
SELECTED TAKES

Film Editors
On Editing

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Foreword by Robert Wise

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in every respect, they get a room of their own. I do not have a director, producer, or a star in my cutting room when I'm working. If they want to see film, I'll give them my twin KEMs and they can go play to their heart's content. I'll watch it with them, but I will not edit with them. My magic is my magic. They don't ask the cameraman, "Why did you put the light up there?" They'll say, "You've got too much light." They don't go up there and watch him change the goddamn light. I don't want them to come in and watch me change a cut. If I've got a brain in my head I'll do it, if I don't, get rid of me or don't hire me.

I never work for money. I have never, ever asked how much I was going to get—never. Many years ago I got an agent and I said, "Don't tell me how much I'm making, I don't want to know. You make the best deal you can; I'll tell you if I want to do the picture." The bottom line is I want to be wanted. I'm not unique. I'm nothing special. I'm diligent as hell. I'm a workaholic. I love my work. I've never had a day where I said, "I wish I wasn't here."

Anne V. Coates

Born in England, Anne V. Coates began her career working for a company that produced religious films. A year later she joined the union and became an assistant editor at the prestigious Pinewood Studios.

As editor, Coates cut many major English films, including *The Pickwick Papers*, *The Horse's Mouth*, and *Tunes of Glory*, before editing David Lean's masterpiece, *Lawrence of Arabia*, in 1962. Her contribution to this epic film earned her an Oscar. She returned to the film in 1989 to supervise the restoration of the original director's cut, which toured the world to great acclaim.

A versatile and dynamic editor, Coates received Academy Award nominations for her affinity for literate films, as displayed in *Becket*, and her ability to achieve poetic beauty in David Lynch's haunting film, *The Elephant Man*.

In the 1980s Coates moved to Los Angeles and has edited such films as *Raw Deal* and Lawrence Kasdan's *I Love You to Death*.

1952	<i>The Pickwick Papers</i>
1953	<i>Grand National Night</i>
1954	<i>Forbidden Cargo</i>
1955	<i>To Paris with Love</i>
1956	<i>Lost</i>
	<i>Mondango</i>
1958	<i>The Truth About Women</i>
1959	<i>The Horse's Mouth</i>

1960	<i>Tunes of Glory</i>
1961	<i>Why Bother to Knock?</i>
1962	<i>Lawrence of Arabia**</i>
1964	<i>Becket*</i>
1965	<i>Young Cassidy</i>
	<i>Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines</i>
1966	<i>Hotel Paradiso</i>
1968	<i>The Bofors Gun</i>
	<i>Great Catherine</i>
1970	<i>The Adventurers</i>
1971	<i>Follow Me</i>
	<i>Friends</i>
1973	<i>Bequest to the Nation</i>
1974	<i>Catholics</i>
	<i>11 Harrowhouse</i>
	<i>Murder on the Orient Express</i>
1975	<i>Man Friday</i>
1976	<i>Aces High</i>
1977	<i>The Eagle Has Landed</i>
1978	<i>The Medusa Touch</i> (supervising editor, with Ian Crafford)
1979	<i>The Legacy</i>
1980	<i>The Elephant Man*</i>
1981	<i>Ragtime</i> (with Antony Gibbs and Stanley Warnow)
	<i>The Bushido Blade</i>
1983	<i>The Pirates of Penzance</i>
1984	<i>Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes</i>
1986	<i>Lady Jane</i>
	<i>Raw Deal</i>
1987	<i>Masters of the Universe</i>
	<i>Farewell to the King</i> (with C. Timothy O'Meara and Jack Warden)
1989	<i>Listen to Me</i>
1990	<i>I Love You to Death</i>
1991	<i>What About Bob?</i>

*Academy Award Nomination for best achievement in film editing.

**Academy Award for best achievement in film editing.

How did you become a film editor in England?

