

The Editor's Cut - Episode 033 - "This Year in Dramatic Film" (EditCon 2020 Series)

Sarah Taylor:

This episode was generously sponsored by IATSE 891. Hello and welcome to the Editor's Cut. I'm your host Sarah Taylor. Today I bring to you part two of our four part series covering EditCon 2020 that took place on Saturday, February 1st at the TIFF Bell Lightbox in Toronto. There's no formula to a festival hit, but the three editors behind the recent critically-lauded feature films Freaks, Mouthpiece, and Genesis, will share how they did it. This panel discussion will focus on the process, their career trajectories, and what lies ahead.

[show open]

Jane MacRae:

These films have made waves on the festival circuit in Canada and internationally. As a group, they're a fantastic demonstration of the film industry's regional successes representing Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto. Each powerful engaging film was brought into existence through very different creative circumstances. An adaptation of a play, with two actors playing conflicting sides of a young woman's inner dialogue. A uniquely structured drama, contrasting the lives of two teenage half-siblings. A science-fiction hybrid grounded in compelling dramatic performances. As editors, each film presents a unique experience and opportunity to find the performances, tone, and the arc. In 2018, all three of these films landed on TIFF Canada's top 10 list. Their international festival journeys have been vast and all have received critical praise and award recognition. We're here to celebrate the editors behind these films whose work is sometimes imperceptible, but always present.

Jane MacRae:

Our moderator Justin Lachance is well acquainted with the festival world, having had his work screened at fests including Sundance, Berlinale, South by Southwest, and TIFF. He's also known for his work on a couple of little shows you might have heard of, Big Little Lies and Sharp Objects. IATSE 891 are pleased to welcome Lara Johnston, Mathieu Bouchard-Malo, Sabrina Pitre, and moderator Justin Lachance.

Justin Lachance:

So, I just want to say to start this off that this is amazing to see you guys all here. I mean, I've been to EditFest in the states and I know that ACE is amazing, but this just gives a great platform as Canadians. It talks about our reality and I'm just very proud and happy with what the CCE is doing in Canada. So, let's get this started.

Justin Lachance:

Who here understands French? Okay, not bad. So, Mathieu is from Quebec, the editor of Genesis. And because it's a little hard to explain the intricacies of editing in your second tongue, Mathieu will be answering in French. So, I'll be here to direct translate. So, please, have a little more patience. Now, Jean Luc Goddard said, "Stories should have a beginning, middle, and end, but not necessarily in that order." And that's what we do as editors, we agonize over the absolute best way to tell the story and in scripted fiction, we have a blueprint that sometimes needs to be shuffled to find the soul of the story. So, right here we have three incredibly talented editors who have done exactly that and with the three of the most interesting films that the Great White North has produced this year. So, first I'd love to get you

guys to introduce yourselves, small explanation of your career path, and introduce your film also, talk about what it's about.

Lara Johnston:

Hi, Lara Johnston. I worked on Mouthpiece. I started many years ago as an assistant editor. I did not go to film school formally, I went to U of T for Film Studies. I mean I fell into film studies when I was there, I took a film course and just loved it. I thought I would be a writer or journalist or something. But, I started working on little Super 8 films and stuff just because I really liked making them. As soon as I left U of T, I worked on a couple small films made by artists and there was a granting system where they would get a person as a grant to sort of help them.

Lara Johnston:

So, I kind of worked on every aspect of it and kind of was production secretary and assistant to the director. And then they liked me, so, they kept me around for the editing and that's where I sort of found my happy place. And then back then it was really easy to get into the DGC, you just paid \$500 and went in to work the next day. So, that's what happened to me. I met Susan Shipton on my first movie, It Was All Caught On Film. And then just worked my way very slowly up as an assistant editor. I worked in LA, I got into the union there. Kind of went back and forth between Toronto and a few other places and met Patricia on the way and yeah, here I am.

Justin Lachance:

Yeah, because you have a relationship with Patricia on different projects. Is that right?

Lara Johnston:

Yes, yeah.

Justin Lachance:

So, tell us about Mouthpiece and how you got onto that one.

