

Members: SAGE Newsletter

2017 01

Dear SAGE members,

SAGE newsletter 2017, volume 1

We are already a third into the year and we hope that the rest of 2017 will be a very productive for our members. We would like to use this opportunity to inform you of what SAGE has been up to until now, make a few announcements and share the musings of two of our SAFTA winners.

Encounters Rough Cut Lab

We are proud to announce our partnership with [Encounters](#) and [The Refinery](#) in presenting the first Rough Cut Lab at this year's Encounters International Documentary Festival in Cape Town. Three documentaries that are currently in post-production will be selected to be mentored by senior SAGE editors from 5 to 7 June 2017.

The deadline for submissions is 5 May. More information about this event and how to enter can be found [here](#), and applications should be sent to pa@encounters.co.za, with the subject line Rough Cut Lab.

Socials

The Cape Town and Johannesburg branches held socials on 23 February to start off the year.

It was a great opportunity to touch base with members and find out what everyone is up to. The JHB social took place at Panettone Café in Parkview, and in Cape Town SAGE members met at Bardelli's in Kloof Street. A big thank you to Louis le Grange who organised a wine sponsorship from [De Wet Cellar](#) for the evening.





South African Film and Television Awards 2017

Several SAGE members received SAFTA nominations for Best Editing in 2017, and even in the Best Film Score category. The nominations were announced in February, and the Technical Awards Ceremony was held on 16 March at Sun City. SAGE

members also participated as judges on various panels. Members who were nominated and won are as follows:

Best Achievement in Editing in Documentary Short

Winner: Khalid Shamis S.A.G.E. for The Silent Form

Best Achievement in Editing in Feature Film

Winner: Nicholas Costaras for Sink

Megan Gill S.A.G.E. for Shepherds and Butchers

Best Achievement in Editing in Wildlife

Candice Odgers S.A.G.E. Soul of the Elephant

Best Achievement in Editing in a TV Drama

Winner: Ula Oelsen for Bloedbroers

Melanie Jankes Golden S.A.G.E. for Heist Season 1

Best Achievement in Editing in a TV Soap

Winner: Kirsten de Magalhaes S.A.G.E. and Andrew Traill for The Road

Kirsten de Magalhaes S.A.G.E. and Jack Esterhuizen for Isibaya

Best Achievement in Original Music or Score for a Feature Film

Quinn Lubbe for Modder en Bloed

Congratulations to all our members who were nominated and especially the winners! We are also aware that many programmes that were awarded in other categories were edited by our members - well done!

A complete list of winners can be found [here](#). If you were a nominee, winner or judge, we'd like to hear from you. Please send an account of your experience and impression to info@editorsguildsa.org.

Below are interviews with two of this year's winners, Nicholas Costaras and Ula Oelsen.

Nicholas Costaras



How and when did you first get into editing?

I was touring with a band and decided to film a tour video. Once I picked up that camera it was a world I quickly fell in love with. And of course once you start filming, you need to start editing.

How important is formal education to the craft of editing?

This is where my opinion becomes controversial. I did not receive any formal education with regards to film and in particular editing. So I assume there are benefits for sure, but the word “important” doesn’t resonate at all. I think apprenticeship is more important. It’s one thing to get to know the technical language of film, and even how to use your edit tools (AVID, FCP etc...). But honestly, YouTube and even the company tutorials are sufficient to get that knowledge at the drop of a hat.

What is important to me is how do you construct a film within limitations of the performances, camera and script. You can’t learn that in a classroom. It’s much easier to work with the footage, learn it intimately and see how that particular scene was crafted and even more importantly why it works in the context on the film. If you get to work for senior editor, as an apprentice you can compile the scene yourself and see how it holds up with the final edit and learn from practice. My biggest learning curve as a cinematographer and editor evolved from me fixing my own crappy camera work. So my editing became more inventive and when I was filming, my cinematography started working towards the edit.

What software do you use to edit?

The director normally dictates the tool here. Some want to go home and fiddle with ideas so it’s really up to them. The key now is 4K. I prefer to get my transcodes in 4K, edit on a 2K timeline and if we need to crop in etc, we can see if lens holds up instead of only finding out in the grade. So the AVID at the moment is my first choice.

