Jozi Film Festival 2014

Panel discussion with Megan Gill and David Max Brown

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Jozi Film Festival 2014: panel discussion

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On the 22nd of February 2014, SAGE hosted a panel discussion at the Jozi Film Festival, featuring panelists Megan Gill and David Max Brown and chaired by Stephen Abbott.

Our original plan was to video this panel discussion as part of a new events video strategy, but a technical glitch on our side prevented this from working. Nates Audio Visual very kindly sponsored the cameras and sound equipment.

Below is the full transcript of the panel discussion.

Stephen Abbott (SA): Hi guys. Thanks for coming.

Just a quick intro on the panelists, on my left here is Megan Gill. Megan has been an editor for 20+ years now, and she is drama focused she has done a lot of TV and features, including *Tsoti*, *Spud*, *Material*, *Rendition*, *X-men: Wolverine*. We are really pleased to have you here, thanks for coming.

David Max Brown is a producer primarily, with a storied history in the South African film industry. He has most recently, I believe, returned to editing in a way, and cuts a film playing here at the festival *The Bag on my Back* which is a documentary, so we are very pleased to have you too.

The topic is contemporary workflows, but I would like to talk more generally and include the technical — how technical enables creative work.

We can start very generally, about the workflow and how you deal with editing today.

Megan Gill (MG): The last film I worked on film was Vehicle 19. It was shot on film but it was basically edited digitally from there. And since then, that was 3 years ago, as far as I know the film labs are closed, and shooting on film seems to be sort of dead in South Africa.

In a way, our work is shot on whatever system it is, at the moment it seems to be Red Raw, transcoded, I try and get it transcoded at The Refinery or somewhere like that, rather than transcoding on set. I think it is enough of a burden and that there's too much other stuff going on on-set, that it should be two processes, and I think they should be separate processes, but that it just my feeling, if there isn't money available at least transcode off site, in a second place.

I usually work on Final Cut, but I'm trying to move back to Avid. I hate Final Cut Pro X, I don't want to know about Premiere, that's just me. I have learnt 7 different editing systems since computers started, I have worked on Lightworks, Avid, DV-something, Final Cut and something else. As far as I'm concerned, I am done with learning new

systems. Avid works really well, and it's cheap now, and it also provides upgrades that you can use, whereas I think (with) Final Cut Pro, Apple, shot themselves in the foot.

So it is transcoded, then it comes to me, my assistant imports it into the machine and logs it with scene numbers, slate numbers, take numbers and slight descriptions and then placed into scene bins. Edits happen, at whatever resolution these days. Storage is so cheap that you can work at relatively high resolutions, although I don't want to work at the highest resolution, full HD etc. For me, it is a waste of time and energy, we can't afford machines that have full HD. So I just stay away from full HD, and I stay at an Apple ProRes HQ or an equivalent. Then once the film is locked, take it back to a place like The Refinery and have it rematched to the Raw, and grade off the Raw if possible, as it has more latitude. You are not going to get to the latitude you want grading with ProRes, especially if you are going to cinema.

SA: So David you are from a completely different perspective right, you're more of an indie, from what I understand about your documentary, it was kind of an indie labour of love, completely the other end.

David Max Brown (DMB): Yes, pretty much. I don't know if any of you have worked with the Canon 5D. Quite a few hands up there. I started my career as a photographer, and then got into video and then years ago we were shooting with High 8 and V-matic and editing then was linear editing, so you'd go from tape to tape and it was very tedious. And then I hadn't done any digital editing, so my experience with digital editing, non-linear editing like Final Cut Pro or Avid, as producer or director, was watching editors edit.

In this film, I was so involved with the director, Tempiwe, and we were making a very personal film, we had probably spent about 2 years on and off, discussing the story, how we were going to shoot, how the film is going to get made and how she was going to tell her story and go back to Zimbabwe to do it. When we finished the film, you know I thought, "I think I could edit this." My son, studied cinematography and he said to me, "Well if you ever have a problem, just YouTube it Dad." So I was like, "What does that mean?" And so then I learnt "YouTube it" and that's how it happened, if I found myself in trouble, I just asked the question and then found the answer, and then kind of found my way around Final Cut Pro 7.

I started making assemblies of the footage, and trying to see how all the footage worked, and actually then started putting the whole film together. And yes, it's first screening was at Encounters, and then it was screened at the Tri-Continental Film festival, the AFDA film festival and now at Jozi Film Festival, so I am quite pleased.