Lara Johnston:

So, I had worked with Patricia many years ago on this weird little ... thanks to Harvey Weinstein, good old Harvey. Patricia was doing this TV movie, I don't even really know how ... she came on after somebody else. And Harvey Weinstein decided it could be ... it was Wrinkle in Time, it was a TV movie, Wrinkle in Time. And Harvey decided in all of Harvey's wisdom, that it could be Harry Potter for girls. So, brought Patricia in to try to do that while someone else was making the TV movie. So, we just for six weeks we took all the TV movie footage and tried to make a feature out of it. I was the assistant editor. We had an audience preview in New Jersey. Everybody hated it, we're like, "Okay, bye, see you later." And then Harvey called the next day and was like "Let's keep trying." And then eventually after another preview where everyone hated it, it sort of formally died. But, that's how I met Patricia and she really liked me.

Lara Johnston:

Our paths crossed a couple of times over the years. I worked as an assistant on Grey Gardens and she was the writer on that. And then an editor that I worked with she brought in ... No, actually I didn't even work with him. He came onto Grey Gardens after it went back to LA and I was by then living here. And

that editor, she really liked the work that he did on Grey Gardens and so, she brought him to reedit, to do additional editing on one of her films and then I happened to work with him later. And he invited us both to a screening at TIFF a few years ago, and I bumped into her. And she asked me what I was doing and I was teaching, so, I sort of left the film business and started teaching. And she said, "Oh, you should come out of retirement and edit this film of mine." And I was like, "Hahaha." And then, it sort of echoed in my head, hahaha, for a couple of months.

Justin Lachance:

Sound effect.

Lara Johnston:

But, I didn't do anything about it because I knew she was joking. And then, I think a friend of mine interviewed for the job and he called me and I really have no idea why he called me because I don't think he could do the job but, he kind of wanted ... I don't think he even knew that I worked with her, but he just called me to talk about it randomly. And I was like, "Oh, she joked that I should do that movie." And he said, "You got to do that. It's totally you, it's your style. Call her." And so then, I called her and she's like, "Yeah, well, that sounds interesting." And I'm like, "What?" Because I haven't worked on anything for six or seven years and I never had a solo editing credit, I always had second editor credits and stuff. But, she seemed to really consider it and I went through the script like crazy, a lot. And then I met her and we had a nice meeting and I gave her a lot of my ideas. And then I didn't hear from her for a month and I was sort of not surprised by that, but I was also really depressed. And then-

Justin Lachance:

That happens all the time.

Lara Johnston:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was like, "Aw, what did I say, what did I do, why did I say that?" All those things you do. And then randomly, and I don't really, I've never asked what happened in the interim and who they talked to and who they couldn't get and stuff, but three days before they went into production, she emailed me let's do this. We do it and it worked great. We just got along, we'd always had fun conversations and stuff. I think the whole making of the movie was just one long fun conversation.

Justin Lachance:

That sounds amazing. How about you Sabrina?

Sabrina Pitre:

I'm originally from Toronto, but I went out to Vancouver to attend UBC and do the film production program there, which was fun. We got to shoot on actual film which was an experience and that was about as much film experience as I have actual tactile film. But, from there, I just got a job essentially loading tapes at night for The Shopping Bags show. Kind of just went from there. There was a studio in town that sort of pumped out B movies, that was what they did and they were hiring people as employees and so, I got a chance to join that team as an assistant editor, again, at nights. But, what was nice about that is you get to work with so many different editors, directors, producers who coming in out of that place that your list of credits grows quickly in the span of one year. So, as an assistant, I was able to get so much experience in the few years that I worked there. And then they eventually went

bankrupt in 2009. And so, I continued to assist, but I got my first break as an editor in 2011 on a feature film called Sisters & Brothers, directed by Carl Bessai. And the only reason I got that was the editor that I often assisted for threw out his back in a skiing incident so, it was sort of just-

Justin Lachance:

Vancouver accident.

Sabrina Pitre:

Yeah, right. So it was really just one of those lucky chances, one of those lucky breaks that you get. And he recommended me to the director and so I had an interview with him, and I did not sell myself at all because I was really just intimidated and I didn't know what I was doing and I wasn't sure I could pull this off. A feature was so overwhelming at the time because all I had done were short films on my own. But, they didn't have a big budget so, I think they needed me for the cheapness. And I needed them for the experience, so that was a perfect marriage. And it ended up working out really well. I got along so well with the director and he pushed me in a way creatively that we got to a place with the film that I'm really happy with and I ended up winning a Leo for it. And so it was really good encouragement anyway.

