer's, after a while you start seeing familiar names, either those who are good at finding software problems, or those who have knowledgeable answers to questions posed by others.

No one has more answers to how Media Composer works than Joseph C. Bond IV, known to most as JC Bond. And I mean, no one. Whether it is a question about Media Composer's history, or a practical answer of what the software can and can't do, JC is a terrific and most knowledgeable resource.

I sent JC a series of screengrabs, asking if he could share his thoughts and recommendations about better ways to set up Media Composer. He took the time and gave extensive answers. I will post some of those answers here. The rest I will post online at (<http://u.pc.cd/NmdrtalK>).

The first important setting is in the **Media Creation** panel. This is where the project resolution is set, and directing where imported or rendered media is stored.



**JC:** I suggest turning OFF "Same as Source" under Render settings, with this setting off the renders will be done at the resolution the user selects. With this setting ON, the renders are done depending on the resolution of the source material, which can be different from clip to clip.

*I suggest turning ON "Save after Render." Since saving became a background process, I always like to have my bins saved after I have rendered effects; this provides an additional save at those times that I have rendered any effect while working.*

Born in Panama, JC started college studying electronics engineering. When he was 21, his family emigrated to the United States. There he enrolled at the University of Miami and changed majors to film. His aspiration was to become a producer. But his first experience out of college made him realize that producing wasn't as creatively satisfying. He started editing commercials and music videos in Miami.

When a post supervisor asked if he could recommend a film assistant for a feature that was going to be edited in Miami, he put his own name in. And got the job. It went well enough that after a year, he moved to Los Angeles and for the next 14 years worked as an assistant/additional editor. He worked mostly for editors Steven Weisberg and Chris Lebenzon, ACE, on such movies as *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Unstoppable*, *Maleficent*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Then in 2013, Tim Burton hired him as the editor on *Big Eyes*.

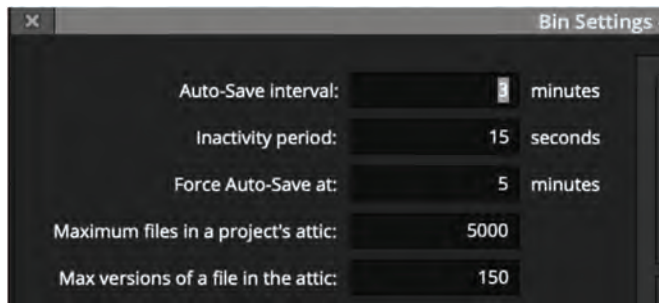
And how did he become so knowledgeable about Media Composer? "My first experience with Media Composer was in 1992, when we bought a system on the movie I was line producing in Miami." His background in engineering gave him a solid computer background. "At the time no one there knew how to use these systems on a film based show, and even though I was the line producer, I became the tech support for our editor, who was cutting on Media Composer for the first time."

#### Bin Settings:

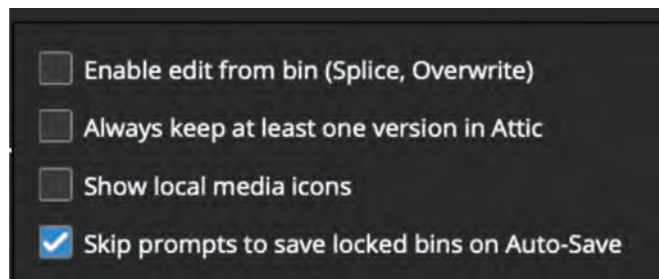
**JC:** Since MC enabled background save, I have my system save as often as it makes sense. So that is Auto-Save every 3



min and Force Auto-Save every 5 min. BUT in a Shared Bin Environment it is important to NOT make the SAVE interval shorter than it takes to save a bin.



**JC:** In a shared environment it is IMPERATIVE that you turn OFF “Always keep at least one version in Attic.” The biggest issue with this setting is that it does KEEP a version of EVERY SINGLE bin ever created in the project, including bins that you considered unnecessary and deleted.



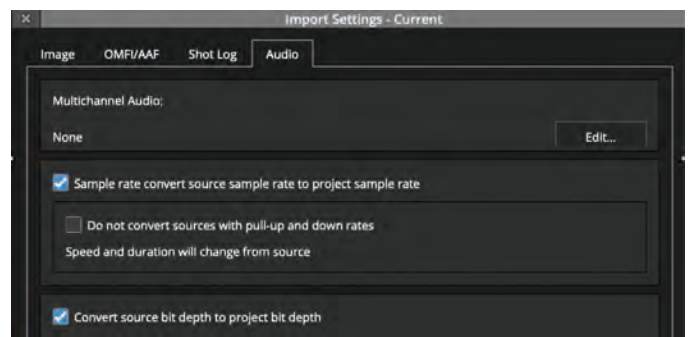
Regarding the Media Composer beta program, JC joined that in 2001. “Since then, I have not finished a project on the same version I started, as I always upgrade to the latest release version of Media Composer as soon as it is available.” But what of the admonition from tech support services that insist everyone on a project be on the same version of Media Composer, and never change during a project? “I do not understand people who stay on an old version. It is not like there is any one version of Media Composer without bugs – they all have them.”

Media Composer is remarkably backwards compatible, meaning I could install an older version and open the same project, bins and timeline that I work on today. Thus, editors on the same project can be on different versions of the software, usually without any issues.

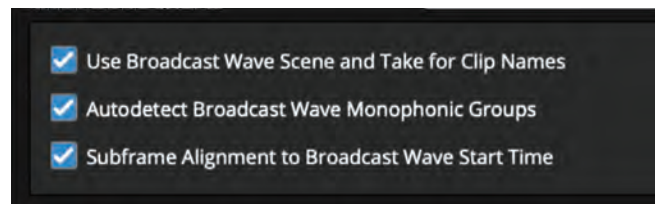
And what is his current hardware setup? “My current and preferred setup is a Windows 11 workstation, always running the latest beta/alpha version of Media Composer. My system has an internal disk array with my Music and Sound Effects library which I carry from project to project and keep adding to all the time. I have an internal Blackmagic 4K card and that gives me all the necessary outputs I need.”

### Import Settings:

**JC:** When importing Audio it is important to always convert to the project settings the Sample Rate AND the Bit Depth.

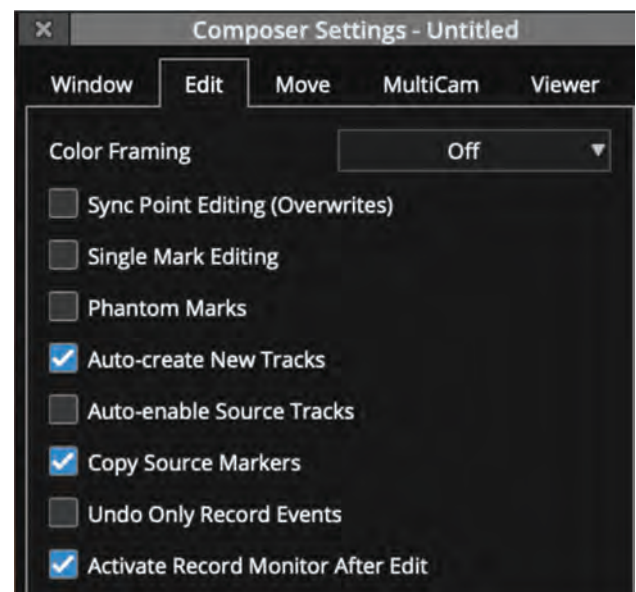


**JC:** When importing Production Audio it is also important to enable Use Broadcast Wave Scene and Take for Clip Names. But this has to be set correctly by the Recordist on Set, otherwise you could end up with the incorrect information here.