When I was at school I decided I wanted to become a film director. At that time there weren't many jobs open for women. Today, women can do almost anything in the industry, but then you could be a secretary, a script girl, or work in the cutting room. I decided it would be interesting if I could get into a cutting room, but it's a completely closed shop in England, it's totally unionized. There are no non-union films like over here. I had an uncle who eventually helped me because he was doing religious films. He thought I was only getting into films for the glamour. He thought if he put me in religious films, it would take all that away from me, but I was actually very serious about making movies. I started at a company called GHW which made religious films. I sent films out to churches for Sundays; I was a projectionist, and did all sorts of odd jobs. I worked in the cutting room on a little hand splicer. I worked there for nine months and got to know the people next door at GBI who were making instructional films. I hung around their cutting rooms. Then one day the union came round and said, "We don't want this little outpost that's not unionized, we want all of you to join the union." Most of the people were kind of religious and they said no. I said, "Give me the form," and signed it. Once I did that, it wasn't that difficult getting transferred to Pinewood as a second assistant in the cutting rooms.

Have you experienced any discrimination as a film editor because you are a woman?

No, not really. I never think of myself as a woman, I just think of myself as an editor. I expect to get paid the same money as a man, that never entered my head. It wasn't until later on that I discovered that women aren't always paid equal money, because in films, for these kinds of jobs, they are paid the same money as men.

*You've worked on a lot of films with strong male themes like *Tunes of Glory*, *Becket*, and *Lawrence of Arabia*.*

Yes, I think often people employ you to bring a woman's point of view to it. I know that the director, Ronnie Neame, was particularly interested in my doing *Tunes of Glory* because I was a woman.

What do you think you brought to that film?

Maybe, subconsciously, I brought a certain warmth and sensitivity to the relationship between Alec Guinness and his daughter, and an understanding of the relationship between the two men that maybe a man would not have.

Did the performances of John Mills and Alec Guinness emerge easily?

All those things take a little nursing. They were very good performances but sometimes they both went a little bit over. When performances are very dramatic, you've got to be careful that you don't go over the top with them. You often play it a little bit down. I don't like overacting. I like really sincere acting. I think that you can tell the story

much better with the little innuendos than the big bravados, and those were big bravado performances. It was very important for those two people to be absolutely real characters that you believed in. You have to choose very carefully on every performance. For instance, there were many takes on the scene at the end when Alec was breaking down. It was a lot of material, many different angles and slightly different performances. Ronnie Neame and I worked closely to pick the best bits out of that material to draw out the very best of Alec.

What sound elements did you have to cut the scene when Guinness breaks down? Did you have the music?

Mostly the music, the marching feet, and particularly the drum beat.

There is a wonderful scene with John Mills and another officer in a jeep, which is played in a single take without a cut. Was the decision made to let that play because he was so good? Was there coverage on that scene?

Yes, there was coverage on it. The single take played very well in dailies. First we cut it with the coverage several different ways and then we took it out, which I think is the correct way of doing it. If something plays really beautifully and it holds, you should play it. I think you should always hold it as long as you can; don't just cut to say you cut it, unless it's a very boring scene. If the emotion and interest is holding, I believe you should hold the shot. On the other hand, it is very important that you always shoot coverage so you've got it. Sometimes something that plays beautifully in dailies doesn't hold with what goes around it when you put it into the finished film.

Many of the scenes in Tunes of Glory are full shots with several characters in the frame. Was there over-the-shoulder and close-up material available on these shots?

I don't know that there was coverage on all those scenes, because I think what Ronnie was aiming for was the feeling of being at an officers' mess with people who lived together, not in isolation. So in the group shots you can see them all together. They rehearsed for several weeks before we started shooting. They would live together and we would eat together—Ronnie had me in on it as well. It was great for the editor to be involved on that level. We all lived together, as it were, like an officers' mess, so they got to know each other. They laughed, joked, and played the scenes, so they were easy with each other. He very much wanted to get the feel that it was a group of people who were used to living together, and that's why he didn't always go for the single shots. He used single shots in the more dramatic moments like the scene when John Mills and Alec Guinness confront each other in a room upstairs.

You have a marvelous ear for dialogue. The Scottish accents in this film have such a melodic lilt to them. Do accents affect the way you cut a scene?

Yes. You're very aware of when the actors come out of their accents, too. We always loop a little afterwards. We did a little looping on people

if their accent slipped a bit. So much of editing is rhythm, so the way they talk is important. You just flow along with it. On *I Love You to Death*, we had a lot of accents. We were careful to clean up anything we thought was out of character or where the accent was lost a little bit.