Sabrina Pitre:

I went back to assisting for about one year after and just couldn't take it anymore, essentially. So, once you get that first taste like we were talking about, you can't really go back. So, essentially, no one told me I was an editor now, but I just said that to myself and just sort of refused assisting work and took only editing jobs. And it was a little bit of a dent in the pocketbook, but eventually, people get to know you, you change their minds about what they think of you as. And eventually you get calls for editing gigs and you just kind of go from there.

Justin Lachance:

Kind of like what happened with Freaks?

Sabrina Pitre:

Kind of like what happened with Freaks. Well, so the way I met the guys, I got hired onto my first union show for Disney called Mech-X4 and Zach Lipovsky was one of the exec producers on it as well as the showrunner. And Adam Stein was one of the directors that they had brought on board to direct some of the episodes. And so I got to work with both of them very closely and we got on really well and found that we were kind of on a similar wavelength terms of creativity. So, once that show wrapped up, the guys, they had a longstanding relationship and they had been writing script together for the longest time called Freaks. And they approached me about it and sent me an early draft and asked if I'd be interested in editing it. And I was like, "Hell yes, absolutely." It just seemed like the right thing to do at the right time and I couldn't say no, so.

Justin Lachance:

It's perfect. And Mathieu?

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

Okay, so Mathieu started off as an assistant editor. He studied cinema in Montreal and then got a job at a post production facility, with one of the rare ones that actually had an Avid back then in the '90s, so.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

So then, he was only an assistant editor for a year, which is impressive. And then, one of his friends asked him to start a post production facility and he was the in-house editor for a while.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

So, after doing music videos and commercials and tons of different formats, he finally was able to do a feature film that was called Full Blast by Rodrigue Jean that actually played at the TIFF, at TIFF Festival. So, I mean it's called Fest anyway. And then, now, how did you get involved with Philippe Lesage, the director of Genesis?

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

Okay, so, that was a long sentence. Philippe was coming back from Denmark and he his studies down there and he came back to Montreal and was hired to do a Making Of a film that he wanted to make into a much bigger production, a documentary about that making of. The production wasn't necessarily warm to it, but Mathieu decided to join forces and brother in arms, they made it together. And then they progressed on to making documentaries together and Philippe would do camera, sound, and everything. And Mathieu would do everything for post production like color and editing and assistants and everything. So, they were kind of a one stop crew film shop.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

So, there's an admiration from Mathieu towards Philippe's work and the documentary language was easily translated into the fiction world. And as he was working on documentaries, he was always thinking about the next fiction and how to make that work.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

And I think it's both language ... two language documentary and fiction, but I think it's very interesting to merge at the certain point.

Justin Lachance:

Absolutely. And Genesis does that perfectly. There's some points where you actually feel like you're watching a documentary because it's just like long shots that are drifting, you're just following what's going on. So, let's have look at what that looks like. Let's play that trailer of Genesis from Mathieu and we'll continue the talk after that.

[Clip Plays]

Justin Lachance:

So, we had asked you for a clip of the film and there was a discussion where we're just like, "You know what? What clip would we choose because they're all very, very long." And the strength of the film is let's watch this happen. So, that's why we chose a trailer, but a lot of this happens with young actors. You have sequence shots that take a long time and how did you guys work with that? Because young actors and sequence shots are sometimes the hardest thing to deal with as an editor. So, how did you guys work with that?

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

Okay, so the decision, it didn't cause any problems to work with younger actors with less experience, but Philippe had a very specific decision or he wanted something very specific for each scene, so they just sometimes shot 30 takes per shot. And so, it wasn't a difference in performance, not necessarily anybody flubbing a line, it was just that he was so specific with that's what he wanted.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

And sometime, the first or the second take is almost perfect on [Mathieu continues in French]

Justin Lachance:

First, I'll translate and then I'll ask him another question. Basically, what would happen is that, in the beginning of the first shots, there would be ... the performance was actually pretty fresh and really great, but sometimes the technical aspects of the shot were not as great, so, they would continue and perfect that. And then, it would become mechanical in performances, so, then it wouldn't work as well because you would kind of feel the acting. And then eventually, as the later takes happen, they would all be like, "Oh okay. They're kind of tired, the actors are tired." So, they just act more natural in that situation, and then, the technical parts would be great. And then, if it wasn't in the first takes, it was in the last takes, the 30th take. And so, he would spend a lot of time watching all the takes though, in the edit suite. And was there any time you just decided to choose a middle one? Did that happen?