Tell us a bit about your editing process. Once you get the footage, where do you start?

There are a number of variables here. Firstly it don’t mark out print takes, I somehow feel it creates a bias to certain decisions I would have made on the timeline. So I approach it blindly and then check the notes just in case I missed something from continuity to lighting. This helps get the best possible performance without dealing with too many technical issues.

The next variable is of course the performance stamina of the actors (this term includes all genders). Depending on whom I’m editing, some actors require you to find little moments of magic from little pieces of all the takes. I will even steal vocal performances of one take and place it under another take if that was better for camera etc. I really love a great actor who has the emotional stamina to carry a take all the way through to cut. Very rare to find but that normally excites me in the edit

where I don't have to cut and can just enjoy the moment on screen.

Lastly the camera work, sometimes the director calls cut to quickly....kills me. Sometimes the camera placement isn't correct to capture the whole performance correctly. I must admit I hate tick tock editing....reaction...dialogue... reaction...dialogue. Gimme a 2 shot any day and I will stay on it as long as possible, that way the audience can look and edit it themselves. You basically engage the audience instead of dictating what they have to look at, unless you want to.

What were the challenges for editing for which you/your team won a SAFTA award?

This film actually went off quite smoothly. I was finishing Dis Ek, Anna and had 2 weeks to go before I could start looking at Sink. Brett Michael Innes (the director of Sink) was eager to get started editing so we got the project logged and off he went. My approach was to not even look at what he compiled and to assemble the scenes myself first. This helped keep it fresh and watching his edit after the fact also informed me of moments he liked and where he was heading with the scene. I would then adapt the scene to incorporate all the good ideas. What worked well here was that we were both on the same page from the beginning. Every time we pushed into a close-up it would have to be motivated emotionally and we would talk, sometimes debate it through.

The main challenge would be child acting, we left quite a portion of the child scenes on the cutting room floor. One way of limiting the over cutting with these scenes was to use eye replacement painting. That way if the child does accidentally clock camera or even look for their mom, you can quickly fix it without having to try cut around it.

And of course the dog Hugo, who was actually great if he wasn't trying to hump the one of the lead actress during takes.

What is a common misconception people have about what you do?

Well I'm not just an editor, I'm a filmmaker. When working with crews you realise that there is a misconception about what everyone does on set. Everyone actually wants to make films to be a part of something bigger than themselves. I could never explain to someone what I really do because there are so many different facets. Each film requires a different set of skills. From diplomacy, VFX supervision, music supervision, education... Every movie has its own fingerprint and needs to be approached in a way that facilitates creativity and constructive filmmaking.

What advice would you offer someone considering this career?

Get your hands dirty. Don't wait for opportunity, create your own.

Ula Oelsen





How and when did you first get into editing?

It actually started out of necessity. I needed a way to fund my studies while I was doing my Honours in Psychology and Philosophy. So being a runner slash data wrangler slash coffee runner was the best way to buy some textbooks.

At some point during my slasher phase I had to do sound recordings and subtitling in the evenings and I found myself going frame by frame watching how the cuts worked. I became obsessed. I was loading movies and TV shows onto the edit suites and dissecting them, studying them cut for cut. This led to my first assistant editor job for both a local TV drama and a film. I don't think I realised then what I would become, or that editing would become my passion.

How important is formal education to the craft of editing?

I don't think you can ever be over-educated. I still try and do as many courses as I can. Education is one big part of it, but then again talent and creativity is too. I mean it doesn't matter how many degrees I have, I will never paint as well as Salvadoré Dalí, but Dalí's studies probably enabled him to explore his talent to its full potential.

What software do you use to edit?

I have used most of them: AVID, Premiere, Resolve and FCP 7. I am currently using FCP X.

Tell us a bit about your editing process. Once you get the footage, where do you start?

Most of the time I just start looking at the footage. I pick a scene that looks interesting. I go through the footage. From top to bottom. From beginning to end. Sifting through it to find what the show wants to be. Looking for that special something that is going to carry the scene, the story, the narrative.