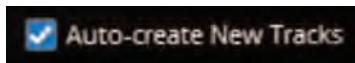
Finally, I asked JC about his thoughts on the future of the film industry. “I think that we are going through another tectonic shift in our industry. Remote editing capabilities will allow for more and more of our jobs to move to other geographic areas, and AI will provide tools for more to be done by fewer people, once again further reducing the size of our cutting rooms. Some AI advances are absolutely welcomed, like the abilities provided by Supertone Clear (an audio noise reduction plugin), and the ability to use AI for TEMP ADR while exploring creative options. But NEITHER of these tools should replace good proper ADR and expert sound work by dialogue editors.”

### Composer Settings:

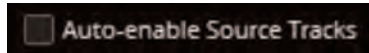




**JC:** I do not use Phantom Marks, but some users may prefer to have them visible.



**JC:** I do normally have Auto Create New Tracks enabled.



**JC:** I hate having Auto-Enable tracks on Source Tracks as I want the system to remember the tracks I had enabled for each clip.



**JC:** I always want the record monitor enabled after an Edit.

For the complete set of tips from JC (and there are seven more pages of tips), follow this link to a PDF (<http://u.pc.cd/NmdrtalK>).

---

### In Other News ...

A kerfuffle recently arose over Adobe's release of new "Terms of Service" for their software. The relevant passage, which all Adobe product users must agree to before/continue using the software, or even cancelling a subscription, was

*"Solely for the purposes of operating or improving the Services and Software, you grant us a non-exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free sublicensable, license, to use,*

*reproduce, publicly display, distribute, modify, create derivative works based on, publicly perform, and translate the Content."*

In other words, you are agreeing to let Adobe have *all rights* to your content. Yikes!

The creative world responded on social media with understandable outrage.


According to the site Lifehacker, initially revised terms were only a slight modification of their previous policy. Here is one of the terms that was changed.

*"2.2 Our Access to Your Content. We may (will-only) access, view, or listen to your Content ...through both automated and manual methods, but only in limited ways, and only as permitted by law."*

The reason they give is for better customer service, to protect from fraud, and check for illegal content, such as child abuse.

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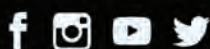
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# JERROD CARMICHAEL REALITY SHOW

Eli Despres, ACE, and Jerrod Carmichael expose the uncomfortable truth of what it might be like being Jerrod Carmichael

BY ADRIAN PENNINGTON

**F**ilmmaker Eli Despres, ACE, first came into contact with comedian Jerrod Carmichael following the release of 2016 fly-on-the-wall documentary *Weiner*. According to Despres, who wrote and edited the award-winning doc about wannabe New York Mayor Anthony Weiner, Carmichael was “a super fan” and approached Despres and Edgeline Films’ production partners Josh Kriegman and Elyse Steinberg about remaking it as a fiction feature.

“We were sort of done with that story but we very interested in watching Jerrod try to get that film made as a fiction piece and following him around in a verité style,” Despres says. “I didn’t know, but Jerrod was closeted at the time and wasn’t ready to open up his life.”

So in 2022 when Carmichael was Emmy nominated for the HBO standup comedy special *Rothaniel*, Despres decided to get back in touch.

“I sent him a fan email because I thought it was an incredible piece of work and he immediately hit me back and said, ‘Can we jump on a call?’

“He had some ideas percolating. I talked about the reality project we’d pitched before and we began to form this idea of peeling back the facade of the lens, looking at the mediated image and then trying to eliminate the mediation.”

Within a week of that first call and with HBO already on board, Edgeline was in production and headed to the Emmys with director Ari Katcher to film Carmichael. “We got into production a lot faster than I’m used to. It was crazy.”

Comedians from Jerry Seinfeld to Louis C.K. have turned their own lives into art but generally in a fictionalized manner. “Jerrod was putting his actual real life on screen. I think that tickled HBO. It tickled me too,” Despres says.

“I mean there’s a ‘holy shit!’ quality. When you see him telling these stories on stage and then you move into his actual life you realize that it’s not a shtick. He’s confessing or unburdening

himself for real. That makes the comedy that much funnier and the pathos that much more affecting.”

In *Jerrod Carmichael Reality Show*, the cameras follow the star as he explores his personal and professional life including with explosive interactions and revelations with his father and mother. It appears to be a warts-and-all expose which is intimate and willfully provocative.

“One of the great things about verité is you never know what you’re going to get. We were often surprised and gobsmacked in production. I mean, it’s a pretty crazy thing to do to mount a television production so you can talk to your dad. He was specifically doing this because it was a framework for him to have these unbelievably difficult interactions with his family.

“If I can psychoanalyze him, the show is very much about him seeking acceptance and love from his parents, in spite of the things in his life that they don’t approve of. His sexuality, specifically. I think there’s a corollary to that where he wants the audience to be brought into that process.”

Peeling back the facade includes letting the audience see the whole artifice of the show’s construction. “We were trying to be as honest with the audience as we can,” Despres says. “Everybody knows that the camera’s there but just acknowledging it does deliver a delightful awkwardness. Jerrod had a good rapport with the crew, in particular Sean [McGing, the DP], and it never occurred to us to cover that up. Sometimes we had to dial it down because we want the story to carry the viewer so that they’re not always thinking, ‘Where’s the gaffer today?’”

By all accounts Carmichael trusted the editors and deliberately excluded himself from the cutting room. “Jerrod is very wary of being dishonest and he didn’t want to make any decisions out of vanity about the way he might appear,” Despres says.

“It’s hard to know whether you’re building a completely fair picture. If anything, I think we erred on the side of making him look worse or less sympathetic than he is. Not that there’s



anything that's untrue but it's just the balance of how reality is shaped by the decisions you have to take as an editor."

Despres also executive produced Showtime's *Couples Therapy* which shares an obvious confessional element with *Reality Show*. "One thing the shows have in common is that there are conversations that are action scenes," he says. "A lot of the emotional combat is cut for suspense and humor. It's not like we invented that, but I think in documentary a lot of conversation is cut for information and exposition whereas we were cutting more for emotion."

The eight 30-minute episodes of *Jerrold Carmichael* are structured around significant events, the first being the Emmys and later ones including Carmichael's experience of a road trip with his father.

"Structuring around these benchmark moments gave the narrative a cleaner arc," says Despres. "The challenge with series work is creating the through line between episodes, especially since working to TV schedules is like building the plane while you're flying it."

"For instance, I knew that the scenes in the diner and at the campfire would be the two tent poles for the road trip. As soon as we shot them I knew that this episode was going to be about Jerrod and Joe [his father] pushing apart or coming together."

"We wanted the spine of the story to be carried by the action that was unfolding in vérité," he says, while interspersing Carmichael's stand-up routines "as a commentary on his life."

The rawness with which Carmichael has laid bare his uncomfortable truths echoes that of Richard Gadd who arguably did similar, albeit as a drama, in *Baby Reindeer*. One wonders if that is coincidence or if there is something trending.

"There's definitely an appetite for seeing something that feels true and is different than we've seen before," Despres says.



One of the great things about vérité is you never know what you're going to get. We were often surprised and gobsmacked in production."



"A lot of shows are just making the show you've already seen but with a new cast or with a different color palette."


"Jerrold has always had a very intimate relationship with his audience. There's been an aspect of confessional to his performances throughout his career. Even where he's closeted and telling jokes early in his career he's leaving breadcrumbs about his real life and his attitude. I think that the audience has a sense that they're hearing something from his inner core."

Despres has been editor, writer or director on a number of documentaries including *The Fight*, *Blackfish* and *They Call Us Monsters* and says he loves to work with "authorial editors."