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

Yes. [Mathieu continues in French]

Justin Lachance:

So, Mathieu has the chance to work on a lot of films d'auteur. I actually don't know how to translate that, do you guys know?

Audience:

[inaudible 00:24:37]

Justin Lachance:

Auteur films, there you go, sure. And a lot of them have very specific narrative qualities, and that's what he's passionate about. And one thing with those kinds of films is that you have a lot more time and you have a lot more time to experiment and propose new ways of editing the scenes and you can really finesse it. And with Genesis ...

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

That was the case with Genesis. [Mathieu continues in French]

Justin Lachance:

So, usually, he starts editing a film while it's shooting and he doesn't have the chronological order of the text. So, this time with Genesis, it was actually a little different, he started editing after they were shot, so you could really watch it unfold.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

So, he was able to do an assembly very quickly and he was able to really follow what Philippe ... the intentions and the rhythm of every scene.

Justin Lachance:

So, I'm going to go over to Sabrina too because you also worked with younger actors, specifically Lexy Kolker. And, but, you had completely different approach. There was no long shots and stuff like that. How did that work?

Sabrina Pitre:

Well, there were long shots, but they workshopped almost every one of her lines. So, they'd have her read it over and over again and with different intentions. They wanted her performance to be as real as possible. And so, I think similarly to Mathieu, the directors wanted something specific out of her and they just kept her going until they found what they wanted. Sometimes they didn't know what they wanted and they just gave me the options and I kind of decided in the edit suite, sort of how ... There were a lot of different ways to take it as a result because we had so many different reads that it gave me an immense amount of freedom, for sure.

Justin Lachance:

And you kind of masterfully got her arc perfectly. Every emotional build was really well done. How much of that was done in the edit room because you had so many options? How-

Sabrina Pitre:

A lot of it. Just because it was piecemeal in terms of how we were getting her lines. And plus her working with Emile, Emile was great at helping her get to those levels that she needed to have intensity in some scenes. He'd keep pushing her and she would push back and they'd kept growing, growing, growing, growing together and you'd get some really great back and forth. So, ultimately, I got everything that I needed out of those performances. It's just a matter of picking and choosing, really.

Justin Lachance:

That's amazing because she's phenomenal in the film. She's really, really great.

Sabrina Pitre:

Yeah, I mean, really. She made the job easy. She's a very talented little girl.

Justin Lachance:

She's the main focus of the entire thing, so.

Sabrina Pitre:

Yeah, she needed to carry the film, so getting a strong actress of that age was instrumental.

Justin Lachance:

Yeah, amazing. Let's watch that clip of Freaks.

[Clip plays]

Justin Lachance:

That is intense.

Sabrina Pitre:

I feel like that needs a lot of explanation if you haven't seen the film.

Justin Lachance:

Yeah, I guess if you haven't seen the film, you're just like what is coming out of her eye? But, why this clip?

Sabrina Pitre:

Yeah, so, this was an interesting turning point in the film. Before all of this, Chloe had been kept inside her house by her father, he'd been telling her that there are these dangerous people outside, never to go, they'll kill you. And so, he has all the windows taped up and boarded, but she happens to meet this stranger who spots her from a window that she's peeping through and coaxes her to actually come out. So, she unbeknownst to her father, had already left the house and met this person. And he gave her this sleeping powder to give to her dad, so she could continue to explore the outside. Up until that point, Chloe was very much sort of commanded by her father. The power was all in his side, and so, this was the first time that we weren't even sure that she possessed any kind of powers herself or even that

powers existed. It's all very vague in the beginning. And so, this was the first time that she took control of the situation and did what she wanted.

Justin Lachance:

Yeah, and it was interesting because there was just enough information to figure out okay, what's going on here? And it kept you hooked the whole time and it was very well paced for that. I hear, that you guys did quite a few test screenings.

Sabrina Pitre:

Yes.

Justin Lachance:

And I'm just wondering, did that help with the comprehension or the pacing of everything like that or?