I must say, we had a lot of technical problems, although I am sure Megan and I can agree, that whatever the technology, it actually only makes it harder in so many ways. You know, editing is all about putting time in, and rethinking, and finding a path through this jungle of material, and digital technology doesn't necessarily make it easier. I think in a lot of ways it makes it even more difficult, because people assume it is going easy. But we had footage that we shot on the F3, and we had cameras that were given to us and I must explain that sometimes when you are making an Indie film you have to work with what you are given. We were given the 5D and the Sony F3 belonged to us. But the specification of Al Jeezera, who had pre-bought the film, was that it needed to be in 422, and it needed to be at least 50 mega-bits per second. So basically the recording rate needed to be at a certain speed onto the card for it to be at the specifications of the broadcaster, which meant that the 5D, which everyone thinks is such an amazing camera, and the Sony F3, were not good enough for the megabit rate required. Everybody says, "but the 5D shoots feature film, people shoot feature films on the Canon 5D," but because the broadcaster retransmits, retransmits and retransmits again, by the time that happens, the signal is not strong enough from what you originally recorded. So we were very limited with the 5D, sometimes we had to use it because we were shooting in places where we weren't allowed to use a bigger camera, because it was dangerous. We were in areas where people didn't want you to film

and in those particular areas we would use the 5D. When we using the F3 we were recording onto an external recorder. Either onto a Pix 240 or a Nano Flash, the external recorder allows you to record in a higher format, and a faster recording speed. It is also a great advantage when you are shooting in difficult areas because when they come to you and take the recording card out of camera, you've got the recording card in the external device as well, so it is like a backup.

MG: So are you saying that you record onto a card, which immediately goes to a hard drive?

DMB: It is actually separate, it is a separate out on the camera which records to the external recorder, but is also recording through the camera at 30 mega-bits per second onto the card, while recording onto the camera card. And the other advantage of an external recorder is that it is recording directly into ProRes, at 422, so it goes straight into the Final Cut Pro, and then you don't need to do any transcoding. If you record directly onto the card then you have to transcode it, and then reimport it into Final Cut Pro, and it is a hell of a process, and the same with anything recorded with the 5D.

We did 2 cuts of the film, a 48 minute cut and a 52 minute cut, and what we did was finish the 48 minute completely, we also took it to The Refinery, graded there, and as you know, for the grade you have to media manage all your media. Now I was just taking those clips which I had used in my edit, as the original final footage, to the grade/ conform, where the film is reassembled before the grade can happen. Of course not all of the shots come across, and things went wrong. Now the biggest problem that we had, our DOP, for some strange reason, when he was recording on the 5D, we are recording at different frames per second, so sometimes it was recording in 23.98, or 21.87 and sometimes at 25. It was a big rocky road and I didn't realise that at all before we got to the grade/ conform. So next time, I am going to check the footage, that it was shot on 25 frames.

Because I didn't have the experience to know that sometimes happens. I just edited, and when I got to The Refinery they could see, especially in the slow-mo's that there was just a slight little jump.

MG: That's the problem with Final Cut Pro as well, it allows for too many errors to go onto the timeline. It adjusts for it and doesn't actually warn you that there are these issues. But Avid would say, "No this is wrong."

DMB: So yes, we only discovered we had problems in this very expensive post-production studio. Which was horrific in many areas, but we managed to solve all of those little problems and whatever footage we shot in the wrong frame rate was corrected to the right frame rate. But I think what it highlighted for me, was the importance of online. And I think that is what a lot of people don't understand, that when you have done your offline, and before you go to grade, you need to do your online, and you really need somebody to check every frame, all the frame rates, all of this.

And it is so much cheaper to do it yourself, or get somebody in with experience to do it for you, than to be sitting at The Refinery where you are paying a lump of money to go through every frame, checking every shot, and checking that every shot is perfect and that it all works.

MG: Would you recommend using the Canon 5D after your experience?

DMB: I wouldn't recommend the 5D because when you are shooting on location and it is sunny Africa, you actually get all sorts of problems looking through the view finder, it's difficult to get the right exposure, to focus properly and see what you are doing.

