

ROGER CRITTENDEN

FINE CUTS

THE ART OF EUROPEAN FILM EDITING



FOREWORD BY WALTER MURCH


Focal
Press

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The conversation with Sylvia Ingemarsson took place at her farmhouse, where she lives with her husband and son, which is on the edge of a lake at Leksand, a town two-and-a-half hours by train at north of Stockholm. Sylvia has now worked with Ingmar Bergman on more than a dozen projects: TV dramas, documentaries and some of his greatest masterpieces, including 'Fanny and Alexander'.

I was born in Vase, Karlstad on 10th May 1949. My father was a road worker and my mother ran an open-air museum where we also lived for the first two years of my life. After that we moved a few times, finally settling down in Nordmark where life revolved around the mining business. Here my mother acquired responsibility for running the 'Peoples Restaurant', which for many of the miners who came from Sweden and around the world was like their home. Even weddings and funerals took place there. So me and my sister (I have an elder sister and a younger brother) had to learn early on to wait table and take part in everything. My father was absent and when I was eight years old my mother married again with my stepfather and six months later I gained a little sister.

My interests have always been horses, animals and nature – and going to the cinema. The village hall showed films on Sundays, and that's where I saw the Swedish 'Carry-on' films, all Jerry Lewis' films, 'The Glenn Miller Story' and 'Psycho' amongst others. I've always been good at drawing and wish I had learned about music, but there was nobody who could have led me in the right path when I was a child. I enjoyed acting and got to do that at school.

My school reports were good but after I finished lower secondary school I decided there was more to learn in life. My teachers were

convinced I should continue but I didn't want to do that. My mother was very old fashioned – she was grown up when she was thirteen or fourteen and she thought that I was too. I think that she couldn't stand me in the house anymore and I wasn't interested in working in the kitchen or in the local factory.

So my mother managed, through a friend of a friend, to get me placed as a baby sitter with a family in Stockholm. 'My family', i.e. both parents worked in the film industry and it is because of them that I got involved. I moved to Stockholm when I was sixteen and by the time I was eighteen I was working as an editing assistant at Europa Film.

The more I learned the more I wanted to know about cinema, because I was competitive from a young age and so I always wanted to avoid being last or lagging behind. I did want to go to the theatre to learn to act – that was a dream but I didn't care about it after I started with film. I wasn't really at home with actors – I didn't want to be a person like that – I have never liked when people are anything else than they seem. I hate that – it's from my mother – I become insecure and uncomfortable, but I love theatre. Recently I've been on a course on how to express myself on a scene, just to find myself. It was wonderful!

I was an assistant at Europa Film for two years and I met Sidney Lumet who was recording '*The Seagull*'¹ and it was fantastic. I also worked on some other movies and a cartoon, '*Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day*'.² I woke up step by step – starting at Swedish Broadcasting. I felt for the first time a little bit off because I had no graduation from high school, but I was tough and I thought 'I will show you, I don't need your fine words and graduation – I don't care'.

At the beginning, when I was working with Sidney Lumet I was longing for the set – to be with the others where the action was. I was just sitting with my old Steenbeck, but the more I learned the more I loved it. So after a few years I had no longing for the set anymore.

I did feel insecure because nobody told me how to do it. There was a course at Swedish Television but it was more or less to be a news editor – it wasn't film editing – it wasn't enough for me. Although I felt frustrated many times I learnt from experience and by looking at other films.

I was working in broadcast until 1976 – I was free to do what I wanted and I had plans to go to the United States of America, but then I was employed by Bo Widerberg³ and I decided to quit the TV job. Then Bergman's editor got sick. I knew Katinka Farago⁴ who was Bergman's production controller. I knew her since I was a baby sitter. She was very glad that I had succeeded, more or less, with Bo Widerberg and the film, *'Man on the Roof'*⁵ was a success. So Bergman accepted her advice and the first time I met him was at a meeting of the actors and crew – a read through for *'Autumn Sonata'*.⁶

It was a very hot day in May 1977. The only thing he said to me except for 'How are you – nice to see you' was 'Oh, are you also being affected by the heat?' I hate it when it is warm outside, because I was so er – the thing is I didn't sleep the night before – I was at a party. I didn't care – Bergman was just another man. So the day after I was sweating a lot – but I looked very nice in a white blouse. I did understand that it's very important to make a good impression.