Sabrina Pitre:

It did actually. It ended up helping quite a bit.

Justin Lachance:

How many test screenings was it?

Sabrina Pitre:

14 test screenings.

Justin Lachance:

During post production?

Sabrina Pitre:

It nearly broke me, but yeah, 14 test screenings. Yeah, I mean, it was seven done in ... all simultaneously done, seven in Vancouver, seven in LA. So we were getting kind of a lot of different feedback based on those two groups.

Justin Lachance:

What were you looking for? What kind of questions would you ask? That's a lot of information.

Sabrina Pitre:

I know. So the big thing was, comprehension and just, it is a slow burn. And so, we were concerned how long we could keep audiences on the hook with before they lose interest. That was very good lesson in terms of these test screenings because we learned very quickly that we have to reveal little pieces. We have to give the audience something at certain point in order to keep them invested. So, yeah, I found the feedback we got from audiences for those test screenings was very, very helpful just to help us craft that. I mean, from how it was scripted to how it ultimately ended up here is quite different.

Justin Lachance:

I imagine. And then, so, how did you resolve those kind of decisions because you were working with a director duo who are also producers and have experience editing and also the writers? So how were decisions processed?

Sabrina Pitre:

So, after a test screening, the guys would sort of summarize everything that had been discussed at the test screenings. And then we would come back into the edit suite and just essentially intensely work for another week trying to solve those problems in the way we thought could work obviously while maintaining the integrity of their own vision as well. Because it's easy to try and appease everybody, but you can't to a certain degree, so. Yeah, it was just a matter of taking one issue at time. Okay, so, we notice that they're really confused here, how can we solve that by bringing in something earlier that gives a little release. So, it was really just problem solving and just really trying to figure out things and little bit along the whole way until finally when you sit back. After every session that we had, we were convinced, this is it guys, we're done, we did it, yes. And then the test screening would happen and we're like, "There's still questions. Oh god. Okay, well we got to figure this out." So, yeah, the guys even called me at one point, they were all very serious and were like, "Sabrina, we know we've been in post for a while and we know we've had" ... this is probably after the 10th test screening and they were worried I was just going to walk because I don't think they've ever done this to another editor yet in their career.

Sabrina Pitre:

We're all very similar in age, as well, so, they're young filmmakers as well, so. They were worried that they were going to lose me at some point. But, it's one of those projects, it's so ambitious. I was invested from the beginning, so, there's no way I was going to walk away.

Justin Lachance:

Absolutely. It was marathon.

Sabrina Pitre:

Yeah, yeah. I think it was about six months in post.

Justin Lachance:

Okay, well, Lara, you also with Mouthpiece had a lot of test screenings, but not quite as many.

Lara Johnston:

I thought we had a lot, but then I met Sabrina.

Justin Lachance:

How many was it again?

Lara Johnston:

We had four. Yeah.

Justin Lachance:

That's still considerable because usually it's around two or so.

Lara Johnston:

Yeah, yeah. It's still a lot for a Canadian film I think.

Justin Lachance:

Did it help with the story telling?

Lara Johnston:

Yeah, it was incredibly helpful. The whole movie's kind of based on a conceit, if you haven't seen it. That it's one person who kind of becomes two people. So, kind of our early screenings were about comprehensibility, would people actually understand that? And our first screening was really small, it was actually just some ... not just some editors ... some editors. So, we had I think three editors and one person who was friend of mine come and they understood what was going on, but because they were editors, and it's a great experience to show your film to editors, although you do get a lot of feedback, but it was about sort of the structure. And so, the film is two stories, kind of woven together. The woman's mother dies and then it's kind of about her dealing with her grief, but it's woven together with flashbacks of her mother. So, the way the film was originally structured in the script was that we met the mom very late on, I think two-thirds of the way into the film. Yeah, and so, the main feedback from the screening was just that they really liked the mom, but by then, you're kind of, you don't want to get to know another character.