Yes, and with our DOP, he tried to sometimes match the 5D set on a tripod for a wide, to the F3 for closer shots, but then sometimes the 5D wasn't in focus, and you don't really notice that on set because you are in a rush, and

especially with documentary, things are happening all the time, and you can be under pressure as a cinematographer. But for certain things the 5D is just wonderful.

SA: Shall we open it up to you guys? Should we start with questions?

Audience Member: What about sound?

MG: I was going to say, the one thing that happens on set, and I am sure it also happens on documentary set as well in a way, and everyone forgets about sound. Do your best to get a good sound person. My other, new thing is everyone, unless you are specifically making something for TV, I think things should be shot at 24 frames per second, because it has become an international standard, and not the 23.98, 24 frames per second, full 24. If you are going into cinema, then you sitting at the rate that cinema is placed under. It became a work around in this country, when Avid first came out and it's a whole long story, nobody could get stuff to sync up properly, first couple of movies I worked on, it was like hell on earth, stuff that was shot on 24 on the negative, and then transferred to PAL at 25, and then your sound and trying to make it all sync up.

So the solution came to shoot everything at 25, and basically in a way that standard is nearly dead, and we are about to go digital in any case, so I am trying to push everyone I know to shoot in 24, especially if you are going for cinema release.

SA: HD PAL is 25 to sync with 50 Hertz, so it's not really 25, it's 50, so it is 720p 50 frames per second (fps), and 1080 is 50i, so yes, TV we are going to still be stuck with.

MG: What happens with cinemas is they run it 24fps. And your stuff gets sped up. I edited a film where it was shot at 25fps, and then when they played it back, and this is when we were still going back to negatives, not to DCP. The film was a comedy and when the played back, it played back slower because I was cutting at 25, and then when it went to cinema, it just played my death.

SA: So the way it works is: the easiest way to convert 25fps to 24fps is that you play those frames at whatever rate, so there are 25 frames in a second, and instead of playing them over a second, you play them over a second and one frame. So you play 25 frames at 24 frames per second. And Voila! That means your films also runs 6 percent longer. And if you don't do anything, it means your audio is at a slightly lower pitch, and that messes with the timing.

SA: I did this with a short film; I shot it at 25 and slowed it down to 24.

MG: It plays so differently.

SA: You know what actually, it's a dark comedy and after a while I couldn't tell the difference.

MG: The first time I watched it play in 24, I was like *aggravated face*

SA: So I guess here I am hearing a lot of negatives, and all these problems. We are seeing problems on set, and it doesn't affect anyone on set but it messes up our lives in post, and Megan you have got a lot of experience working literally on film, then digital film and now completely digital film, digitised, then completely digital. And David you too a little bit, going from tape to tape, and now digital. What are the benefits? Surely there must be something, some kind of give as well as a take?

MG: It is much easier to handle that film and just be with that film, when it is not as time consuming, and sort of prepping it for the editor, or takes long to prep somewhere else. And digital does give you, more room to experiment because it much easier to undo, and redo, and keep a version here and keep a version there, and try this that.

SA: So this is how I learnt, by just playing and I can't imagine learning any other way, and undo, you know.

MG: Yes, which is great to a certain degree, but what editors do on film is that they make those decisions quite carefully, so they have more of an idea of how the scene is going to look before they edit it.

SA: So it is less intuitive, and more thought through?

MG: Or maybe it is just as intuitive actually, because my instinct is to do it this way and that kind of has to be right. The thing is, going back to problems which are not necessarily about editing, it's because we shoot a bit slap dash, and I think that it's not an issue, because it 'looks amazing'. But that does it actually mean anything. Editing is like 'oh, that is such a sexy cut', but that doesn't mean anything in terms of the story. I have got a theory that films run too long in the last 15 years…

SA: Hell yes.

MG: And I actually think that it is because people are cutting on their computers, the films are beautifully edited, each scene is beautifully edited but the overall story seems to be lost in the film.

When we used to cut on film, we used to go and watch that film every Monday morning, watch it from beginning to end, and the editor would make decisions from watching that film.

Viewings are important, sitting there and watching the film and thinking about it. We don't think about it, and what has happened is because everything is digital, everyone wants the post production schedule to be cut in half, but it shouldn't be because editing isn't about throwing stuff on the timeline and making it work, it is about thinking, it's about making very big decisions about the story on a whole, on a micro and macro scale. And I think to a certain degree, macro is lost in the digital age.