"My partners and I often hire editors to direct," he says. "We believe in the authorial voice of the editor. We're not looking for technicians or people who just are going to follow a script and push a button. We want people who have a strong narrative sense and an individual voice in terms of how they approach story. Everyone on our team for this show is gifted at making surprising decisions and choices."

The editors on *Reality Show* include Despres' regular collaborator (and wife) Kim Roberts, ACE; James Atkinson; Aaron Wickenden, ACE; Kelsy Jarboe and Delaney Lynch.

"Kim and I have a special relationship with Delaney who worked for both of us as assistant and then as associate editor. Watching her grow into a very strong authorial voice has been a real pleasure."

Despres says he is also a big believer in empowering editors and the apprenticeship system. "Remote work has been terrible for leaving AEs high and dry with no real way to go hands-on and see what was involved in building a show. So, I would encourage producers, directors and editors to bring their AEs physically into the room as much as possible." 

# Baby Reindeer

Peter Oliver on working on the Netflix drama with creator and star Richard Gadd

BY ADRIAN PENNINGTON



A woman walks into a bar and the bartender serves her a drink on the house, little knowing it would be received as an invitation to send 41,000 emails, 744 tweets and 350 hours of voicemails over the next few years. *Baby Reindeer* is the bleakly comic drama of trauma and questionable moral judgment which has become a global and controversial hit for Netflix.

Based on autobiographical events experienced by British stand-up comedian Richard Gadd and adapted by Gadd from his one-man stage show, the limited series also features Gadd as lead character Donny and Jessica Gunning as Martha, the woman who forms a weird attachment to him.

"We were never driven by algorithms," says editor Peter Oliver who cut the first four of seven episodes. "We thought we were making a quirky little show and didn't really know who it was going to appeal to. But Richard, myself, [director] Weronika Tofiliska and [producer] Matthew Mulot were adamant that we would make it the way we wanted to."

Oliver previously worked on medical black comedy *This Is Going to Hurt* and says he likes "quite dark material" but assumed by its title that *Baby Reindeer* must be a kids Christmas show.

"Having read the script I knew I wanted to do this. What I liked, especially about Episode 1, was the humor mixed in the darkness."

The series may be about a female stalker but neither her characterization nor that of Donny is black and white. Judging the tone proved tricky. "You begin to sympathize with Martha so much that you don't want him to do the things that he does to her," says Oliver. "When she is sent to jail it is not a triumphant moment. Richard always treated Martha like a lost soul. They are two lost souls."

The complexity of the characterization caused Oliver to question his own judgment. "When I started getting rushes I was trying to make the audience like Donny. He's a kind of an

anti-hero. You don't always like him and you question why he does certain things."

In Episode 2 for instance, Martha is loudly abusive to Donny in a café. Yet in the following scene, instead of cutting off contact, he follows her home.

"I really quizzed this with Weronika because I felt the whole audience would ask themselves why he would do that? That's the point where you realize Donny is unhinged as well. It was challenging because I found myself not really liking the character at times."

Donny is an aspiring comedian but in scenes of his repeat public performances in comedy clubs and bars his act doesn't get any funnier.

"I really wanted him to be funnier the next time he goes up on stage and so I asked whether we could put in funnier jokes. Richard didn't want to. He wanted to show [Donny] as a failed comedian, which is incredible really, if you think he's laying his credibility on the line."

Another debate concerned the length of the beginning of Episode 1 when Martha first comes into the pub. Oliver felt they'd introduced Martha as a comical character and then made her look too strange too quickly.

"We thought hard about what point she joins eyes with Donny. When he says that she can have a cup of tea for free you know he's done something really special for her. Initially, I had her looking up a lot sooner but Weronika wanted to hold on as far as we can before she looks up."

At the end of that episode Donny makes the bizarre choice of following Martha on social media but it's not until the end of Episode 2 that it dawns on viewers how dark the show is.

"The scene by the canal is one of my favorites because it shows the power of Richard's writing," Oliver says. "You get the jump scare with Martha blocking his path beside the canal.



You get her sexual puns about him going ‘up the stairs’ then it gets darker and finishes with sexual assault. That scene can make you laugh and scared and then be absolutely terrified by the end.”

In Episode 4 Martha doesn’t appear until the end. Instead, it’s an extended flashback to Donny’s time in Edinburgh where he is groomed by a successful TV writer, ending in assault, drug abuse and rape.

“The episode actually starts with comic lightness and Donny at his parent’s house. Then it gets very dark. The rape scenes were horrific. There was a knot in my stomach when I was doing that. For me the hardest thing was Donny crying on the floor afterwards and then his abuser just casually saying, ‘Do you want a cup of tea?’”

“Even worse, Donny returns to his abuser because he’s so driven by the promise of fame and he craves acceptance. These were definitely the hardest scenes to cut but the most rewarding. There was a lot of material, variations in the acting, many different angles. We restructured, trying lots of different routes. What is happening is so discombobulating we had to convey that experience.”

Oliver ran out of time before his commitment to join Netflix show *Eric* kicked in. The episode was finished by Benjamin Gerstein (who also co-edited Episode 3). Mike Holliday (*Ghosts*) cut Episodes 5, 6 and 7.

Gadd/Donny narrates the show’s voiceover which was a source of discussion about how much to include and what the substance would be.

“Richard recorded the VO on set which we put into the assembly but the nuances of what he was saying evolved with the edit. He would regularly go out into the corridor and record different VOs. I’d insert that and we’d all watch it back. There was a lot of to and fro.”

Also under discussion was the extent to which they’d use Martha’s emails and text messages on screen to comment on and punctuate the story. “For a long time in the edit we’d taken them out because I thought they slowed the pace. The reason we include so many of them is it drives home quite how off the rails Martha’s character is and how overwhelming it must have been to receive all those messages.”

It required great discipline to tighten each episode to 30 minutes. Episode 1 for instance came in at an hour to start off




with. “Weronika, Richard and I would be really tough. Do we really need this? Can we take something out? If we did and we felt we were then missing an element we restored it. There was a lot of experimentation.”

“Her character is Donny’s safe place,” Oliver says. “You definitely feel that he’s more relaxed with her. Those are important moments but I think it’s more about Donny in those in those scenes. I’d be watching more for his reactions because it’s all about his secrets and what he’s not telling her. The audience knows he’s lying and begins to dislike him.”

As you’d expect of writer, actor executive producer and chief subject Gadd, he was hands-on in the edit. “Given this is based on his life story a large number of decisions came down to him but he was very gracious and would always let us try things a different way.”

It is arguably masochistic of Gadd to lay out his demons in public. Cathartic too no doubt. Instead of taking the opportunity to shape himself into a more sympathetic person he unmasks more of a universal truth.

“Many people have had darkness in their lives and things in their past that they’re not proud of. I think that’s what audiences have responded to,” Oliver says. “I hope *Baby Reindeer* has helped to open up conversations about male abuse and male rape particularly.

“Richard is a survivor. It’s obviously a really hard conversation to have, but if you have someone else who’s been through a similar thing, then hopefully it’s easier to talk about.” 



“

Many people have had darkness in their lives and things in their past that they’re not proud of. I think that’s what audiences have responded to.”



# Lessons in Chemistry

Geraud Brisson, ACE, and  
Daniel Martens cook up the  
right alchemy for  
the period miniseries

BY MATT ALLEN

**L**essons in Chemistry, a work of historical fiction based on a best-selling book with the same title by Bonnie Garmus, is adapted into a miniseries for AppleTV+.

It centers around chemist Elizabeth Zott, played by Oscar winner Brie Larson, who must navigate the challenges of being a female scientist in 1960s America. When her dream of being a chemist is thwarted and personal hardship leaves her alone with a newborn child, she finds her voice as the host of a cooking show called *Supper at Six*.