How did you get the job of editor on Lawrence of Arabia?

Originally, David Lean did a whole week of tests for the part with Albert Finney. I just happened to get the job because I bumped into a friend of mine in Harrod's one Saturday morning with my husband, and I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm going to do these tests with Albert Finney." The film was called *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* then. I said, "Have you got anybody cutting them? I'm not doing anything at the moment," and he said, "I don't think we have, ring up on Monday morning." So I rang up on Monday morning and then checked with David, and he said he had nobody especially lined up, so I went down and cut those tests. He did them in two complete sequences. He did one of Albert in the map room with other actors, and then he did a scene with him as an Arab in the tent talking to Ali. I cut them together. Albert actually turned it down. David liked the work that I did on them so much that he and Sam Spiegel offered me the movie.

What was it like to work with David Lean?

He loves the cutting room. I find him very easy and clear in communicating what he wants you to do. The assistants adore him, he really works well with them. David thinks a great deal like a cutter, but, like every director, he gives you a lot of cover because he knows that you always need cover. He fell in love with the desert, so we had thousands and thousands and thousands of feet of desert and mirage. There was a lot of argument at the end when it came down to color timing the film, because Technicolor was busy trying to make all of the sand look yellow, and David had gone to these deserts especially because the sand had that pink tinge. It was very important to get that, so we spent quite a lot of time getting the colors correct, and we cut them so that the colors went from one shade to another and the shadows matched with each other.

Does David Lean storyboard sequences or are they just very worked out in his mind?

They're very worked out in his mind; he doesn't really storyboard. Sometimes he'll storyboard it, if it's a special effects sequence, but he doesn't for ordinary scenes. He works it out carefully with John Box, the designer who has done all his films. They design the sets with David knowing where he's going to put the camera before he gets there.

The transition from the shot of Peter O'Toole blowing out the match to the shot of the sunrise in the desert is so visually effective. How did that come about?

Robert Bolt, the writer, says it was his cut; David Lean said he did it. The actual timing of the cut is mine. Robert Bolt described it in the script;

it went from the match blowing out to the sunrise, but it's the actual moment that you do it that makes it special. David said, "Try cutting it when he's actually blowing it." I only did about two cuts on it and got it more or less right.

What was your approach on the sunrise shot?

We timed that several times to see how long we could hold it before the sun came up. It always seemed like we held it a bit too long, but once the music was on there, it seemed perfect. David taught me a lot about holding on to shots. He was much braver than I was in those days. I would say, "It's really too long, David." "Nonsense," he would say, "it's perfect." When you got the music on he was quite right. I learned such a lot from him: to be brave, and to throw stuff out, too. You've got to be ruthless to get down to the actual core of a picture and he was ruthless. He threw a whole heap of stuff out that broke my heart and he was right.

Omar Sharif's entrance almost has a magical quality. He seems to appear out of nowhere in the desert and slowly rides straight into the camera. Was there a lot of coverage on that scene?

Oh yes, masses of coverage. The scene had been longer, it only got shorter. It was difficult to cut just the right moment when Peter O'Toole and Tafas break away to run.

Tafas is shot by Omar Sharif off-screen. Was that because you didn't want to show the actual violence of it?

No, it was really just to do it in a different dramatic way. David likes you to try things differently. That's why we used direct cuts in the film, which he hadn't done very much. In the script it said dissolve, but I'd been to the French cinema quite a bit, and they were doing a lot of direct cutting. Opticals were becoming old-fashioned. It was also one of the first pictures to use presound, like on the charge of Aqaba where the bell starts ringing over the close-up of Lawrence from the previous scene. Also, in the tram where he says, "Who are you?" and then we start the tram and he comes back to civilization, the noise of the tram came before the cut. The manager of the theater where the premiere was held said, "I knew you were in a hurry, but you'd think they could have gotten the sound in sync." He didn't realize that we had done this on purpose. He thought that was an accident. We spent hours getting those right. Now, everybody pre-laps the sound, it's old hat, but in those days people hadn't started doing that.

In the battle scene, you cut twice to Arthur Kennedy, as he takes a flash photograph. How do you know where to have that happen and how many times to show him?