I remember the first time I thought about that was when I saw *Traffic*, and that is an impeccably edited film, the transitions between scenes and all that are amazing, but the film is at least 50 minutes too long. And I probably am exaggerating, but it was too long and I know it was layered and that sort of thing, but I think something has gotten lost somewhere in that process of editing.

SA: So basically because of computers, we are just kind of doing it at an assembly, and considering that the final cut?

MG: It is more just the overall story. My big thing is if you cutting something, or you making a film, watch it a lot. One of the assistants I worked with in Los Angeles, he worked on a Michael Mann film, and every night, this is when we were still on computers and you couldn't make a Quicktime really, you would play it out to tape. He would play it out to tape every night, and whatever happened, even if it was midnight, that tape would be driven to Michael Mann's house, who watched it before he came into work the next morning. And I am not a big Michael Mann fan either, and all editors have nervous breakdowns when they are working for him, but I think it is lost in the way we make films here a lot.

SA: We're too focused just on the scenes.

MG: The scenes, the whole story, just watch the film and think about it is saying but don't go straight back in to the edit suite, if possible, walk away. Another thing I try and work into all my schedules is a week off before I picture lock. So that I finish, I think I have the final edit, and then you come back and I promise you, you see at least 15 things that you still could do to make that film better. Because otherwise you are too entrenched, and you haven't had time to think about it.

DMB: I think that works right through the process, I am working with a writer at the moment, and I have been waiting for that script, I have been checking my phone and my laptop every day, for the script, and just yesterday he wrote to

me to say, “I have finished, but I am not going to send it to you just yet because I just want to let it sit for two weeks”. So that he can look back at it with a bit of perspective before he sends it to me.

And I thought, “That’s great,” you know, I would rather wait another month, and you do that, and then I think we will get a better product, because that’s what’ happening, we’re just rushing, especially with documentary. Look, I really do think that whether you are making a fiction film, or a documentary film, and I work in both, the strongest thing is about story telling.

We really have to be telling stories, and the best documentary films when they are telling a story well and the techniques of doing that are very similar. And what we tend to do is, because we aren’t thinking that clearly about what the story is, what is the film really doing, you know, so we tend to rush things. So for example, all documentaries have direct interviews, or they have a lot of people just talking, and 9 or 10 times out of 10, okay maybe 9, most editors, or lets rather blame the producers, are not actually thinking about transcription. So that you can actually take the file, and can say, “Okay, David was interviewed here and this is everything he said,” and you can look at that file away from the edit suite, and get to your table in the morning and just sit and look through it and then take a highlighter and look at what are the most important things. It’s so important to have that, to really know what is being said, but it also comes back way before.

For example, this film *The Bag on my Back*, we decided that as a creative decision, but we also knew it would save us money, but creatively, to make a documentary film about Zimbabwe - a film about history and what had happened in the country - we didn’t want to use any archive, so that constraint gave us a lot of creative energy as well.

It meant that, and I said to Tempiwe, that even though I didn’t know I was going to be editing, and I knew the editor would need coverage. So when the people are being interviewed, or even when we are looking at them Skype-ing with relatives overseas in exile, what is going on in the room?

You know, you see an old calendar, we are shooting in 2013, but this calendar is 2008, so for me that is really important, just in the background and isn’t really seen by the camera, so I asked the director to really pick up those details when she went back, to go back into that room where she had done that initial interview and film the calendar, and the DOP said, “Well what are we filming a funny calendar for, and it’s dirty!?” But it really worked well in the final cut. We had close ups, we shot close ups of fires that we could then use in the edit instead of say raids on farms. Where you would usually use the farm raid and the archive, we used other kinds of ways of telling the story. And what I would say is one of the biggest constraints for me, is coming from producing into the actual edit, the thing is we had pre-sold to Al Jazeera, so imagine, you want to make your own creative film right, and be in control of it, especially with a documentary, but who is actually putting the money in.

Once a broadcaster, a newsy kind of broadcaster, has given you money you have to be thinking about them as well. And I had a director who had a really creative vision, she wanted to put animation in there, she wanted to put things all over the place. She wanted it to feel like a time machine, like it is all about the past and the present, and the future. But Al Jazeera didn’t want that, so we kind of had to mix the director’s vision with the practicality of the job at hand.