The eight-part drama was crafted together by an editing team of Geraud Brisson, ACE; Matthew Barbato; Laura Zempel ACE; Jack Cunningham; Daniel Martens and Lilly Wild.

For Brisson, who edited Episodes 3, 4 and 8, it was an opportunity to reunite with showrunner Lee Eisenberg from their time together working on AppleTV+ anthology show *Little America*.

This prior collaboration paid dividends, Brisson explains, “Because I have worked with Lee, I feel that I meet with him on that tone level. Going into it, I had an intuition about what we were looking for because of the work we had done on *Little America*. It was this balance of drama and comedy. You live in this world where it is a drama with humor in it. The people can be funny, but the situation is probably not.”

He says of Larson’s performance, “There’s a lot of range in terms of what she does from one take to the other. There are a lot of little things that I thought were interesting not to miss in the dailies. The humor that she brought to the part was not to be missed.”

The story about a woman learning to live life on her own terms does not just revolve around Larson’s character. “The chemistry between Brie and Lewis Pullman and between Brie and Aja Naomi King was really great,” Brisson points out. “Lee and I felt that the show was about connections between characters and not necessarily about a single connection or a single person. We were careful about the choices in performances, the timing and the reactions because it was about how the chemistry between characters was passing from one to another.”

Martens served as Brisson’s assistant editor and co-editor. He says it took an entire editorial team to craft the story arc of Elizabeth Zott’s epic journey that included the loss of love and the challenges of raising a child as a single mom.

“Our first two episodes [3 and 4] wouldn’t have worked without the awesome foundation that Matt and Jack had built by cutting two excellent episodes that set up the story. They cut Episode 2 which is where love interest Calvin (Pullman) dies. Episode 3 is dealing with the aftermath and the grief of that event. Then Laura and Lily’s episodes follow and help set up everything for the climax. I think they all did an incredible job.”

The sense of connection that is echoed throughout the show was further highlighted through the use of editing in the final scene of the last episode edited by both Brisson and Martens.

“Geraud did an amazing job with this montage at the end of Episode 8 where Brie is giving a speech to her chemistry class. She is reading from Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* and



Geraud cuts beautiful little pieces, little memories and experiences from throughout the show that illustrate the interconnectedness of all these little beats. She closes the book on that performance and you can see that she's come this long way."

The nonlinear elements of the miniseries and the editing to make it happen play a critical role in the storytelling. Martens reflects, "I remember all the different flashbacks that happened that are not in our episodes. It just kind of makes all that stuff in that final episode and that final montage really hit you in the gut. In my opinion, none of it would land without the team's craft and expertise."

Geraud says cutting the final montage "was a good memory in the cutting room" because Eisenberg, Larson and the show's producer were also there.

"We tried several different directions for it and we got inspiration from one idea into the next. It felt, to me at least, that there was a little bit of everybody in this ending, including the other editors of the show, because I was going back [to other episodes] to create it."

For Brisson and Martens, *Lessons in Chemistry* is the continuation of an editorial collaboration that has grown quickly. Martens recalls, "I was assisting and looking for an editor to work with who I could learn from and who could also show me a different way of doing things than I was used to. A friend



put me in touch with Geraud and right away I could tell we got along. Lucky for me he brought me along to work on AppleTV+ drama *Shantaram*. That was our first collaboration that went for a year and a half. I learned more from working with Geraud than anyone I've worked with – both technically and also in the theory of editing."

For upcoming filmmakers and editors, Martens advises, "There is no set path. Always try to pay it forward in regards to mentorship. Even if you're not fully where you want to be, you can still help people out and be a mentor to those who aren't as experienced. I'm always trying to help out other assistants or whomever is trying to get into TV and make that experience a little bit easier than it was for me."

He adds, "Don't be afraid to meet people and reach out to editors. Everyone loves to talk about the craft. Some might be quieter than others, but everyone enjoys a cup of coffee and to talk about what they do."

Brisson, who cut Academy Award winning film *CODA* and recently served as consulting producer on the F/X series *Shōgun* says, "I was a cinephile as a kid so now it's about finding a way to connect that passion to an audience while making a living. I love stories. I love that we try to find the best way to tell each story. I always find that so exciting. And I think it will always be because there are always more stories to be told." **CE**





# SLOW HORSES

Tinker, Tailor, Editor, Spy:  
Sam Williams on  
crafting the MI5 thriller

BY ADRIAN PENNINGTON

**M**ixing espionage intrigue with whip-smart humor Apple TV+ series *Slow Horses* has burned through three seasons since 2022 with two more in the works. Adapted from author Mick Herron's award-winning novels by See-Saw Films and screenwriter Will Smith, the drama revolves around a group of British spy misfits under the notional command of washed-up MI5 chief Jackson Lamb (Gary Oldman) who somehow manages to get mixed up in plots that endanger state security. Also starring are Kristin Scott Thomas, Jack Lowden, Olivia Cooke and Jonathan Pryce.

The critically acclaimed third season earned multiple BAFTA nominations including for Katie Weiland, ACE, who edited the Season 3 pilot "Failure's Contagious." Sam Williams, who won a BAFTA (and was Eddie nominated) for Episode 1 "Strange Games"; and Zsófia Tólas, for Episode 6, "Footprints."

"We're a little bit shocked to be getting all these plaudits for Season 3 because normally that doesn't happen on a repeat show," says Williams (*Luther*, *His Dark Materials*) who joined for Season 3. "When you come in to edit a season of any show you are standing on the shoulders of giants because they've already done a lot of the work."

One of the production's hallmarks is that one director is handed responsibility for the whole six episode run. In this case it was Saul Metzstein (*Brassic*) whose paths had crossed with Williams on *Doctor Who* but they'd never directly worked together. With Metzstein's regular editor committed to another project, Williams got the invite.

Season 3 opens with an extended sequence shot on location in Istanbul with Williams also in attendance. He explains, "They didn't want to have the expense of having to come back for reshoots so they sent me out there with a mobile edit suite to begin cutting it together. The problem was that I then fell in

love with every piece of the shoot because I'd been so closely involved in it."

The first cut for this sequence ran about 15 minutes when they ideally needed it around five.

"We were always aware that we might have to compromise the sequence because editorially we needed to do two things," Williams explains. "We needed to establish that our two lead characters (Sean and Alison played by Sope Dirisu and Katherine Waterston) are in love with each other. We also need to ensure that we re-introduce Jackson Lamb and the rest of the series regulars as soon as we can."

"The whole motivation for the Season 3 story rests on whether you believe Sean and Alison are in love and the emotional impact you feel at the end of the sequence when she dies."

"That's down to the quality of the direction and acting but just the meeting and falling in love part of the story was originally about five minutes long. In the end we trimmed that down to around 40 seconds."

To do that Williams says he had to become more objective. "No one cares if we were up until four in the morning to shoot and cut a scene in Istanbul. I had to make hard decisions, trim the scene to its essentials, while retaining the action and emotion."

The 10 scenes following this opening were the trickiest to finesse and to order, he says.

"The task was to introduce all our characters without stretching out 20-30 minutes and suddenly finding half of our time has gone by and we've barely started on plot."

The frenetic action which closes the opening scene in Istanbul gives way to Lamb in a doctor's waiting room.

"There's a slow tracking shot across a doctor's waiting room and we just see a pair of feet and hear someone break wind."



You don't quite know it's him, but if you've seen the show before then you know. The tracking shot ends on Lamb's face where he is ruminating on death.

"The editing here is just very simple. It says 'now we're just going to take things very slowly' and shows that we're back in a world where life feels weary.

"Nothing works out the way you want it to. That sort of feeling is imbued in a lot of those opening scenes, so naturally, you're not going to start cutting all over the place."