I usually get in trouble for it, but I really don't like reading the script before a scene. The footage should lead me to tell the story; the performances, the directing, everything, not me reading a script knowing I should look for a close up of the bomb timer ticking by.

What were the challenges for editing for which you won a SAFTA award?

Probably because it was a period drama, creating the correct feel for the show, rhythmically. We wanted it to feel correct for the time period, for the viewers, but also try and make the editing current and modern. So we used the old technique of cross

dissolve as many of the old black and white movies did, but we also utilised bending the line, jumping the line, a jump cut or two, which gave it a subtle, modern edge

Thinking back now, I recall working in a few ramps and slow motion shots into the cut as well. Great fun.

What has been your favourite project so far and why?

I have been very fortunate to have worked on some amazing projects over the last 4-5 years. From being one of the members in the groundbreaking *The Wild* to going on and to help create what has now become the most exciting TV slot, the Sunday drama slot on Mzansi Magic, with shows like *Rockville*, *Igazi* and *Is'thunzi*. And one not to forget, the epic shoot of *Donkerland*.

I think the two that jump out were *Sweisbril*, a short film directed by Gérard Rudolf, and a short film cutting workshop I did with ACE editor Stan Salfas from *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* and *Let me in*.

Sweisbril's story was really close to me at the time and Gérard wasn't scared to explore and let me play with, at times, frenetic cutting rates, ramping and super slow motion. It was all about how to edit and manipulate how the viewer would feel; uncomfortable, uneasy, unsettled. Parts of it went into a Terrence Malick direction. Wonderful experience.

Cutting for Stan was more of a personal journey. South Africa's industry is in many ways still wrapping its head around the craft of editing and post-production in general, so competing internationally, getting affirmation and compliments was really humbling and a push I really needed.

What is a common misconception people have about what you do?

The general public only knows about directors, cameramen, producers, writers and actors so they assume editing falls into one of those categories.

In the industry... working through 200 hours of footage doesn't take 200 hours...

What advice would you offer someone considering this career?

Editing is really the coming together of all the departments of filmmaking and understanding storytelling and how to manipulate it, is vital.

It's really hard work, long lonely hours in the dark with usually with very little credit and considering post-production is usually last in line when it comes to budget and production time, it's no wonder people struggle to make a decent career out of it.

Pay your dues and be prepared to learn and put in the hours. Too many students come out of university with bloated egos feeling they are going to win a Oscar in 5 weeks.

Be humble, work on your craft and respect your productions, big or small, and you could be part of one of the most creative and rewarding parts of being a filmmaker.

Why do you enjoy being an editor?

Editing is the most exciting and creative part of any production because you have the ability to shape and mould almost every part about the show or film. From the timeless cutting style of No Country for Old Men to the in your face cuts from Whiplash, the heart and soul of a film is determined by the rhythm, you give to that heart.

Anything you'd like to add?

Is this the bit where we complain about the budgets?

Working conditions in the industry

We are in the process of finalising our Rate Card for 2017, and will release it soon. Please remember to make use of our anonymous [Rate Offer Reporter](#) so that we can be aware of the current trends in the industry. Please also see our [helpful documents](#), the [pre-employment checklist](#) and [what to expect from an editor](#), which will assist you and your employer to get the best out of a job opportunity.

SAGE released a [contract agreement](#) for Independent Contractors last year, which was drawn up in partnership with our legal counsel. The contract is a comprehensive document and should be used as an adaptable template, to the satisfaction of both parties. We advise that you also read [this](#) to familiarise yourself with the Labour Relations Act and determine whether you are working as an independent contractor or employee.

Our [annual survey](#) about 2016 working conditions concluded on 31 March. We will release the results next month, as well as the winners of the draw. Thank you to everyone who participated.

Interesting stats, based on the [job offer submissions](#) we received, is that in 2016 producers requested editors to work on the following software:

- 9 for AVID Media Composer;
- 9 for FCP 7 (yes, it's still in the running!);
- 2 for FCP X;
- 7 for Premiere Pro;
- and 6 left it up to the editor to decide.

This year we have so far received 17 submissions:

- 3 for AVID;
- 3 for FCP X;
- 10 for Premiere Pro;
- and 1 left it up to the editor

- and then it up to the editor.