SA: Could I just jump in here: it sounds like a problem, and I guess it is something to be aware of, how do you work in the constraints of not only the director’s creative vision, but also the funders, but on the other side it is also a blessing. I cut a documentary about Johannesburg, that the director basically self funded, and through other private money that wasn’t that concerned, and it was hell, because he had no idea what he wanted to do. He had no constraints, no direction and so it became about everything, it was about his life in general. We spent three years cutting this bloody thing, and I just wished firstly, we had some money, a deadline, and an exec. producer, so you know when they are

telling you to cut out that shot of whatever they don't like, the money doesn't like, it is also a blessing in a way… Ja, generally in creativity.

MG: As filmmakers, to a certain degree, you need to know who your audience is, and I mean obviously you have to make the film for yourself, but need to know what story you are telling. Don't go into a film thinking I am going to make a film about fire, and just explore it. You've got to know how you going to get there, it can't be something sitting in the clouds, it has to be real.

Your vision has to have a way of getting there, and work out how you are going to do it. You can shoot the shit out of anything, but that doesn't mean that you have a story to tell. You've got to sort of have all those things in place before you start.

SA: So, more questions?

Audience Member: Do you find that when you have a limited amount of footage, that the director's been quite clear and has maybe only given you two angles, and 3 takes of each of those 2 angles, do you find that better?

MG: No, I hate that, too. I mean you want room to move, and you want room to be creative. But there are some directors I imagine, I was watching *Amour* this week, and I am sure Haneke from just looking at his films, he knows exactly what every shot is, and he could probably put it together himself, and I don't know his process, but from looking at his film is seems that there are so few out takes.

SA: Probably just cuts it in the camera.

MG: Because his vision is so pure in a way. But then again the director has to be really good to do that, to know, "this is what I want," then you have got to be a master like him.

SA: And it is less creative for the editor right, because it is more of an assembly.

Audience Member: Maybe creating order to the last bit?

MG: Maybe working like that is the most rewarding experience in the world, I don't know. But if you are going to be that certain about what your shots are going to be about, you better be good, or you are not going to have coverage. So then you've got to know that it is masterful and perfect. Otherwise just shoot, and try and find a way to something.

Audience Member: How early do you start with pre-production?

MG: Not much, sometimes I have a say on the script, only things that really bug me, and then of course talk about schedule, and how we are going to get certain things done.

Audience Member: Do you have any say about coverage? And that you were thinking as a producer and not an editor at the time?

SA: You never push back.

MG: No, no, it's not really my job, I will phone and say you need that close up, once it has been shot. But if the director asks me, "I'm not really sure how to do that, do you think we need to do that?" then I will. But I don't really like to, I think that is the DOP's and director's job, my job is to come in afterwards and work my way through it. I am a very big believer as an editor of not being too involved on the shoot, because then I am just doing what I saw being done on set. But if I am outside of what is happening on set, in terms of my headspace, then I am the first audience for the film. If I am on set, then I can't be that. If I am too involved with the shooting then I become too worried about that crane

shot that took 7 hours to shoot and I'm thinking I've got to put that crane in, because then I don't have the freedom in the edit room to be like I know that took a long time to shoot, but it actually doesn't work and I throw it away.

SA: David, do you feel your editing was tainted by your knowledge of the difficulty of the process?

DMB: No, because I didn't go on shoot. But I know they had a very difficult time.

MG (at SA): Do you direct and edit?

SA: Sometimes I do my own stuff, it's kind of one of the ways I deal with directing and the trauma of directing on the day, but also making sure that it is going to work. I'll do a rough edit that night, because I am so stressed about it. But I don't like editing too close to the show if I am editing as well. It is the same sort of thing.

So we've talked about working with the sort of funding constraints, and we touched on it a little bit, but what about working with the director, the creative vision, executing, you know beyond the ideal of Haneke, what's it like? How do you negotiate this sort of relationship and what are the ways that it can work well, in your past experience? I mean, David, in your case, since your kind of the experience is producer and editor, I'm interested there too?

DMB: I mean I think it is quite interesting between director, editor, producer, camera. I find it quite absurd that camera, DOP or camera operators shoot and then never see the finished product. They are actually not too interested, they just want to shoot and never see it again.

SA: And never mind rushes right?

DMB: Right, You'll find editors who will edit for years, and actually their practice of editing makes you a very good director, you know. I think it is actually setting you up, I think that editors can become directors, but we always think of camera people as becoming directors.