It's a feeling, an emotion. That's what editing is about: knowing how many cuts to put in and knowing when you've got it cut right. You're telling a story, so you've got to be sure that the audience knows what's

happening dramatically, without boring them by telling them too many times. You have to build up something to just the right moment.

When you were putting that scene together, did you cut the battle first and then decide where the shots of Arthur Kennedy would go?

No. I'd look at all of the material and then I would decide to put in the cuts of him right from the start. Afterwards, you do add things, but I try to get those kinds of things right in the first cut; then you start changing and altering, but you've got the material there.

In the original roadshow presentation of this film and in the restored version, there is overture music that plays before the film. How is that prepared?

You just put it onto black film with a mag stripe. We had intermission music as well, and then we had playout music at the end. People don't do it very often, other than for a roadshow, but I like that. It's got some style to it.

How much film was shot for Lawrence of Arabia?

There were 31 miles of film.

How long did it take to cut the film?

From the time we finished shooting to the time we premiered it for the Queen was four months, which was very fast to cut, dub, and write the music for a film of that size. A normal film takes you six months. The first version of *Lawrence of Arabia* ran 3 hours, 42 minutes. David and I had never seen it from beginning to end before we ran it for the press. We'd seen the second half first, because we'd cut that first, and then we saw the first half; but we never saw the whole film. I've probably seen *Lawrence* less than any film I've ever worked on. We never had time to finesse some of the things we would have liked to. I think possibly one could have taken out quite a bit, just in trims, if we had more time. When the film opened, there was a general consensus of opinion that it was too long. With an intermission of 10 minutes, it was getting on to 4 hours. We took out 20 minutes. That was the first time we cut it down. Then about seven years later, they wanted to do a cut-down version for television, so we took out approximately another 15 minutes. David was assured that version would only be used for TV; then he eventually discovered that version was going out everywhere. If you saw the film after 1970, that was the version you would have seen. It was about 3 hours and 8 minutes.

Were the 35 minutes that were taken out of the film during those two cuts put back for the newly restored version?

Yes. It's nearly the first version that opened in that December. When we came to the restoration it wasn't a straightforward thing of just putting pieces back in. We had to restore it from two different cut versions. Some of the scenes taken out were very easy, because they were stored away in little sequences. Others had lines and shots that had to be all joined up. Once your negative is cut, you always lose a frame, so

it really was a very complicated thing to do. When Bob Harris rang me and said they were going to do it, I was skeptical. I didn't think they would be able to find the negative. I didn't think they could do it. I didn't remember the film all that well, and I hadn't seen it for 15 years. Once we did the TV version, I never saw it again, because I didn't like the cut-down version at all; I really hated it. I thought they ruined the picture. I didn't like the first cut-down either; I liked it the long way, and that's the way everybody likes it now. It actually plays shorter as a picture, because now you know why Lawrence is doing things. Though it runs longer, it seems shorter, because you're more interested in him as a person.

In a film like Becket where the language is so important, are you referring to the script more than on other films?

Not really, because I cut very much from the material I am given. Obviously, one would check to see that they have said it properly, or if you haven't got it all, but usually there would be a note from the continuity girl. I like to run the material, listen to it, and think about what I'm going to do with it, how I am going to construct it on the Moviola. I go for the rhythm, the magic, and the music.

Did Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole give you a lot of choices in their line readings?

Richard played it nearly the same, a very disciplined actor. He could do it differently if the director asked him, but basically he thought his part out. When he was doing the excommunication scene he had a big gold medallion on his chest. As he took those big breaths and shouted, the medallion went up and down exactly the same on every take. Peter gave you more variance and did it differently.

What was the most difficult scene to cut?

The beach scene, which I thought was brilliant. It was very difficult to cut because neither of them could control their horse, so the horses were never standing in the same direction or angle from cut to cut. I had to get what I wanted out of the scene in spite of the horses, because it was a very important scene and I had to get it right. Then they didn't like the way they did it the first time, so they reshot it. They liked some of the first shoot and some of the second. It was absolutely crazy because there was no way that they were similar. It didn't match, it was a different sort of day. I don't know how I ever did it. I love the beach scene, it's one of my favorite cuts.

What was it like to work with David Lynch on The Elephant Man?