I was employed from the first day of shooting in Norway, but he never wants to edit during the shoot. I collected the material and



Sylvia Ingemarsson cutting with Ingmar Bergman (Jacob Forssell (Photographer)
Expressen, Swedish Newspaper. © PRESSENS/EMPICS)

did the synching up and put it in order. He only wanted to see the material on Saturdays, so we looked through the whole week's material then. Everything had to be in shooting order but also in script order. He would choose takes and I had to take care of all the tests on make-up, hair, costumes and lighting.

There was one occasion that he was furious at me in the screening room. We saw all the tests and there was one missing. The laboratory had put it at the end of some leaders I had ordered and it took five minutes for me to find it and give it to the projectionist. I went into the screening room again and I was smiling and he was yelling at me, 'That's nothing to laugh about – how can you stand and laugh about a thing like that?' I said I'm sorry, – but it's here and we can see it – I did my best to solve the problem. I was sitting behind him and he was yelling and barking like a dog. I repeated I'm sorry, I'm very sorry. He said, 'and you don't have anything else to do during the day than take care of this material!' His first impression of me was that I was not proper enough – not professional, but I was angry. He had no right to be so angry with me, so I disappointed him with no tears.

Sven Nykvist⁷ said to me afterwards – I think you handled this very well, but even at the end of the day Ingmar came to me and said you will be angry at me many times – it was kind of an excuse.

At the end of the shoot we had to go back to Munich, because he was living there for six months of the year. I did understand that he was super-professional and he was expecting the same from me, so I decided that he would never have the opportunity to be angry with me again. So everything was in order and nothing could go wrong and it didn't, even though I had no assistant because he won't have anyone else in the cutting room.

He didn't stay in the cutting room all the time. He did everything basic to tell me how he wanted things to go. He didn't know exactly how to edit 'Autumn Sonata', because you know the film is based on closeups – so much talk. So we started at the beginning and the first time we went through the material we didn't use any closeups – we took all the long shots and the medium shots just to get the story in a very roughcut. Then we went back to the beginning again and edited the closeups with all the pauses behind and in front all the time – we couldn't decide where to put the overlaps at that time – and that was a very good school for me.

So we edited the film from November and then it was Christmas and we went home and we'd only just begun. I remember that Katinka Farago asked me when I went to the office in the days between Christmas and New Year's Eve, 'What have you done to Ingmar, he's so happy?' I hadn't done anything. 'He's so happy – he just loves to work with you'.

I felt relaxed although I wasn't at ease with the Germans – for the first time in life I felt like a foreigner – and I felt racism.

Ingmar was not satisfied with the film, he was angry with it, but I thought it was fantastic and I loved working on it. It's much better than the film he made immediately before, '*The Serpent's Egg*'⁸ I didn't like that film at all – not after seeing '*Cabaret*'.⁹ In my next life I will become a dancer with Bob Fosse¹⁰ – I will be a dancer and a very good rider. I want to dance and do things with horses!

RC: These are both things which have very much to do with rhythm.

SI: Yes, and intuition.

RC: Yes a sensibility, but it's also a physical sensibility, isn't it?

SI: Yes it is. I just have to 'think' which way to go and the horse follows.

RC: It's not only the spirit but its also the way the body and the mind work together – and I suppose editing is trying to give that sensibility to material.

SI: Yes, and when you have been working many years together you don't have to explain, the signals are very small, you feel what your partner thinks.

RC: When you have the opportunity of course – sometimes you know you can't make it work.