SA: Makes you a good critic, sitting in the edit suite, criticising.

DMB: Exactly. Because at the point in the edit where you see all these problems, you are actually physically dealing with how things don't go together, or how things could have been shot differently, so it is an incredible learning environment for directors and cinematographers.

SA: So here, I think, we can safely say that the DOP should be around more, they should be around a little bit in post, in the edit, and then they should definitely be around in the grade right? This is something that freaks me out, the person who is supposed to be in charge of the picture generally isn't around when it is being messed with.

MG: Producers have enough money for the grade.

DMB: I think it is silly. Just come into the edit, to at least see how your shots are working, get some feedback from the editor about how this could have been done differently or not, a lot of cinematographers just move onto the next job and they couldn't give a shit, they're so convinced they're doing it correctly but then they might not be.

I have certainly come across many cinematographers who I would like to sit down with, but you don't always get that time, so instead you decide you're not going to work with that person again, and try it out with the next person.

MG: It's a shame because if more of us were more open to having this conversation, about what doesn't work and what works; you could actually expand your relationships with people, rather than having to move onto new people all the time.

DMB: Especially with the colourist doing the grade at The Refinery, he was showing me something and I said, "Wow, that's beautiful!" And he said, "it is not because of the DOP, it is because of me!"

MG: I also think they take themselves a little bit too seriously, these digital cinematographers, what are they calling themselves these days? Ja, anyway. I just want to talk about my relationship to directing. My first thing, I think as an editor, your responsibility is to serve the director's vision, and not to bring your ego into it. Sometimes they mess up and you've got to fix it, but what I am trying to do is enhance what they've already done. That's what I think my job is.

Once I have read the script I try not to think about it. This is why I know I am never going to be a director, because I sometimes think to myself, "Why did they shoot it this way or that way?" but I don't have that overall vision.

I try and read the script and read the story and try and see it only as that, and I read it is as a novel, so that I know what the story is about. So that when I get my rushes, I am not going, "Why the hell didn't they do this, why did they do that?" It's about how do I serve the story in terms of what I have and try not to imagine all the other shots they should have done.

SA: Ja, the director will do that for you.

MG: Especially on low budget films. I just recently worked for a couple of weeks on the Phillip Noyce film in Cape Town, they needed someone to come in, they had shot a whole lot of second unit and the editor hadn't had time to look at it yet, so I just came through and sorted out the second unit for the places where it was supposed to be in the film, before they went to go shoot the first unit stuff. And it was quite amazing working with Barry Alexander Brown, basically he's Spike Lee's editor, he's done every Spike Lee film, the editor of Phillip Noyce's film. He cuts, cuts, cuts and then he goes through it and then he says, "Look, you know what would help is if," because they have got probably a 100 million dollars probably, maybe 80 million dollars, so he says, "It would be really helpful to add this and add that," but the films we do here at home, we just don't have that luxury.

So I usually have to work within the constraints of what was shot, so it is a big difference. When you are working on a 100 million dollar, or a 50 million dollar or a 30million dollar budget, they can go back and do pick ups, which is great, but most of the time on local productions that is all I've got.

So it's about using what you've got to make it work. And then once I am working with the director, then for me, I just hate the first cut, it kills me. It's horrible, I find it painful and hard and I'm nervous, I'm not getting this right and then the director comes into the room and there is an absolute sense of relief off my shoulders. So I love the collaboration of working with the director. And going, "That's working, that's not working, you must do this." He throws things at me and I throw things back at him. That's how I work. But try not let your ego get in the way, that is the most important thing for an editor. You got to be sure of what you are doing and be able to argue your point, but not take it personally when the director says that isn't working.

And my other big thing as an editor is, when the director says try this and you say, "This is not going to work," rather than having a discussion about why it is not going to work, stop and just show them. Rather just do it and see if it works, and see if he's right, if he's right, he's right—if he's not, he's not. Otherwise it becomes combative, and you're not going to have an honest and real relationship. And sometimes it actually does work.

SA: I had that happen to me once: I said it wasn't going to work and then it did. Then you're like, "Well shit, it is a good thing you are paying me."

DMB: That's the advantage with digital systems like this, you can do anything.

SA: We've got a few more minutes, so one short question and then we can wrap it up.

Audience Member: You said most directors only come in after the first cut?