I went to have a meeting with him and this young boy came out of the back of the office. I was just about to say, "I'll have cream in my coffee, thank you," when somebody said, "This is David Lynch." He looked so young I really did think he was the office boy. He has this freshness about him and an extraordinary mind that's nothing like the

way he looks. I hadn't seen *Eraserhead*, so I went to see it with the cameraman, Freddie Francis, and a couple of other people. We all sat and watched this film and when the lights went up we all went, "God, what have we let ourselves in for." I thought it was a brilliant film, but it didn't seem to go at all with this bright, pleasant, young man. He's a very interesting man. My appreciation of him evolved slowly as we went ahead with the film. I enjoyed working with him.

Was there a lot of discussion of how and when to show the face of the Elephant Man?

There were two ways of shooting the opening. David wanted to see him in the cellar, when Treaves first goes down and the tears run down his face. Then, there was the possibility of not seeing him, until the little nurse with the tray sees him and screams. When we had a meeting with Mel Brooks, who was the executive producer, he said, "It's your picture and I don't want to interfere, but I would like you to shoot it both ways, because I'm not absolutely sure how I would like it to go." I don't think David thought that Mel was really serious about that. David shot it the way he wanted. When Mel saw it he said, "I want to see it the other way." It hadn't been shot the other way. In the scenes after Treaves, you could see the Elephant Man very clearly, so I had to cut it the other way by blowing up quite a lot of shots so that the Elephant Man was blown out of the side. Because it was shot in black and white and very grainy, you really didn't notice. Just when you were about to see the Elephant Man, we cut away to something else. You didn't actually see him until the nurse sees him, and that took quite a tricky bit of cutting. Mel Brooks was right, it was better that way, but it was an interesting challenge to do. We did lose a couple of scenes, which was a pity, because we couldn't cut them without showing him.

There were several complex montages of surrealistic imagery in the film. How did you work with David Lynch on them?

It was fascinating work on those montages with David. Now by doing it with video, it would be easier to get inside his mind, but it was very difficult on film because he didn't know exactly what he wanted until he saw it. Something complicated like the mother and the elephant we did hundreds of times before we got it right. David would be telling us what he wanted, my assistant was very patient and kept ordering it over and over again, and it was always wrong. The montage when he goes to the theater was shot as a straight scene; that wasn't shot as a montage at all. It was shot with him coming into the box, the whole performance, the reactions, the crowd, and everything. Afterwards, it just didn't hold, so we made it into a montage. The extraordinary thing was that we had a piece of music that had already been recorded and we had to cut to it. We got it right the first time.

The whole first third of Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the

Apes has almost no dialogue. It must have been a unique experience in cutting that material.

Telling a story with pictures is what editing is all about. It was fascinating. We had a great deal more of it—about two hours of that jungle material. It gave me a great opportunity to do some very interesting things, many of which were never in the picture, because it was much too long. I made vignettes from the ape material with the boy, their family life, their surviving, watching the apes, crying, and laughing. There was some lovely stuff. There was a lovely scene when the boy first goes swimming. He's diving off the waterfall and all the other apes are on the side looking in horror because they don't even want to get their feet wet, let alone plunge in like that, and they're so concerned for him.

What were the production tracks like on all that material? Was most of the material silent?

Yes, mostly silent. Sometimes the boy and the people in the ape suits grunted, but none of it was used. The final tracks were completely made up, we did a lot of work on them. We were very concerned not to make the jungle sound monotonous. If you noticed, it sounds different in different areas. We used various background animals and birds and those ape voices are made up. The sound editor, Les Wiggins, came to America, went to an ape farm up in Ohio, and recorded a lot of sound. Then we recorded human sounds and mixed them together to get the sound that we wanted. They're marvelous tracks, they sound right, and therefore you don't realize what went into them. You shouldn't be aware of them, or you've done it wrong. It should seem as if it's absolutely perfect, but they are, in fact, made up of a lot of different bits and pieces, equalizing, slowing down, speeding up, and all sorts of sound to make each ape's voice sound different.

The apes that Rick Baker created were wonderful. Did you have to pay particular attention in editing that material so that they appeared to come alive?

