

The Editor's Cut - Episode 038 - Holiday Movies

Sarah Taylor [00:00:00]

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Hello and welcome to The Editor's Cut. I'm your host, Sarah Taylor. We would like to point out that the lands on which we have created this podcast and that many of you may be listening to us from are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that as long served as a place where Indigenous Peoples have lived, met, and interacted. We honour respect and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today. We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions, and the concerns that impact indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action.

Today I'm sitting down with Ryan Kovack, an editor based in Toronto Canada, who at this point in his career has worked on over 20 holiday movies. I know for myself I very much enjoy the holiday movie season. I can't wait to learn more about the post behind this genre.

[show open]

Sarah Taylor

Well Ryan thank you so much for joining me today.

Ryan Kovack

Like I said thanks for caring about something I have to say. It says it's a thrill. Thank you.

Sarah Taylor

First off how about you tell us a little bit about yourself. Where are you from and what led you to a career of editing. Kinda funny.

Ryan Kovack

I am born and raised in St. Clair beach Ontario which is suburban Windsor so the Deep South went to the University of Windsor and towards the end of my degree I got a job at the radio stations there. So I worked in radio for about two years after kind of prior to

and after graduating university. Then at one point I heard a couple of on air personalities who were just a year or two older than I was, saying how they couldn't afford to move out of their parents house yet. So I decided that maybe I'll go get into -- my first love I guess was TV and film so I thought, move up to try and I'll see what I can find. So I had worked on an independent short in Windsor as a sound recordist and I thought that was with my radio background I thought that was the logical way to go but I also enjoyed the editing aspect when I was in school. I got up here, got in touch with another guy from that short - they were all based in Toronto. Ended up doing one day as a daily boom up on another slightly larger but still very much low budget short. Basically I spent the day for about 100 dollars trying not to freeze to death because I was not prepared for the weather and decided then and there that, yeah editing sounds much more fun. The weather is always better. The only snow is on screen. Same with rain. Generally the hours can be a little bit more stable. So I thought that was the way to go and you know basically I got I started my career in the industry at Epitome Pictures working on answering the phones for Degrassi when they first started up. Not to date myself. And from there after Season 1, I was able to with some encouragement and help from the post supervisor and the assistant editor there get into post-production work where I was doing more post-production P.A. / coordinator ADR as-produced transcripts that sort of thing. Did that for a few years, and the assistant picture editor left Degrassi, called me up a few months later and said "hey I need somebody."

Ryan Kovack [00:03:59]

And that was kind of you know -- needed an extras extra set of hands on a big series. So I came in as a trainee on that, and started assisting from there and then eventually worked my way up into editing over the last few years. So a slow journey.

Sarah Taylor [00:04:15]

But exciting that you basically got to kind of learn on the job like you went to school and you have a background in radio and doing radio stuff which is similar but that you got to get into it by being in the right place at the right time.

Ryan Kovack [00:04:29]

I know Linda and Stephen and the team that were running Epitome Pictures for Degrassi. They've been instrumental in getting a lot of talent out into the into the creative world and you know I'm kind of a minor blip on that compared to some of the others that have come out but they were good to me and you know I'll always be grateful for that and and the assistant editor Mark Arcieri who is working there he's the guy who got me out. He's the guy who I was assisting for a long long time.

Sarah Taylor [00:05:03]

I actually watched one of the films that you assisted and he cut the other day. The Best Christmas Party Ever.

Ryan Kovack [00:05:10]

Oh boy yes. Yeah that's right. Yeah I vaguely remember that one --one of many. Yes.

Sarah Taylor [00:05:18]

Well that is one of the reasons I wanted to chat with you today - is because you have cut many holiday films. I want to say I counted 16 that you either assisted or edited.

Ryan Kovack [00:05:28]

That's that's probably just the visible this is probably closer to 20 than I've. Yeah I think I'm up to eight or nine as an editor and in probably more way more than that as an assistant.

Sarah Taylor [00:05:40]

Amazing. For me and I'm sure many other people I know a lot of my friends and family we definitely look forward to the holiday movie season. For me it starts on November 1st on W and so I PVR all of the movies and then every night me and my daughter sit down and we watch a Christmas movie. We love it. How do you feel knowing that you're working on films that bring a lot of joy to people?