Lara Johnston:

So, we had to pull her story up to the beginning of the film. And that constituted a lot of work. I'd say if you look at the amount of time we spent working in that area, it was up here and everything else is down here. And again, if you've seen the film, there's an escalator ride that just goes on and on and on, two escalator rows in the bay. And that was partly because we had this ... kind of these flashbacks that were all locked together and had to bring them to the front. So, we had at least two screenings to try to kind of get it to a place where we were pretty happy with. But, then we also just got really specific with screenings. Patricia liked to do ... she's made some studio films and with studio films you do cards where you fill things out. And it's pretty awful in a studio film because the studio will put it front of your face and go [inaudible 00:39:15]. Whatever, you need to put more of this character in or make this character more likable or whatever.

Lara Johnston:

But, she kind of does it because she really wants the person's direct first impression rather than the mob mentality that you get after when everyone's talking together. I mean, I find the talking together after really helpful too as an editor because someone will say something and then another person will go, "Oh yeah, I agree with that." And then you get a sense of sort of consensus.

Lara Johnston:

But, one of the things that was really interesting that came out after one of the screenings, so there's a plot point in the film and it was this screening was kind of breaking up and it had been a really good screening. We sort of felt like oh we're done. We always picked our audiences, we wanted it to be the demographic for the film. And it was never trying to appeal to anybody we that we didn't think was the

demographic. But, just someone was standing around talking to Patricia after and just sort of mentioned they didn't like this one thing in the plot. And it was like I don't know why we never thought of it before, but she just said it seems kind of devicey. So, the mother's supposed to take some pills, she decides not to take these pills and then dies as a result of not taking the pills and it's directly the result of something her daughter has said to her. And this woman said it felt very devicey. And we were just kind of like yeah. Because it was a device.

Justin Lachance:

And that would have affect the entire rest of the film because that was at the beginning where you learn that somewhere, and yeah. Your perception of those characters is completely changed.

Lara Johnston:

Yeah, yeah. So after that, we said, "Well, why don't we try taking it out?" And we did and it came out so easily, it was just sort of a clue that it was a device and it really wasn't woven that organically in. Except there are a couple scenes where I really had to do some hack jobs to sort of get around the talking about it and stuff. But, it was really useful for that and then also just, everyone here I'm sure has experienced it, that feeling of watching something with an audience tells you so much, right? You just don't even have to ask them anything, you just get-

Justin Lachance:

You feel the vibe of the room.

Lara Johnston:

You feel it, yeah. And sitting beside Patricia, and she's looking at me and going like this. They were incredible helpful in that regard.

Justin Lachance:

And there's this feminist undertone throughout the whole movie that's basically the essence of the movie. And it's wonderfully done and beautiful to watch. But, there's also this moment where Ruth Bader Ginsburg has a cut. She says flat out what is the message and it's powerful, it's very powerful because what a great spokesperson. But, I was just wondering, how did that come to be?

Lara Johnston:

That was in the script and it happens to fall in the ... Patricia and I call it the escalator ride to hell. So, it's one of the areas I just felt was too long anyways, so I strongly did not want it to be ... It's just you go to the escalator, you go to a flashback of the mom, you go into these weird musical numbers, and then come back to the escalator, and then you go to Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and I'm like we don't need that. I felt like it was already very sort of there in the film. But, a lot of people, when we showed it to audiences and young women especially, it really resonated with them. And I felt like it was something I could've fought harder to take out, but the audience reaction to it did really resonate with me. And so, it's kind of that line of deciding it's not my favorite moment in the film and I feel like why do you just go there for one time. It's not woven in, but it was important to people and they really liked it. And so, you decide things to keep and things to lose. That's deep.

Justin Lachance:

Yeah, you pick your battles.

Lara Johnston:

Exactly. Yeah.

Justin Lachance:

No, but, it is a very powerful moment in the film. It does take you out a little bit and you're like wait, what just happened? But, that message is so clear and it really resonates throughout the whole film. It's wonderful. So let's watch a clip, this one's in the grocery store of Mouthpiece.

[Clip Plays]

Justin Lachance:

That's an amazing clip. Why did you choose that one?

Lara Johnston:

I was talking to Mathieu about that before I don't ... I didn't know we could pick a trailer.

Justin Lachance:

Oh really?

Lara Johnston:

No, it's really hard to pick a clip because it's not so much about the scene. But, I mean I did pick that ... the movie only has two musical numbers, so it's actually not really indicative of what the movie is, but the language of the film is something we ... it kind of evolved as we were editing. And there was a third musical number which got cut and there's sort of a shot that I couldn't figure out how to use that they shot for the scene. And I ended up using these flash cuts to use the shot to get into the musical number. And everyone really liked that. So, then I tried it with this scene. They shot this on the last day and they sort of had liked the earlier scene, so it kind of wove, had the dialogue go back and forth so we could kind of do it going out of the scene too.