A follow-up scene with River (Lowden) and Standish (Reeves) packing files of boxes at Slough House continues the theme.

"Packing files is about the most tedious job you can imagine but there's something else going on that isn't immediately apparent which is that the whole story is really about files. If the camera team are favoring shots of boxes in this scene, that's the reason why."

Season 2 hadn't been released by the time they started editing but Williams and Tálas were able to watch rough cuts and get up to speed.

"Music is always a big thing to get sorted before you start any show since it's a large part of the look and feel and pacing," he says. "Obviously here we already had a whole box of tricks to instantly call on whereas the editing team on Season 1 were still figuring it out.

"That said, we do as much if not more work on the sound as on picture. Executives who have invested in a project or are about to buy into it like to see as finished a product as possible so the closer you can polish it with temp FX and music the more likely they are to buy it. The process also helps you as an editor since a little bit of sound adds so much to the drama."



No one cares if we were up until four in the morning to shoot and cut a scene in Istanbul. I had to make hard decisions, trim the scene to its essentials, while retaining the action and emotion."

For example, Slough House, the operational hub of Lamb's division in a less affluent part of London, is intentionally depicted as a dull environment. To help convey that, Williams layers in sounds of road works, police sirens and traffic.

"It's supposed to be in a rubbish part of town so by adding some atmos you can do a lot of the storytelling."

He continues, "It also helps your editing if you've fallen in love with the characters. With two series under the belt, there's a whole history to rely on. You can note certain little looks or things that they do that are shorthand for their character. You know instantly that when you see something in Gary's performance that that is a very 'Lamb' way to do things."

One short scene in Episode 1 shows Lamb ordering a greasy kebab from a High Street take-away. He asks the shop owner to put as much spicy sauce on the sandwich as possible so he can't taste the meat. It's a typically rude and witty remark that tells you all need to know about Lamb's character. Williams thinks Oldman may have ad-libbed it.


"Did you notice the design team having fun in that scene? It's subliminal but there's a wide shot where Jackson goes into the kebab shop and you see a poster on the wall that just says, 'Lamb is Great.'"

Williams edited Episodes 1, 3 and 5 with Tálas cutting the other three. "We critiqued each other's work and watched all the episodes together with Saul."

Another signature of the show's style is intercutting storylines, much of which is scripted but still requires tightening in the edit.

"Many scenes are written a lot longer because the writer won't be quite sure if it's going to work on screen. My job is to ensure it's to the point. I've always found that having a lot of material in a scene really helps the actor with their performance. Even though I've taken some of it out, their performance is really strong emotionally because they've worked through the original script."

He says one of the joys of *Slow Horses* for an editor is to show off different styles. "We go from the energy of a chase in Istanbul or the suspense of the siege at the file storage facility in Episode 6 to simple ones such as Lamb when he's at the doctors.

"It was without doubt the best show I've worked on in a long time. So much fun. Everyone was lovely. And then to be getting all these accolades at the end just makes me realize how lucky am I to have worked on it." 





# 2024 ACE Annual Meeting

**T**he ACE Annual Meeting and brunch was held June 15 at The Garland in North Hollywood, while a garden party was held simultaneously at Blue Table Post in Brooklyn allowing members in New York to follow the proceedings.

Outgoing ACE President Kevin Tent, ACE, led the meeting, and took a moment to thank the membership. “It’s been an honor and a pleasure to have been president of ACE for the last four years,” he said. “I’ve learned so much and have grown to appreciate even more what our organization stands for and what its stated goals are. One of them, and I paraphrase — ‘to advance the prestige and dignity of the editing profession.’ That’s happening. I’ve said it a million times. Editors are the best people and our organization has the cream of the crop.

“ACE is growing and getting better and better every year,” he continued. “So congratulations to you all — you should be proud of yourselves, your fellow editors and our great organization. Be bold, be brilliant and for God’s sake keep on cutting!”

He thanked board members, staff and committee participants as he talked about the past year.

That included highlighting the work of ACE’s active committees, including the Animation, Blue Ribbon, *Cinema-Editor*, Connect, Diversity, Education, International, Internship, London, Membership, Merch, New York, Social and Welcome committees. All ACE members were invited to get involved.

“Thank you to the chairs and your committees for making ACE more vibrant, accessible and relevant. Not to mention adding some fun,” Tent said. “You are really making a difference as to what kind of organization we are and want to be.”

Since last year’s annual meeting, 98 new Active and Affiliate members have joined ACE, in addition to six International Partners. During the meeting, the newest ACE members and Associate members received their plaques. ACE also looked to the future by introducing its latest ACE interns, Jessica Pradhan and Grant Ward, who spoke about their experience in the program (see story, p. 26).

During the meeting, Tent introduced a slide presentation, paying tribute to Edgar Burcksen, ACE, NCE, who died April 7 at age 76. “Edgar was truly an impressive person, a great editor and a quiet force of nature when it came to ACE,” Tent said. “He was the editor of *CinemaEditor* for nearly 20 years and basically rescued it from obscurity. He spent years on the board and recently was the driving force behind ACE’s outreach into the international community with ACE joining TEMPO and our International Partner Program. We are truly indebted to him for his years of creative contributions.”

ACE would like to express its gratitude to meeting sponsor Adobe for its support. **CE**

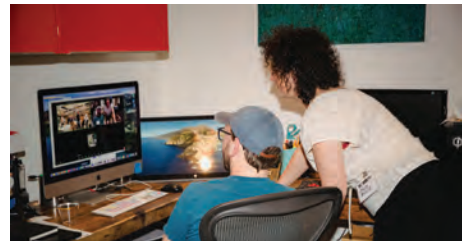


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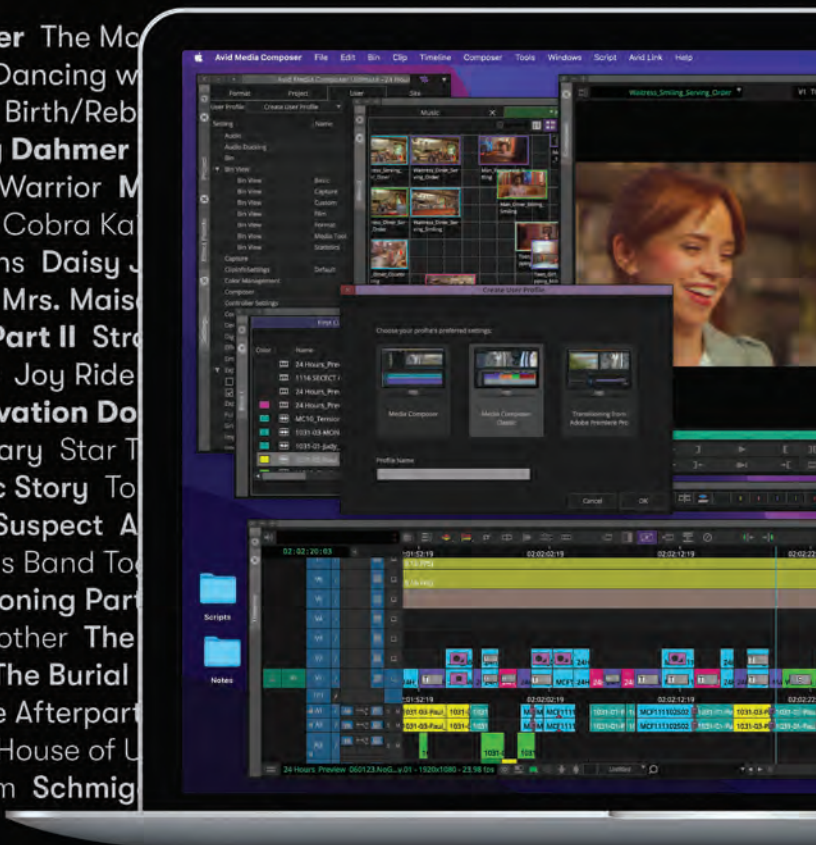
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# Willing to Succeed

The latest ACE interns  
Jessica Pradhan  
and Grant Ward share  
their experiences

**T**he ACE Internship Program is in its third decade and is an outstanding pathway for young editors into the industry. The practical experience these young filmmakers and budding editors receive while in their first professional editing rooms has proven invaluable and is thanks to ACE members and their teams who continue to contribute their time and expertise to this worthy mentorship.