Ryan Kovack [00:06:07]

When I think I can't take anymore green and red and romance. It helps. You know you get so many of them. And that after a while it it's it's it's you know too much of a good thing

Sarah Taylor

That's too sweet.

Ryan Kovack [00:06:25]

Yeah yeah. And I know in you know you sit back and you go. I can't do this again. Not another one. Well at least people are happy at least it makes people happy. I'm glad that's you know -- if it makes people happy, that's good for me. You know that's all I can say.

Sarah Taylor [00:06:45]

Well as you mentioned before you said you assisted on many movies and then you did make the transition to editing. So how did you make that track that journey from assisting to editing?

Ryan Kovack [00:06:56]

Slowly. There was so like I said it was working with Mark Arcieri, assisting on a lot of his stuff. We were working for mostly the same company, Chester Perlmutter, and they just got busy one year and said let's throw the kid a bone. I mean I was no kid by point but compared to you know I've had no real editing experience-- a few shorts that

nobody's ever seen as far as I know. So they let me try my hand at one. As far as I know it's still relatively well-liked but it was a while before I got to do another one. So I was mainly a financial consideration: being a steady working assistant is better financially than being an occasional editor. And I wasn't able to go back and forth as much as I would've liked. Then eventually, I guess it was three or three years or so later, the same company came to me and said we need Mark's not available, he's off doing bigger better things now. And they gave me another shot and I said ok and hopped right in and I think it was another brief series that I assisted on after that. But then it was Marc Gingras, another guy over at Urban post terrific sound editor. He got me in touch with another company who was looking for somebody and you know I got through all of the screening and undercut the other other people, I'll work for scale, sure. And they brought me along and you know it's been kind of - not looked back from there was just sort of gradual...Eventually the foot was in the door far enough that they couldn't close it.

Sarah Taylor [00:08:47]

You're in.

Ryan Kovack

I'm in. Yeah. So like I say there was a long time between the first and the second. Not so much time. just a few months, probably about half a year between the second and the third and then then the avalanche started. You know I've been working fairly steadily. Plague exception. But yeah I've been quite lucky and quite fortunate to be working steadily relatively for the last couple of years.

Sarah Taylor [00:09:19]

What was the name of the first film that you had. First holiday film?

Ryan Kovack [00:09:22]

The first film was The Christmas Share. Yes. So yeah Christmas Share was very much like I believe The Holiday. A city guy and country guy switch...

Sarah Taylor [00:09:36]

I feel like maybe I've seen it.

Ryan Kovack [00:09:38]

It was lovely musical number there was a country singer that was playing one of the lead the male leads and he was quite good singing. They did a nice rendition of Joy to the World possibly? I can't remember now but yes that was that was the first one way back when.

Sarah Taylor

A good first one to be on because they'll probably there was probably a fan base of the country singer right. So that's like a real good good foot in the door for that. That's great.

Ryan Kovack [00:10:11]

Yeah. It was also really helpful to add that a lot of these I find are very A-story centric. There's no real B story this had really two A stories. You had two couples, so it was a little bit easier on me as far as being able to go back and forth and not have to worry about the "well we just ended a scene with these two people. Now we're starting to see these.." which can be a problem sometimes.

Sarah Taylor [00:10:39]

Sure. Well that takes us to my next question is...Talk me through the process of your typical process of working on a holiday film like when do you come on board, kind of walk me through that, how much time you get.

Ryan Kovack [00:10:55]

Never enough...Usually it's varied but usually it's a week or two before they go to camera they'll have ... we'll get the final stamp of approval. A lot of times they need network approval and of course the director and producers you know the Canadian producer may not be the....the people staffing it that the American creative producer will be the one who has to finally come in and say Yeah he's good enough or he's great or whatever they have to say. And so that's usually...I come on about a week before I read the script, go through you know kind of get a feel for if there's any sort of central theme, who the main character is -- not just as far as oh it's obviously person A, like who they are as a as a character.