Yes, we very carefully picked out the best bits. There was some material that was not so good. There were shots where the apes were running along branches and swinging that didn't look at all real, so you had to be very careful that you got the dramatic bits you wanted to tell your story. When we finished the picture, we ran it for an expert on apes, to make sure I hadn't put in anything that didn't look absolutely real. We checked it very carefully. We were worried when we first went up to preview in Seattle they would all say, "What's Hugh Hudson doing with a film with people dressed up in ape suits?" but we got exactly the reverse. We had much more violent material that's not in the film now. We had a great fight between two apes and a scene where an ape mauls a woman. The audience was turned off, because they

thought real apes were getting hurt. They didn't care about the humans getting hurt. They were horrified, so we had to tone down the whole thing.

Did you cut to music?

I didn't cut to music, but we laid a certain amount of music on the tracks. Hugh likes that. I always put music on a film. I think it helps a lot, particularly if you've got silent scenes. I don't cut to the music.

Did Arnold Schwarzenegger have any input into the editing of Raw Deal?

He wanted various inserts put into the film. We did a whole day of close-ups of hands clicking guns and gun barrels exploding, and all that sort of thing. They were really requested by him.

Masters of the Universe was a complicated special effects movie. What was their impact on the editing process?

I like doing different movies. I've always resisted doing effects movies because I knew there'd be an awful lot of boring stuff going on while waiting for effects to come. You can't finalize your scenes until you get them. People say you can just slot them; well, there's no way that you can just slot them in. You have to alter your cuts to make it work.

You have edited many epic films. Do you find they need a different approach than a smaller film?

Not really, it's just the same. You just take it sequence by sequence. It's not really very different. Obviously, it's going to take you a little bit more time, and you have more material to choose from, but you should remain calm at all times. If you've got a whole heap of material coming in, just take it step by step; work out in your mind what you want to get out of a scene. Whether you've got thousands of feet or five feet, it's the same thing. You work out very carefully what you want to say to the audience and how it fits into the rest of the story. So you can be panicked by the amount of the material, but you should just get calm and go through it slowly. It's very important for you to get to know your material.

Is there any particular piece of cutting that you are most proud of?

In *Aces High* I made battle scenes out of nothing. I made them out of footage from *The Blue Max*, *Darling Lili*, stock material, our own full-size flying planes, 20-foot miniatures that were electronically controlled, little baby miniatures that were flown, and real live people on the ground firing guns in machines that rocked about and had clouds rush past them. I made complete World War I dogfights out of them and that was really exciting. I cut from one of our planes being blown up to one from *Darling Lili* that was spiraling down. It was a different plane, and yet it worked because when you saw it exploding and falling, you thought it must be the same plane. When Malcolm McDowell, who was in it, saw the film, he said, "I saw this guy shooting down these planes and

whirling about the skies; then I realized that was me." That was fun to do. The film wasn't successful so you get no credit for doing it, but I consider that one of the best editing jobs I've ever done.

What would you like to do that you haven't done as an editor?

I would like to do a really big musical and I would love to do a cowboy movie. I love editing. I think I'm just so lucky to be doing something that I like to be doing.

Dede Allen

Dede Allen is one of the best-known names in feature film editing. Her dynamic cutting on *Bonnie and Clyde* helped transform contemporary American film. Throughout her career she has been responsible for training many of the industry's most prominent editors, including Jerry Greenberg, Barry Malkin, Richard Marks, and Stephen Rotter.

Dede Allen became a feature editor the long, slow way. Starting at age 19, she spent ten months as a messenger for Columbia and three years in the sound editing department. In New York, she was a picture editor at Film Graphics, where she cut industrials and commercials. After working on several TV series supervised by Carl Lerner, he recommended her for a monster film, *Terror from the Year 5000*, which was her first feature. Her major break came in 1959, when she cut *Odds Against Tomorrow* for director Robert Wise.

Dede Allen has gone on to work with Robert Rossen, Elia Kazan, Arthur Penn, George Roy Hill, and Sidney Lumet. Her powerful editing has helped shape such challenging films as *The Hustler*, *America, America*, *Little Big Man*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, and *Reds*. Her work on *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Reds* earned Academy Award nominations.

1958	<i>Terror from the Year 5000</i>
1959	<i>Odds Against Tomorrow</i>
1961	<i>The Hustler</i>
1963	<i>America, America</i>
1967	<i>Bonnie and Clyde</i>