Lara Johnston:

And also the musical numbers were much longer in the script and shot longer and the musical numbers were always on the chopping block because they were left from the play, so this is based on play. And they were very much of the play's DNA and some people, Patricia included, she kept on saying, "I hate musical numbers. Why am I doing these musical numbers?" But, some people really liked them and they're very much part of the theme of the film and the performative aspect of being a woman and her having to kind of come up with what she's going to say about her mom. And so, the happy medium we came up was just making them shorter, which I think they're great.

Justin Lachance:

Yeah, absolutely. And there's also a device that you used throughout the whole film too that kind of helps those transitions. I know it's during heightened emotions there's flashes and there's a specific one where a bathtub where she's drowning in the bathtub. How did that devise?

Lara Johnston:

That was again, that was left over from the play, but in the first act, they do get into the bathtub, but there was a scene where they sort of have a fight in the bathtub. And it's sort of supposed to frame the fight that they have at the end and that early audience we had of editors, yeah, if you want to feel bad about your film, show it to a bunch of editors. They're like, "Oh yeah, we just feel knocked around at the beginning." So, part of the beginning was taking stuff out and really figuring out what needed to be there. When I read the script, it was almost like train spotting, sort of the opening and it couldn't be further from that, it's very slow sort of getting into it.

Lara Johnston:

So, there's this bathtub scene and the footage is pretty cool and we ended up putting a shot of it in the credit sequence. And then, there's this scene where they have this feminist awakening in the bathtub. And I always ... I didn't quite feel like the scene went far enough and so one day, I just put in a bunch of the bathtub footage and I sped it up. And everyone's like, "That is so cool. I don't know what it means, but let's leave it in there." So, it was just kind of trying to use stuff and for me, it was a little bit about what's just boiling inside of her.

Justin Lachance:

And just being overwhelmed, completely overwhelmed. It was wonderful, it was beautiful. I had talked with Richard Comeau who's an editor, really great editor from Quebec and he's done a bunch of films here. He said that the difference between a documentary editing and fiction editing is, documentary you're always asking what do I put in, and in fiction, you ask what do I want to take out? I don't know if you guys had any input on that kind of stuff. But, I feel like when you're rewriting scripts and stuff like that and the third writing of post production, there's always that kind of idea of removing scenes.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

Oh, wow. We'll just carry on. I'm sorry.

Sabrina Pitre:

Similarly, yeah, I find with scripted you have this sort of bones of a scene, but once it's shot and once you see how the actors have interpreted it, things change dramatically. And so, a lot of the test screening too helped us determine whether or not some characters just needed to be lessened or whether some scenes needed to be pulled because the father was coming across too harsh. That relationship was a very delicate balance between him and Chloe. And so there were some early scenes of him punishing her essentially that were just removed because we found the audience just wasn't connecting with them as father-daughter. So, yeah, it's like the script is sort of just the foundation and then you can kind of take that and just mix it up and do what's necessary to get really the core of the

story coming through and the themes that you want and it all kind of has to be harmonious, so it's never set in stone what's written down anyway.

Lara Johnston:

Yeah, I guess. Like our film was ... Patricia kept on saying it's film about a woman who does errands for the day and writes a eulogy. It's not terribly action heavy, so I think that really drove, whittling and whittling and whittling. And there's some really kind of fast cutty stuff in it, but then part of it is you just have these moments where you want just to kind of go into this kind of very lull where she's just in her head and she's kind of thinking and stuff. And I think for those moments to kind of resonate, you kind of wanted the other moments to kind of move quickly. And so, yeah, I mean just sort of finding that balance between the two kind of tones I think was helpful.

Justin Lachance:

That pretty much sums up our job. I'll open the floor Q & A. Is there anybody, yes?

Audience:

Hi. My question is how do you work with the director and how much room you have from the director, how you communicate with the director and what kinds of director that you think is fantastic to work with?