Many of those who have gone through the program have continued on to have successful careers in editorial. They include Gretchen Schroeder (2016 intern), assistant editor on *Megalopolis*; Ben Murphy (2016 intern), assistant editor on *Avatar: The Way of Water*, and McKenna Cook (2021 intern) assistant editor on *Daisy Jones & the Six*.

Co-chaired since 2015 by former interns Carsten Kurpanek and Tyler Nelson, ACE, the Internship Committee selects two interns and provides them with the opportunity to shadow for one week each, the editing rooms of a feature, a television show and an unscripted show. Interns also visit several facilities integral to post-production (e.g. sound stages, VFX vendors, labs, etc.). Interns are being mentored by ACE editors and previous alumni. The ACE Internship Program is geared toward anyone with a passion for editing, who is just starting their career in post-production.

Congratulations to this year's alumni. Let's hear their stories.

## ACE Intern 2024: Jessica Pradhan

I discovered my passion for storytelling at age 15 when I accidentally stumbled upon an editing software, thinking it was a video game! Little did I know, this seemingly ordinary event would set ablaze a passion within me. It was fueled by the desire to weave captivating narratives and share with the world the rich cultural tapestry of my homeland, Nepal.

But as much as I cherished my craft, I knew that to elevate my artistry, I had to embark on a journey of growth and exploration. And so, in 2020, I made the decision to leave behind the familiar comforts of home and venture into the unknown territories of a foreign land: this beautiful country. I was driven by a singular goal: broaden my horizons in the world of storytelling. The prospect of starting anew was daunting, and moments of uncertainty and

doubt naturally crept in. Amidst these challenges, I stumbled upon a beacon of hope – the American Cinema Editors Internship.

From the moment I stepped into the proverbial halls of ACE, I knew I had found my home. Surrounded by a community of driven and talented individuals, I felt a sense of belonging – a camaraderie that I had never experienced before, not even in my hometown.

Over the span of four enriching weeks, I was fortunate enough to shadow some of the industry's most skilled post-production professionals. I witnessed the intricate workings of their craft and the alchemy that occurs behind the scenes. From the grandeur of feature films to the dynamism of non-scripted television, I immersed myself in every niche of the post-production process. From the tranquil sanctuaries of cutting rooms to the bustling hubs of post facilities, I gained an intimate understanding of an industry few get the chance to see up close.

But perhaps the greatest gift of all were the connections I forged and the friends I made along the way. These special bonds, built on our shared passion for editing and respect for one another, have truly made my life so much richer than I ever could have expected!

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Chris Jackson, Mark Helfrich, Steve Edwards, Tara Timpone, Jared Simon, and Art O'Leary for graciously opening their doors and allowing me to shadow them. Their generosity, expertise and unwavering dedication to their artistry have left an indelible impression on me. Under their mentorship, I gleaned invaluable insights, honed my skills and cultivated a deeper appreciation for the power of collaboration.

A very special thanks to my mentor, John Axelrad, who took me under his wing. John, your guidance, wisdom and unwavering support have been the cornerstone of my experience at ACE. Throughout my time here, you have been more than a mentor – you have been a guiding light, a source of wisdom and encouragement and an inspiration to emulate. You have helped me to grow not only as an editor but as a person. Thank you.

I want to express my deepest appreciation for the entire ACE community for welcoming Grant and I with open arms and for creating an environment where learning, growth and camaraderie thrive. Your support has been instrumental in shaping this journey.



I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Jenni, Eliza, Gemmalyn, Carsten, Tyler and my Academy Gold mentor, Troy Takaki, for their invaluable guidance and support as we navigated the intricacies of this industry. Your expertise and leadership guided us through new territories and ensured that we made the most of our experience. And to the countless other ACE members who welcomed us with their warm smiles: I am forever grateful for your kindness and generosity. I look forward to continuing to be a part of this incredible family.

Currently, I am working as a post-production assistant with my aforementioned mentor, Mr. Axelrad, on a feature film. It's been an enormous privilege to be a part of his dream team of talented individuals. Every day, I learn something new and am excited about what I'll learn the next day. And thanks to the nurturing ethos of this incredible program, I know that my journey of learning and honing my skills will never stop.

*With heartfelt gratitude – Jessica.*



### **ACE Intern 2024: Grant Ward**

To say getting the ACE Internship has been a dream come true would be the understatement of the century. Back in 2019, when I was in my first week at Chapman University, I went to a student run event called Film School 101. There, I got the chance to hear advice from upperclassman editors on how to best prepare myself for an education and career as an editor. The overwhelming recommendation each person gave was to apply to this program called the ACE Internship.

At the time, I didn't know anything about it. But it was clear through the way they all spoke, there was something really special going on here. As I did my research on what the program entails, I began to understand why. That night, I bookmarked the application to my Google Chrome browser's hot bar. Over the course of the next four years, anytime I'd log on to my computer, through thesis projects, college life and a pandemic, I had that link staring right back at me.

I'll be honest, my resulting anticipation that built up over those years may have become a tad high. I don't think I've ever screamed louder in my life than when I got the call I landed the internship. Sorry Tyler. But standing here, one year later and

marking the end of the program, I'm genuinely thrilled to report that the scream was unquestionably warranted.

Film school does a fantastic job at teaching you the basics of how to edit, but as I've come to learn, there's a lot more to a career in editorial than just being a good storyteller. From PA, to first assistant, to post supervisor, I now have a much clearer understanding of how every individual acts as a necessary part to the collaborative whole. I had the unique opportunity to observe firsthand the nuanced differences between features, scripted and unscripted, and saw how each medium influences a team's construction, workflow and even day-to-day lifestyle. I have also been able to kickstart my 'quest' to discerning everyone's favorite aspect of this profession: cutting room politics. They don't teach you that in film school.

Beyond that, I have come to a grounded understanding of what the financial realities I can, and will, face as I begin my journey to make this, let's face it, volatile industry one I aim to find a future in.

As someone still so fresh to this field, the internship has demystified many of the confusions, uncertainties and blind spots I've had regarding pursuing my own goals in this space. It's like I've taken a bite of the apple; I can for the first time see the reality of what possible futures lay before me, the good, the bad and the ugly alike. To have obtained this perspective at the beginning of my career, I genuinely couldn't have asked for a greater introduction. It's because of this, I have never felt more prepared to face the coming challenges.

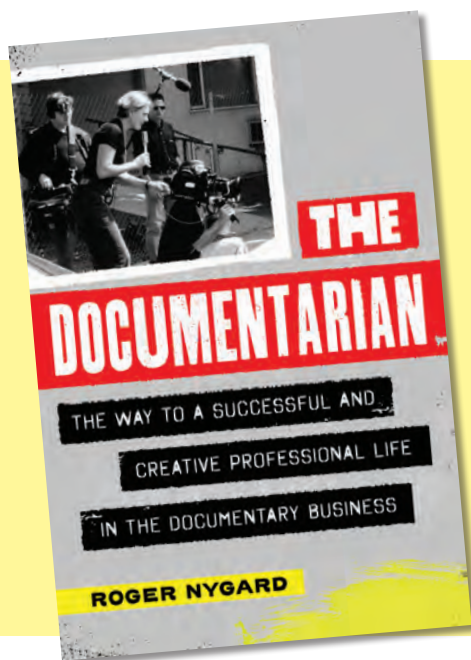
Not to mention that in these initial steps, I've been granted the greatest gift of all: the love and support by the people here at ACE. To my mentor, Maura Corey, thank you for always being only a phone call away to answer any questions I've had regarding steps forward. Your advice has, already, saved me from making critical (or really, naive) mistakes, and as a result, I've been able to hit the ground running.