SI: Mm that's terrible – because it's so easy to think maybe if I was a much more skilled editor – another editor could have made this much better than me and maybe it's so. But it's bull-shit – I am as good as anyone else!

RC: One of your other credits is '*Montenegro*'¹¹ with Dusan Makavejev¹² – clearly this is a man who works in a very different way.

SI: Very different – he's the opposite to Bergman. He was waiting for inspiration and it took time for him to get started with the editing and it was very frustrating for me. I couldn't at first understand what he wanted – which way to go.

There were scenes and shots missing because of his 'waiting' (*for inspiration*). There is a part in the bedroom with Erland Josephson,¹³ the husband, and Susan Anspach,¹⁴ the wife. She is very nervous and anxious and she tries to talk to Erland who is lying on the bed with his back to her and doesn't answer her. There were long shots and some medium shots on Susan but no closeups on Erland. So we had a lot of shots of apes from the beginning of the film and we decided to cut in the ape for 'shot missing' on Erland. She was asking him things and the ape was making faces – it was so wonderful.¹⁵ I haven't seen the film since. It was difficult to adapt to his methodology – it took a lot of patience.

Bergman on the other hand is so methodical. He comes to the cutting room for two hours every day – eleven to one – and we go through the material from the beginning, reel by reel. Then he leaves and I do the editing, so I do everything that we have talked about – he gave me a lot of time because he knows so well what he wants. I never have to work late nights, maybe sometimes taking care of the trims and filing. I feel free to do what I want. If we have decided a cut and I think it will not be good of course I must make another cut – that's what he expects of me. At the beginning I was of course nervous – maybe I do it wrong – maybe he won't like it – but he's a very good teacher.

RC: So with *'Fanny and Alexander'*¹⁶ – looking at the finished film – it looks as if he knew and therefore you knew what was the right shot at any given moment. For instance in the prologue when the boy is hiding under the table it could have been cut in a number of different ways, but it feels as if it had to be that way. Maybe it's just because you are a wonderful editor!

SI: (laughs) Yeah, of course. His view of the scene is in his head before it's shot, but there are still many different ways, but I understand what you mean – that's because of his thinking, his planning. The boy under the table was the only shot where a piece was lost. There were fifteen frames that he wanted to put back and I couldn't find them! I looked all over in every box, all over the room, and it was only him and me in the room (sighs). He said it doesn't matter, just order a new copy so I did but after two days I found the piece!

Even if you have worked in cinema for sixty years like Ingmar you can still be insecure. For instance, in the scene where Fanny and Alexander and the housewife are in the Bishop's garden and she tells the children the story of the children that once lived in the house she is looking at the screen

right at Alexander and the problem was which direction should Alexander look. They had to take two shots because the script girl and Ingmar couldn't work it out.

I must tell you about the work. Many people ask me if I can decide on my own. Of course I can decide on my own but I can't make Sylvia Ingemarsson's version of the film. I must do the film that Ingmar likes. Of course if there is a sequence that he doesn't really care for and he feels that he can't do it then. For instance in '*Bildmakarna*' – the play '*The Imagemakers*'¹⁷ – there was a sequence when the actors were dancing around and flirting and posing to music and he couldn't figure it out really. So he said to me 'do something' and then it's much easier for him to come and say you can take away that one or you can shorten that one a bit. It's always like that. The more we have worked together the more he trusts me.

I remember when we made the documentary about 'Faro'¹⁸ in 1979. There was a sequence with a typical Gottland play and they play ball. He couldn't do it and I tried my best to edit it as good as I could and he was amazed. He said, 'It's wonderful – I couldn't do it better'. He's talking about that now and then because he thinks it was so exciting, but I was glad. I was very anxious to make it look good. So that's what I mean with competition – I have to compete – I am very serious about my things.