At that point I'll talk to the producer and the director and see what their feeling is how they want to go with it. Yeah. And then it's just a matter of once the footage starts rolling in and of course there's always the technical talk where I sit on the phone call and listen while the assistant and post supervisor talks to the DIT and whoever else, sound guy and camera people in wherever they're shooting and hope it's whatever they come up with is this good. You know basically wait for the footage to roll in. And then I start trying to make every scene as good as I can. Some directors depending on how much time they have like to see things as they're assembled which is helpful sometimes but can slow you down a little bit. But if they do, I'll send them a scene or two every couple of days some of the bigger ones see how they feel. Make sure we're on the same page and staying on the same page. And yeah eventually, gets to the part that I feel is usually lacking most in the schedules the editor cut is mostly just an assembly at this stage it's throw the scenes together in order figure where you know you're ...any temp score any whatever you can do to make the transitions between scenes and or acts as good as they can. Then directors cut will vary as well as far as

duration depending on how much time you have. Producer cut, network cut and then knock on wood it locks with a happy network.

Sarah Taylor [00:13:23]

Excellent. So all in all pretty pretty quick turnaround.

Ryan Kovack [00:13:28]

Yeah. I believe the last one was about seven weeks I believe. The one before I did earlier this year pre-pandemic was I think closer to eight weeks. We had a bit more time as it was you know April when we locked as opposed to November.

Ryan Kovack [00:13:48]

So that helped. But yeah generally it's seven to eight weeks is usually what when I get as far as you know from day one of footage to lock picture.

Sarah Taylor [00:14:00]

How many do you normally cut in a year.

Ryan Kovack [00:14:02]

This year was was like I said pandemic. I was expecting to get two...I was lucky to get the one early in the year in April. So three or four year would probably be a good a good number as far as being able to afford the rent and and you know walk the line between affording the rent and going Christmas crazy.

Sarah Taylor [00:14:23]

Yeah. I balance it out like Christmas and then maybe you like a Halloween movie.. So you kind of touched on it saying that often these films are just a story heavy so transitions can be challenging. What other sort of editing challenges do you come across working on this genre?

Ryan Kovack [00:14:45]

I'm not the only one who pressed for time as far as you know all of these could you. All of the directors will --every director wants more time. But I feel that sometimes they are shortchanged on the shoot as well just they could use an extra day to make sure that you know the big scenes are covered properly. As far as what they want to accomplish and sometimes too some of the sets can be a little lackluster because again there's just not enough time. The A story centric problem can be a bit much sometimes. You know there's all the usual complaints that every editor has. I also find the networks can be demanding sometimes even though they may not be getting what they want because you know editors are the last line that they have a chance to just to yell at. Not yell at, but you know what I mean, we're the last people that they have any interaction with or any say in the process. They tend to be - some of them can be quite trying. I found the last few actually been much better, they've been getting better but I've had

experiences in the past where there are questions about the script and the story that were in the script from the start and somehow it's my fault.

Sarah Taylor [00:16:14]

Like that's the footage I got.

Ryan Kovack [00:16:15]

Yeah you know I can't make....I didn't write it. I didn't direct it. You know I didn't direct what they wrote. You guys approved your scripts. Like I say the last few you have been much much better as far as the network goes. They've been very smooth as far as that goes.

Sarah Taylor [00:16:37]

Are you often working with the same crew like the same directors coming through or the same producers like how does that work for you?

Ryan Kovack [00:16:43]

No. The directors have usually been I think I've only...I don't think I've actually worked with the same director personally as an editor twice. Yeah sometimes it's with the crew generally depends where it shoots in the last few couple have been up in Ottawa and I've got a lot of the same people on those. There's a few quite a few that have been in Hamilton especially back when I was assisting and that was you know that was a case where they almost shot it they'd shoot three or four in a row and they would almost run it as a TV series as opposed to four separate movies so you would have crew overlapping as much as they could. You know some consistency and some burnout too because I mean four of these in a row for for them was challenge

Sarah Taylor

but what are the shoot days usually on one of these films.