To the teams I shadowed during the internship, thank you for being willing to have me join you in your cutting rooms, and welcoming my incessant questions I pestered you all with each day. I want to especially shout out Daniel Martens, Len Ciccotello, Ashley McKinney, and Robert Malachowski for being so excited to share with me the greatest advice and lessons I could have ever asked for. You four have now become my foundational role models for the type of editor I aim to become.

To the ACE Internship Committee, thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for putting this program together for people like Jessica and I. The education we've received from both the lecture series and our weeks shadowing have been priceless. Especially considering there was a strike occurring in the middle of the program, you somehow were capable of not letting it impact the quality of the experience for either of us.

Lastly, I couldn't stand here saying any of this without also thanking the shepherds of our involvement here at ACE: Jenni, Gemmalyn, Eliza, Tyler and Carsten. Thank you for being Jessica and my parents as we've come to be included in all the amazing events and gatherings that go on here! You have helped turn this community into a family, and, for me, have made living in this crazy city finally feel like a home.

*To American Cinema Editors, thank you – Grant.* 



# How Editors Solve the Biggest Documentary Mistakes

BY ROGER NYGARD, ACE

As an award-winning documentarian, Roger Nygard, ACE, has balanced humor and seriousness in films such as *Trekkies* and *The Nature of Existence*. Nygard has also edited Emmy-nominated episodes of *VEEP* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. This is an edited excerpt from his new book, *The Documentarian: The Way to a Successful and Creative Professional Life in the Documentary Business*, published by Applause Books.

**W**hen I was editing my first documentary, *Trekkies*, I suddenly realized I had no story structure, no single protagonist with a goal and obstacles heading toward a surprising ending. I was about to make one of the biggest documentary mistakes. As an editor, you may be faced with crafting an engaging documentary out of a gigantic pile of footage dumped in your lap. The editor has to find – or create – a plan from a disparate collection of interviews and B-roll. There is a secret to finding that structure.

The first rule to understand is that most successful documentaries are structured in three acts (or more), the same as screenplays. That simply means there is a beginning (a main character or characters, a goal, and an obstacle are introduced), a middle (conflict builds in pursuit of the goal against bigger and bigger complications), and an end (after a crisis point or climax, a resolution is reached). A documentary does not always have to be edited in a three-act structure, but building a robust structure is one way to improve a film's chances of success.



An even bigger problem that underlies a missing story structure is when neither the filmmaker nor the editor are able to identify a clearly-stated *theme*. Frederick Wiseman (*Titicut Follies*, 1967) says a film must work on two levels: literal and

abstract. The literal level is the story, the dialogue, and the problems or needs being addressed. The abstract level comprises the general ideas suggested by the literal encounters viewers are observing or, to some extent, participating in as an observer. This abstract level is called *theme*, a filmmaker's point of view about the world, society, human nature, or some kind of revelation. It is related to the moral reached at the end of the story.



Examples of themes include: love conquers all; corporations are destructive; justice is not available to the poor; courage is needed to defeat evil; absolute power corrupts absolutely. When I began editing the docu-series *The Comedy Store* (2020), I realized that simply going sequentially through this building's history was not sufficiently engaging. I suggested to director Mike Binder that each episode needed its own unique theme. When we focused in on finding a thematic idea for each episode, that helped us vastly improve episodes.

The solutions for both narrative documentaries and concept documentaries are similar. A narrative documentary begins when a core question is posed: Will the hero defeat the evil threat? Will the protagonist win over the love interest? Will the investigator solve the crime? Will the family get to safety? This fundamental question is answered at the end, after a climax.



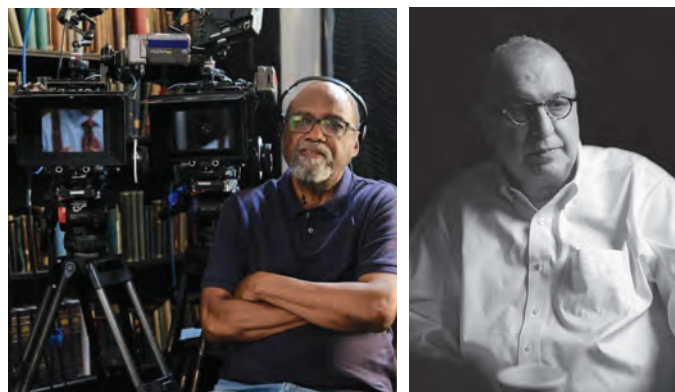
When a documentary is not engaging, it's often because there was no clear theme, or a core question was not clearly asked at the start. Every scene should relate to the core question in some way.

A concept documentary often relies upon a core question that a filmmaker poses and sets out to answer. This is the mystery that will be solved, a theme that will be explored, a premise that will be proven, and that's what holds the viewer to the end waiting for the big answer. A mystery often begins with the question: "Why?" Robert Kenner's *Food, Inc.* (2008) asks: Why is food from corporate farming unhealthy? We watch to learn the answer. Pose an engaging question at the start to hook the audience. What mystery will you solve? What lesson will you teach? What secret will be revealed? Insatiable curiosity is an asset.

Michael Moore investigates and builds cases in his films. *Sicko* (2007) is an indictment of the United States health insurance industry. Moore said, "I am confronting the American audience with a question: Who are we, and what has happened to our soul? To me, that's maybe more confrontation than going after the CEO of Aetna or the CEO of Pfizer."<sup>1</sup> Lee Fulkerson said the conclusion he builds to in *Forks Over Knives* (2011) is: "Fight disease by changing what you eat, and you can avoid going under a surgeon's knife."<sup>2</sup>

When Davis Guggenheim was making *Still: A Michael J. Fox Movie* (2023), he said, "The big idea was: how do you strip away the expectations of a celebrity biopic and really figure out, at the core, who a person is, which is usually not what people present as themselves." When Guggenheim was working with editor Michael Harte, as they pulled footage from Michael J. Fox's movies and television episodes, they noticed that Fox was constantly running. "That became a big theme in this documentary. He's running toward Hollywood, and then he's running away from Parkinson's disease."

Rachel Grady (*Jesus Camp*, 2006) suggests, "Come up with a hypothesis. And then be totally open to being completely wrong. You are flexible, but you aren't floating along like a jellyfish. You do have to direct the action, but you're not controlling the story too much; follow paths you think are going somewhere." Sam Pollard (*MLK/FBI*, 2020) agrees, "If I'm doing a story about Dr. King, slavery, or post-slavery after Reconstruction, I have a theme in mind. But sometimes the theme evolves and changes as I interact with people and different ideas. You've got to be malleable. You can't be rigid about what you think the theme or the structure is."