Bergman never lets intuition or chance rule. He must work with his reins very tight. I feel that we are dancing together when we work – it's not that I have to decide – today I have to decide something – its not like that. Its not a fight between each other – who's got it right – we do it together and his decision is not always the best – neither is mine, but we meet and we discuss and we do. When we have made the roughcut and we go through the film two or three times and when we come to the final cut then it happens he is there four hours a day, because then he is very excited. Then he thinks it's the best part – when we do the fine cut – and so do I of course. Ingmar is so critical about his own work. Sometimes he gets too hard with the scissors, so I have the feeling that he cuts away the things that give the story more life in his ambition to make it flow – not stop.

The sound editor takes care of the film after the editing is finished, and that's a pity many times because I have no control over that. With Bergman, when we are finished, the sound engineer comes to see the film with us and he has a tape recorder and he's noting all the things that we say about each effect and atmosphere – as you know Ingmar never uses much music.

It has happened with other directors that they have made a different editing after my work, just to suit the sound editor and that's not good. It's so frustrating when I meet other directors and they don't care – and I care a lot. I'm sitting prepared to do my thing the way I've learned it and they don't care if I come too late – oh, I must go to the dentist or manyana manyana – they don't care.

Since I started working as a teacher I have been very interested again. I feel the lust, the fascination of film-making and editing. I had a very good experience in Norway with Eric Gustafson. He made a little film based on one of Ibsen's not so famous books. It was very easy – every day he knew what to shoot and how to shoot it. I also had a picture manuscript – what do you call it – a storyboard for the first time – it was so comfortable. The material gets so easy to edit when there is thought – when I don't have to guess.

My best editing has always been a co-operation with a good director who knows the film language and also doesn't let chance decide through improvisation which is what inexperienced directors often do. They also usually listen to too many advisers and get the story muddled up and the consequence is that as an editor you have to wrestle with lots of problems and in the worst case get blamed for them as well. I have no opinion what is my best editing but the nicest is of course, *'Fanny and Alexander'*. In my opinion it is seldom you can tell who edited a film because it is a co-operation, but sometimes the director chooses his editor and it works well the first time and so it happens that they continue working together. It has a lot to do with the chemistry between people. It is important that an editor is patient, meticulous, has imagination and intuition. Therefore I believe that a good editor is both born and created through experience.

After I had visited Sylvia she went to work for Bergman again and I asked her to send me her thoughts about his latest project.

SARABAND

These last years, when Ingmar and I have met to edit one of his TV films he has said that this time is probably the last that we will work

together. That, due to his age he wouldn't be making another film – that it drains your energy – the level of commitment required. We have therefore said goodbye and thanked each other for the good co-operation several times, and after '*Bildmakarna*' in 1999, which we edited on Faro I was certain that this was the last time.

In August 2001 the world was informed that Ingmar Bergman was 'pregnant with a script' and the news was given great space in the media accompanied by photos of Ingmar, Erland Josephson and Liv Ullmann who would be playing the leads and that it would be a sequel to '*Scenes from a Marriage*'.¹⁹

In January 2002 the phone rang and a production manager from Sveriges Television asked me if I would like to edit '*Saraband*'.²⁰ Usually I would get this call much earlier and often it would be from Ingmar himself, but times change. The film was planned to be recorded in a studio with four HD cameras but ended up being shot with only one because they were too noisy.

The editing would be done on Avid and this would be the first time Ingmar and I would work digitally. As I told you my experience of working on Avid was not particularly extensive but I thought to myself that it would have to work! I finally have to learn this (surely it can't be more difficult than getting an HGV driving license which I succeeded in doing three years ago) and I cannot pass on working with Ingmar. It would have been a betrayal as I know how important it is to him that I am editing the film. Adapting to a new editor after twenty-five years, I knew it would irritate him immensely. Despite this I was on the brink of calling him to decline several times as I became increasingly nervous the more the date closed in.