Ryan Kovack [00:17:42]

Usually it's a Monday to Friday sometimes but it's always gets to a point where we start calls time to get pushed later and later as they should they shoot in the nighttime so sometimes they'll start at 7 a.m. on a Monday but by the time they get to Friday they're starting at 2 or 4 clock in the afternoon and I mean it doesn't affect me too much except if there's a problem and I can't find anybody at 9 o'clock when I'm starting to fix the...where's my footage?

Sarah Taylor [00:18:12]

They're sleeping. Yeah. So tell us about the Christmas setup which is the film that you just wrapped on. I believe that it's the first holiday movie one of the first Hollywood movies where the main care couple is gay which I think is great.

Ryan Kovack [00:18:27]

Yes as far as I know as far as the the big “we are all in on Christmas movie” networks go, which is basically Hallmark lifetime and there's probably another one that I'm forgetting. As far as I know it is the first that they are doing. So that's kind of exciting new territory - long overdue territory I feel. I've been doing these a long time and I find that most of the time the couples would look like you and I two very boring, no offense, white people. You know a blonde lady and a dark haired guy in a green sweater and a red sweater. And yeah so it's been a long time coming and you know I mean aside from the two of them both being men it's a holiday romantic comedy. It's the same as all the others it's which I think also is a great thing. They're just two guys in love and that's all it is.

Sarah Taylor

When you're cutting the film too it just was like everything kind of and when as it as it went and it was a normal process on your side because it is the first I know there's going to be a lot more eyes on it and I know there's already people that hate it on principle which is ridiculous to me. But yeah I put that extra pressure out of my head and just I treated The Christmas Set Up the same way I treated Christmas Unwrapped in the spring. Two people falling in love at Christmas.

With extra snow and sugar.

Ryan Kovack [00:20:04]

Yes. So that's you know that's the way it is. That's the way it should be I think.

Sarah Taylor [00:20:08]

Yeah. Yeah. Do you have any story stories you want to talk about about working on The Christmas Setup?

Ryan Kovack [00:20:13]

I'm sure the publicity is out that Ben and Blake the two leads are actually married in real life.

Sarah Taylor

Oh I didn't know that that's great.

Ryan Kovack [00:20:22]

Yeah, which worried me when I heard it. Because sometimes real life chemistry does not translate to the screen. They both knocked it out of the park. Performances are fantastic. And yeah. So I mean that was great. They were fun to watch between action and cut but they were also fun to watch before action and after that the pre and post roll. And another thing too unrelated to the two main leads is are our big name was Fran Drescher.

Ryan Kovack [00:20:58]

And I mean all I remember her from is her sitcom in the I want to say I'm going to say 90s -- I think it was the 90s. And I also remember her from her role in This is Spinal Tap. So I was kind of like OK how is she going to be, and again another you know she's still a fantastic comedic actress. And surprisingly to me who only knows her from those two things, a fantastic dramatic actress. So that the cast made it so much easier to make a good movie. So between the cast and the director Pat and another guy did a fantastic job. It was just an all around pleasant experience.

Sarah Taylor [00:21:45]

That's fantastic. And we think in mid December. I'm not sure when it's coming to Canada but...

Ryan Kovack [00:21:48]

I'm going to say I'm 90 percent sure that it is the 12th of December on Lifetime in the US. And as I check my email quickly to see if anybody got back to me with the Canadian dates and I don't think anybody did.

Sarah Taylor [00:22:09]

If I find out before this is released I will put it in the show notes. So check the show notes if to find out the date of when it might air in Canada.

Ryan Kovack [00:22:22]

I will try and email a few more people and get you some information for you if I can.

Sarah Taylor [00:22:28]

It's definitely something that I'm going to put on my list to watch this season and I'm very excited and I was very excited to find out that this was happening and that there was a Canadian cutting this film which is really great. Do you typically like watching Christmas movies. And if so--

Ryan Kovack [00:22:40]

No.

[laughter]

Ryan Kovack [00:22:45]

If there's any producers out there listening who want me to do something it isn't Christmas. I'm more than happy to.

Sarah Taylor [00:22:52]

And he's more than capable! He doesn't have to just do Christmas.