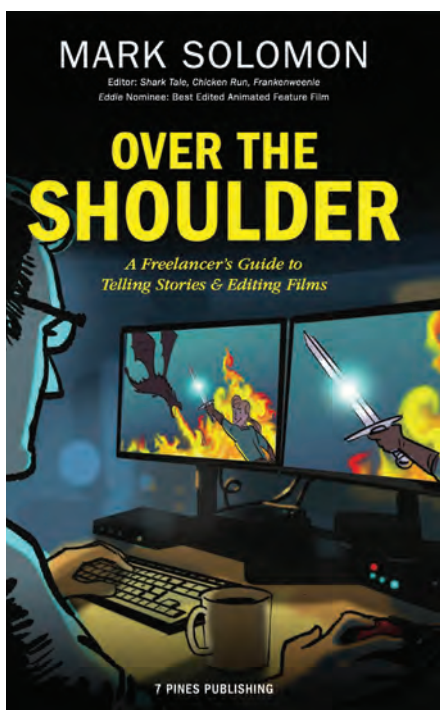


In *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), Errol Morris asks: Is convicted murderer Randall Dale Adams innocent? Morris's fundamental theme is that the judicial process is flawed. In *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), Michael Moore sets out to answer the question: Why does the United States have more deaths due to guns than any other Western democracy? Moore's thematic premise is that violence is not a proper way to bring change in modern society.

Film agent Glen Reynolds at Circus Road Films has been representing filmmakers for fifteen years. Reynolds has found that theme, or a filmmaker's point of view, works best when it is narrowed and sharpened: "If you're making a film about politics, you're less likely to find an audience if you are taking an even-handed, journalistic bird's-eye-view of the subject, presenting all sides, rather than having a strong point of view." Reynolds said when he watches documentaries, he often wonders what was left on the cutting room floor that would have opposed the filmmaker's point of view or told a different story. Reynolds cited the documentary *Fire of Love* (2022), about two French volcano experts who became the world's most famous volcanologists. The movie was primarily constructed from found footage. Documentarian Sara Dosa created a narrative about two people who fell in love and died together while studying volcanos. A love theme was there in the footage, but Dosa had to unearth it. Filmmaker Werner Herzog utilized the exact same library-source footage about these two volcano experts, and yet his film is entirely different, even in aspect ratio. The theme of *The Fire Within: A Requiem for Katia and Maurice Krafft* (2022) is in the title; it is a visual requiem for two extraordinary, perhaps reckless, scientists.

Look for a theme that is bursting to get out of your footage. What message must you get out to the world? What question are you trying to answer? What is your film's point of view about a core idea, topic, or mystery? Once you've identified a theme, put each idea or scene on a notecard and revise the order until there is a flow. Once you have the basis of a story figured out, divide it into three (or more) acts. Write down your theme and post it above your computer. That will be your editorial blueprint. You might follow it closely or deviate wildly from it in the editing room as the journey continues. But without that map, you may wander lost within a forest of choices. **CE**

<sup>1</sup> John Horn, "He wants you to be disgusted by *Sicko*," *Los Angeles Times* (May 22, 2007); <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-may-22-et-moore22-story.html>. <sup>2</sup> Courtney Davison, "What Does 'Forks Over Knives' Mean, Anyway?" *Forks Over Knives website* (May 3, 2019); <https://www.forksoverknives.com/wellness/what-does-forks-over-knives-mean/>.



**OVER THE SHOULDER:  
A FREELANCER'S GUIDE TO  
TELLING STORIES  
AND EDITING FILMS**

by Mark Solomon

Published by 7 Pines Publishing  
Available on Amazon

Addressing up-and-coming storytellers, *Over the Shoulder* is a primer to becoming a successful editor, with tips on how to make it in Hollywood, from an outsider who became an insider.

The author is British editor Mark Solomon, whose credits include Tim Burton's Oscar nominated animated feature *Frankenweenie* and Aardman's *Chicken Run*. He swapped London for a chance at success in L.A. in the mid-1990s, cutting student films for free and getting in contact with editors whose work he liked before landing a breakthrough on *Space Jam* (1996).

He brings his more than 30 years' experience to bear on storytelling insights that can take years to figure out. "I'm your ally without an agenda who just wants you to succeed," Solomon confides.

Half the book delves into learning the craft of editing. Take an acting class, he advises, "at the very least learn the vocabulary of actors and directors."


He emphasizes the value of brevity ("pro tip: half as long is twice as good") and explains the Japanese concept of Jo-ha-kyū – which translates roughly as beginning, middle, end or in some contexts 'beginning, break, rapid' which means that all actions or efforts should begin slowly, speed up then end swiftly.

"Everything from a single character's expression to the entire story will benefit from this gathering sense of rhythm," Solomon says. "Hana, the Japanese word for blossom, represents the highest climactic moment of your story. If the rhythm has been well constructed the audience is breathing complete in sync with the performers as the pace gathers intensity and the noise leads to a rare moment of calm."

The second portion of the book has personal insight into the practical matters of freelance work and how to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

He recalls attending the 2013 ACE Eddie Awards – he and fellow editor Chris Lebenzon, ACE, were nominated for *Frankenweenie* – at The Beverly Hilton in the company of Steven Spielberg; Jay Cassidy, ACE, and Lebenzon.: "I could play the jaded cynic and scoff at the whole scene, but there was such a feeling of fellowship in that room, a respect for the contribution of editing to the moviemaking enterprise and a celebration of editors telling a visual story. Experiencing an evening like that was a reward by itself."

Solomon's pithy, witty and accessible book is timely enough to address recent developments in AI. As with the rest of his advice, Solomon approaches this with a can-do attitude.

"No matter how fast AI technology disrupts the process, secrets continue to be passed down from old masters to new students on how best to use tools to produce an emotional, memorable result. These tricks of the trade were shared with me and I am passing them on to you here."  – ADRIAN PENNINGTON





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The premise is familiar – a hitman takes on one last job – but the execution is anything but. The first act of *John Wick* establishes the motivation for revenge which drives not only this movie but sets in motion three sequels and an expanding universe. After a gang has broken into Wick’s home, stealing his car and killing his dog, the scene chosen for this profile by editor Elísabet Ronaldsdóttir, ACE, begins with Wick burying his pet. He goes to see Aurelio, a friend who runs a car shop, to ask if he knows anything about what happened.



“This was the first time I started to think about intercutting in *John Wick*,” Ronaldsdóttir says. “There are two reasons. One was that Keanu Reeves is more or less in every single scene of the movie but originally this was one of the few scenes where he was not. I didn’t want to lose eyes on John Wick.”



“Secondly, I don’t like telling the same story twice within the same movie. We had one scene where we see the gang visit Aurelio and another where John Wick takes the bus to visit him. I wanted to see if we could make it one flowing scene so we only tell the audience once. This intercutting became the DNA of the movie.”



Ronaldsdóttir, who is Icelandic, says she was drawn to the story because it resembled a Nordic saga. “Someone hits you and you gather your uncles and go and kill them all – that is the basis of all Icelandic saga.”







“I hope we managed to show that killing his dog was the last straw. He lost everything when his wife died. Even though she died by a sickness that is not defined, he is very angry but he cannot avenge her death. When they kill his dog, he gets that outlet.”



To build the mythical nature of the central character the editor with Stahelski and David Leitch [producer and uncredited director] decided to excise all explanation. “Why would anyone have to explain anything to John Wick?” she says. “So why would we explain to the audience? I think that’s fascinating. We didn’t explain the coins, the hotel, the code. It was just there. I am very proud that people understood the world and fell for it.”



Stahelski and Leitch, both stunt performers and coordinators, made John Wick the vehicle for a new type of action which Ronaldsdóttir calls “an alpha male dance.”



“The action sequences are very precise and we took that and made the story as precise as possible,” she says. This includes the flashbacks that John Wick has of his wife throughout the film.



“It’s interesting that the wife character is a more of a painful memory – not a lingering comfortable one. Even though it’s about someone he loved we make them like hard and fast horror flashes.”



At first, according to Ronaldsdóttir, Lionsgate didn’t have much confidence in the production “but when we saw dailies we knew we had something special. There was no doubt.” **CE**



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