So, it looks like Premiere Pro took over the FCP 7 market, with AVID still a solid choice for producers, and FCP X lurking in the shadows.

SABC Crisis

At the end of March the [SABC](#) announced that they were experiencing a [financial crisis](#) and were struggling to pay their creditors on time, which included many [production companies](#). This affected quite a number of post-production professionals, who were only partially paid, or not paid at all. Some shows were put on hold or cancelled, and staff members were laid off.

[SASFED](#), the umbrella industry body to which SAGE belongs to, held an urgent meeting on 6 April, which was attended by a SAGE exec member. SASFED was then due to have a meeting with the SABC Board on 10 April, but it was cancelled and no new date has been arranged yet. The IPO is also conducting meetings with relevant stakeholders to discuss the situation.

If you are affected, you are welcome to contact us for assistance. You can [email](#) us with the following information:

- Your Name
- Production Company/Producer
- Production Title
- Amount Owed
- Description of what the money is owed for
- Any Additional Info

You are also encouraged to contact us for any other problems you may encounter workwise.

What is a Guild?

Guilds originated in Western Europe during the early medieval era, and were associations of craftsmen, artisans or merchants who controlled the practice of their craft in a particular town. They were organised in a way that resembles a cartel, with some elements of secrecy to protect the “mystery” of their craft, technology and specialised skills.

These organisations were called “guilds” for the gold deposited in their common funds, and were quite serious about their business: members had to swear oaths to support one another, back each other in business ventures and keep their trade skills a secret.

These guilds set high standards for membership, which was usually by invitation

only, and would exclude other professionals who didn't abide by their strict rules.

To enter a guild one had to undergo a long period of apprenticeship before deemed a craftsman, and afterwards one had to travel and work in other towns for several years as a journeyman, practising that craft, eventually becoming a master or grandmaster. Members had to uphold a high standard of work, or else would be fined for not delivering quality.

Some guilds became very powerful and had political influence on the economy and commerce of towns and cities. The guilds also supported elderly members, as well as the widows and orphans of deceased guild members.

In modern times, guild membership in the USA is often a prerequisite for working in their film and TV industry. The Screen Actors Guild, Writers Guild of America, American Cinema Editors (ACE) and others have great control over the industry. Some of these guilds had initiated strikes which had a profound effect on the TV industry.

The most recent one was organised by the Writers Guild of America and lasted from November 2007 until February 2008. The strike was mainly about residuals for new media and disagreement over the role of writers in Reality and Animation genres. 12 000 screen and TV writers took part. It affected numerous TV shows like Scrubs, Heroes, Prison Break, CSI and Desperate Housewives. Some shows like Pushing Daisies, The 4400 and Private Practice were postponed or cancelled as a result. The strike cost the Los Angeles economy between \$1.5 billion and \$2.1 billion, and thousands of crew workers and support staff were laid off by the production studios, or lost months of wages. Hollywood actors, directors, musicians and even set decorators have gone on strike before, but somehow editors have never downed tools yet, no doubt too busy fixing everything in post!

As a guild, SAGE is a cultural, professional and educational organisation, focusing on the pursuit and recognition of excellence in post-production. It aims to maintain professional standards in the industry, and to foster good relations with other stakeholders. It also gives support and advice to members, strive to improve working conditions and protect the interests of post-production professionals. It is not a union, but an organic community, run by editors for editors and other post-production workers.

For more information about SAGE, you can look at the SAGE constitution:

<http://www.editorsguildsa.org/sites/default/files/file/SAGE%20constitution.pdf>

Keeping in touch

We'd like to remind members that if you have interesting news to share about

projects you work on or which have done well, you are more than welcome to share it with us. You can also post on our [Facebook](#) page, as well as tweet on [Twitter](#). Please remember to update your details regularly, especially if your email address, your location or your surname has changed. You can do so by logging into your on our website: <http://www.editorsguildsa.org/user>.

We hope that you have enjoyed reading our announcements and that you are just as excited about 2017 as we are!

Kind regards,

Marina du Toit
SAGE Chairperson
+27 (0)82 255 8077
info@editorsguildsa.org