Luckily the college where I now work had bought new Avid Express 2D and I was able to take one home to practice for a couple of weeks. When I left for Stockholm to begin my work on the 17th November 2002 I felt pretty safe and I knew that I would have quite a lot of time to get to know the equipment since Ingmar nowadays only works every other day and since we always begin by watching all the material. It also turned out that Sveriges Television had bought editing suites similar to the one I had become accustomed to at home, so after a while it went pretty smoothly.

Of course I was very afraid of making mistakes and the biggest fear was of losing material but I had access to a good assistant editor

who shared his knowledge and digitised everything, so I arrived to a 'set' table. He took care of everything outside of the editing itself, leaving me to take care of my business.

The editing room was small, miserable and disorganised as it usually gets when different people pass through it in various stages of stressful work and nobody has time to make it comfortable. Since I cannot work in disarray I tried to make the room nicer with the help of a couple of red chairs, a table and cloth and a framed poster from the silent screen. This really made a difference.

The editing work went very well and with the exception of my anxiety that something would go wrong (I'm sure Ingmar had anxiety as well, but for something different) we had a very nice time in the edit suite. The editing was not always easy. The shooting had a few difficulties which affected the material which made some of the cuts less than perfect but the story was not compromised and 'Saraband' turned out to be a powerful experience.

As usual, each day we had a short break at three o'clock. We drank blackberry juice mixed with Imsdal (*mineral*) water and ate Brago crackers to top up our energy in order for us to be able to work until five o'clock. We talked about many different things but mostly about events from his long life. He is such a great storyteller and has such a wonderful memory despite his eighty-five years.

We would each light a candle and when the break was over we blew them out at the same time and would compete about whose smoke trail would last the longest. In the cold technical world we found ourselves in it wasn't allowed to light candles so we would wait for the fire alarm but to Ingmar's disappointment and my relief it never went off.

Now once again we have said goodbye. . . .

Notes

1. **Sidney Lumet and *The Seagull*** – 1968 starring James Mason, Vanessa Redgrave and Simone Signoret. Lumet's first major success was the court room drama '*Twelve Angry Men*' in 1957.
2. ***Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day*** – Disney animation, 1968.

3. **Bo Widerberg (1930-97)** – Most famous for the enchanting '*Elvira Madigan*', 1967.
4. **Katinka Farago** – Born Vienna, 1936. First worked with Bergman as script girl on '*The Seventh Seal*'. Subsequently as production manager and producer.
5. ***Man on the Roof*** – Bo Widerberg, 1976.
6. ***Autumn Sonata*** – Ingmar Bergman, with Ingrid Bergman, 1978.
7. **Sven Nykvist** – '*Sawdust and Tinsel*' in 1953 was his first credit as cinematographer for Bergman. He has since contributed his special skills to many international filmmakers.
8. ***The Serpent's Egg*** – Bergman, 1977.
9. ***Cabaret*** – Fosse, with Liza Minelli, 1972.
10. **Bob Fosse (1927-87)** – Choreographer, writer, director including '*All that Jazz*', 1979.
11. ***Montenegro*** – Makavejev, 1981.
12. **Dusan Makavejev** – Born 1932, Belgrade. Caused a stir with '*WR Mysteries of the Organism*', 1971 and has always been provocative and employed an eclectic style.
13. **Erland Josephson** – Internationally renowned actor, who first worked with Bergman in '*To Joy*', 1950.
14. **Susan Anspach** – Despite a part in Bob Rafelson's '*Five Easy Pieces*' in 1970 her acting career has never really blossomed.
15. **Apes** – They are still a wonderful surprise, which even Bunuel might have been proud of.
16. ***Fanny and Alexander*** – Bergman, perhaps his most effective masterpiece, 1982.
17. ***The Iagemakers*** – Bergman, 2000.
18. **Faro** – The island where Bergman has his home.
19. ***Scenes from a Marriage*** – Bergman, 1973.
20. ***Saraband*** – Bergman, 2003.

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