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

So the director is on set always asking questions and they have to have answers constantly. And they're bombarded by decision making and they have to be on all the time and so, in the post productions situation, the time and the possibility of questioning themselves and really trying things out, gives them a lot more freedom and that is for an editor, you're supposed to nurture that and help that along.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

And so, depends on the director, some are hardly there, sometimes you just work on your own, sometimes they're always there constantly. And so you have to stay a little bit open to different kind of ways of working.

Sabrina Pitre:

Yeah, I think Mathieu covered that really well. Essentially, you have a relationship with the director, director-editor. It's like a collaboration, so I think the more you take that to heart, the better really. The idea that you can experiment together in the edit suite and there's isn't any set way necessarily to achieve something, it's just you kind of find your way there together. Obviously, getting the freedom to experiment alone is always helpful too as an editor just because I feel if you don't have somebody watching over you the whole time, you have a bit more freedom to do something incredibly bad and be like, "Oh yeah, that's not going to work."

Justin Lachance:

And then you feel like you're God because it's like, "Oh this is perfect."

Sabrina Pitre:

Yeah, right. So, yeah, it's really just giving that, having that flexibility and building that relationship with your editor. It's sort of symbiosis really.

Lara Johnston:

To feel safe, to try crazy stuff and there are a couple scenes where I cut them completely different than she wanted. And she was like, "That's interesting, but let's try this." And we ended up doing it her way, but then we used some of the ideas in a different spot. You have to feel like you have the freedom to do that and Patricia just really nurtured that, she said that to everybody on the crew, just go crazy. It just created such a great sort of environment.

Audience:

I have a question about test screenings? And I know two of you, Lara and Sabrina, mentioned test screenings. I don't know for you Mathieu for Genesis, are there comments you get back from test screenings that you completely disagree with and fight for those edits to stay in and have you been successful?

Lara Johnston:

Yeah, I mean, one thing and Patricia right from the beginning was like, "We're only going to do the things we agree with." And that wasn't that she wasn't open to other comments, but it's kind of a way of confirming something that you already have doubt about or if there's something you're disagreeing about, that it can kind of give you ... And for me, it'd be Bader Ginsburg and there was one other ... There was many versions where we had a title card in the beginning because some people didn't understand the whole conceit of the movie until very late and it upset them. And so, it was just always a balance between the ones that are helpful and then the ones that aren't. It's different with studios because sometimes you have to do them, but not in Canada, which is what's so amazing about it.

Justin Lachance:

Yes it is.

Mathieu Bouchard-Malo:

[Mathieu answers in French]

Justin Lachance:

So Mathieu said that he hasn't really done big test screenings with a giant room full of people, but he has done with a select few people who have been nicely chosen. And sometimes you can fight against those notes, but they always come back in your brain and they always start making you think about this current thing. And it's like okay, let's try some things. It can usually help.

Sabrina Pitre:

Yeah, I mean for the most part, you're always going to get those comments. Like, what the hell, come on. But, it's always going to be a mixed bag, but it's more I think about maybe how many of the similar comments like those you're getting. It's important to weigh sort of the percentages of how many are saying the same thing. But, ultimately, it is your vision, so, it's up to you whether you want to take it to heart. But, it's just a way of kind of pulling you out of sort of a tunnel-vision that you can get sometimes about your film.

Audience:

My question's for Sabrina. Did you notice a difference between the comments you got from LA and the comments you got from Vancouver?

Sabrina Pitre:

Yes, yes we did. Yeah, that was interesting. We actually found the LA people were a little less in tune with the vision we had for the film, oddly enough, I think they're used to a certain budget level, a certain ... yeah, just way of going about things. Maybe the slow burn they weren't a big fan of that either, ultimately. So, we did have to take a lot of those comments with a grain of salt sometimes without compromising the vision of the film. But yeah, but, it was interesting because ultimately, you want your film to appeal to a wide range of audiences, so you don't want to ... I think the guys were very specific about choosing people from various backgrounds and doing these multi-city screenings in order to get as much kind of varied feedback as they could. So, ultimately, it was quite helpful.

Justin Lachance:

Well, thank you very much for the film panel.

Sarah Taylor:

Thanks for joining us today and a big thank you to our panelists and moderator. A special thanks goes to Jane MacRae, Maureen Grant, and the CCE Board for helping create EditCon 2020.

The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Original music provided by Chad Blain. 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 a 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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