MG: I usually work when they are shooting, so I will have the first cut a week or so after the shoot, and then we start working, I also want them to have at least a week or two off before they walk into the edit room. I also don't love sitting with the director doing the first cut, I think that is where you can lose magic.

We've lost the art of watching rushes together, that seems to have fallen by the wayside, so I'll cut my scenes, especially if I have never worked with the director before, in the first few days I will cut my scenes and then try to get the director in to see if we are talking the same language. And then we probably don't really see each other again because the schedule is so tight etc., until after they're done shooting. If I have too much discussion with him or her about what that scene should be about, then I am just doing what they think should be done, and I am not bringing my stuff to the party. So I like to do my first cut myself, then he or she becomes an objective eye on my cut, if the director does the first cut with me, then he is also entrenched in thinking that cut's perfect, which probably doesn't really work probably at a later stage. But that is just my experience.

SA: So to wrap it up, I thought I would ask each of you to give one creative tip, and one technical tip, and I will go first as well. My creative tip is kill your darlings. And my technical tip, I don't know, I would say, make backups.

Audience Member: What is 'kill your darlings'?

SA: If there something that you love, and you think it is the best thing ever and it has nothing to do with the story—then there's your answer.

MG: That beautiful shot that took a day and a half?

SA: Yip! And you know edit ones too, those things you edited so carefully, you're showing off how good you are and all that, that's when you know you've got to worry. It's really when you think you as the editor are shit hot in that scene, the alarm bells should be going off. Kill your darlings. Think it's better for the project generally. Unless it's a music video. Then go wild. Megan?

MG: Creative tip, mine is to sleep on it. Come back, don't ever think anything is perfect, because I promise you, you come back and you can change something and it will be better. My technical one is, I don't know, backups are good…

SA: Test your backups?

MG: Ja, well I have never really had a backup problem… Have a good assistant. Oh my technical tip is put an extra three weeks on your schedule for your editor, or double it, you don't ever have enough time to edit, I promise you.

SA: David?

DMB: Well I just think that sometimes the time that you take before you start editing, is the most important time. I think that is really my most important lesson, especially with documentary. You want to start playing with images when you should rather speak to the director, really understand what their vision is, and what the story is, because you don't quite have a story yet, which is how it is different in your case Megan where you cut to the script.

With documentary, unless you as an editor have really understood what the director's vision is, you will jump in and start throwing things around and you will go on forever. And you could end up editing for a year, or two, I have seen it happen.

You also need to be aware of those constraints, be clear about who that audience is, because it is the director's vision, where exactly is it going to be seen, who it's going to pay for it, what is it then going to look like. You can make

different versions, but believe you me, by the time you are done with version one, you have lost a lot of energy for version two.

We did a 48-minute cut, and we did a 52-minute cut and we keep on talking about doing the 90 minute purely for the creative vision of the director, but I don't know if it will ever happen. I think you have so much footage, often you can go any way with it, so you really need to spend time to talking it through before you really start working on it.

And then I would say, sometimes you must just be prepared. In the beginning everything feels perfect so be prepared to change things and mess it up and start again—because you can. What Megan was saying about giving it time, is just the most important thing. Let it rest, come back to it after 2 or 3 weeks.

Technical tip, one odd thing I discovered about stills is, you know, I thought that if somebody was going to scan a still, like a photograph, that we were going to use, because we used family stills, I thought I had to scan them at the highest possible resolution, only to find out that those jpegs at 1200dpi or whatever, don't play in Final Cut Pro.

SA: Ja, Final Cut Pro 7 does not deal with stills well.

DMB: At first they were fine, but at any other stage if you want to put a background or something, I can't really think of examples, but I think you know what I mean, when you want the background to move or something like that, it just all breaks up and goes to shit. Final Cut Pro just runs out of memory.

SA: Alright, thanks guys. Megan?

MG: If you can, move away from Final Cut Pro 7, with Avid your life will be so much easier.

SA: Really, it is from the 90s.

MG: I know it is hard, but Avid only costs 11 and a half grand now...

SA: Ja, it's 2000 dollars. So the best? Between a Mac and a PC?

MG: You don't need any dedicated hardware like you used to. So it's fine.

SA: Well thanks very much, Dave and Megan, and just want to thank Taku and Lisa from the Jozi Film Festival for having us, and thank you to Nate's audio visuals, and lastly to the GoetheOnMain for the venue.