Ryan Kovack [00:22:56]

That's right. Yes. I mean it is not my genre of choice.

Sarah Taylor [00:23:00]

Do you have a Christmas movie that's a fave from like maybe when you were a kid.

Ryan Kovack

I always lean back on the classics. You know Christmas Vacation is up there. And of course there's always the debate about whether Die Hard is a Christmas movie or a movie that happens at Christmas.

Sarah Taylor [00:23:17]

Well my husband argues that it is a Christmas movie and we watch it every year. So he has to endure the cheesy ones that I watch so we Die Hard. Can you say which one of these films might have been your favorite to work on?

Ryan Kovack [00:23:30]

I'm going to say The Christmas Setup in part of that might just be that it is the most recent. But like I say, everybody pillar to post with it--if you'll excuse the post pun. But yeah like I say that the cast was fantastic to see every day on my screen or on my monitors. Pat (the director) Mills was a great guy to work with. We were on the same page. And Danielle, the producer was also on the same page with Pat which put her on the same page as me. So you know the three weeks three of three or four weeks I spent locked in a room with one or both of them was, it was just pleasant. You know I've had experiences where I've not seen the producer at all and it's just been good luck and that's it. And then not been a good experience but this overall has been just a fun experience dealing with all people I hadn't known before which is always nerve-wracking and coming in and having a good time with working with them has been great.

Sarah Taylor [00:24:39]

Are you looking forward to hearing feedback from people watching this film?

Ryan Kovack [00:24:44]

Actually, yes I am. Usually it's it's you know I'll check the you know rotten tomatoes where I am DP score and see 6.5...That's about right. That's you know that's that's where they all kind of yeah..

So I'm actually, I think story wise it's probably one of the best that I've worked on so I'm happy about that. And so yeah I'm kind of looking forward to hearing what people who actually don't hate it on principle, of course, what people think about it.

And I you know I just hope that I've served the story I've served the actors I've served the director and I've served the community in general well. I mean I'm an outsider to it

so I'm hoping that they can forgive me my faults and I've done a good job that they are happy with.

Sarah Taylor [00:25:38]

That's fantastic. Well I'm excited to see it as I mentioned before and I'll definitely let you know what I think.

Ryan Kovack [00:25:44]

Thank you.

Sarah Taylor [00:25:47]

I'm sure I'll love it. All things aside what would you like to cut in the future. What would be something that you just love to do.

Ryan Kovack [00:25:52]

I think anything that I would watch so I'm a sucker for your cheesy procedural crime procedural type things. And some of the sci fi type stuff that's that's out there too would be a lot of fun too to work on.

So knock on wood or whatever this coffee table's made of and hopefully I can get you know something in the future but in the meantime I'm making people happy with Christmas movies so be it.

Sarah Taylor [00:26:22]

Well thank you for bringing joy to my life. With your Christmas movie editing and we'll put the word out to all the sci-fi producers out there who might be listening to Ryan's available but he has to do a few Christmas movies so that he can appease my Christmas routine.

Ryan Kovack [00:26:38]

Fair enough. Fair enough.

Sarah Taylor [00:26:40]

Well thank you so much for taking time to chat with me today and I look forward to watching The Christmas Setup.

Ryan Kovack [00:26:47]

It's been a pleasure and I hope you, as an editor who's going to fix this and make me sound coherent, I appreciate that.

Sarah Taylor [00:26:55]

Not a problem here.

Thank you so much for joining us today. And a big thanks goes to Ryan for taking the time to sit with me. I hope you all enjoy The Christmas Setup.

A special thanks goes to Jane MacRae, Stephen Philipson, and Heather Taylor. The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Original music provided by Chad Blain and Soundstripe. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao. The CCE has been supporting Indspire - an organization that provides funding and scholarships to Indigenous post secondary students. We have a permanent portal on our website at cceditors.ca or you can donate directly at indspire.ca. The CCE is taking steps to build a more equitable ecosystem within our industry and we encourage our members to participate in any way they can.

If you've enjoyed this podcast, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts and tell your friends to tune in. 'Til next time I'm your host Sarah Taylor.

[Outtro]

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