

In the Cutting Room: *Oranges and Sunshine* with Dany Cooper ASE

Interview by Karen Fleming



Actress Emily Watson as Margaret Humphries in "Oranges and Sunshine"

Oranges and Sunshine is the stunning debut feature of London based director Jim Loach. A British/Australian co-production set in both countries; the film was produced by Camilla Bray of 16 Films and the Award-winning producers of *The Kings Speech*, filmed by Denson Baker ASC and edited by Dany Cooper ASE. Based on the remarkable true story of Margaret Humphries (portrayed wonderfully by Emily Watson) a social worker from Nottingham who stumbled across the secret deportation of thousands of children from the UK to Australia with the promise of oranges and sunshine. The reality of the government enforced exile was far more damaging. The film follows Margaret as she sets about reuniting families and redressing a multitude of wrongs, much to the expense of her own family.

Currently in the top 10 at the Australian Box Office, if you haven't already seen it I highly recommend you do.

As the son of Ken Loach, Jim has quite a film legacy to follow. How did you find working with him?

Jim was always incredibly polite, respectful and very funny. We got on brilliantly, we had the same ideas, same thoughts, he listened if I did not agree, and I listened back. A very good collaboration was had between us. It was a really terrific experience.

You went to London for the beginning of filming. How did the process of shooting and editing in two countries work?

We shot Nottingham first in November and transferred and synced the dailies at Deluxe London, roughly, no code etc, just so we could all get a sense of what had been done. Then when the shoot started in Adelaide in February, for 3 weeks, we put all the neg, (super 35) through Deluxe Sydney and transferred to DNx 36. There was quite a gap during the two shoots so I had 2 weeks at the end of

December to do a rough assembly for Jim as a guide to use when shooting the Australian material.

In terms of story telling how were the two locations treated?

The Nottingham dailies had a blue hazy quality, mostly because the time of day Denson shot. It was winter, well early winter so it was getting dark very quickly around four. When Jim got to Australia we were in the tail of summer. Adelaide has a dry look, which automatically contrasted with England. Because of these two quite opposing lights we didn't feel that we had to sign post the country changes/ travelling etc after the first one, (nor were we interested in seeing Margaret get on and off planes). This set up a certain cutting style from the start.

What kind of coverage were you given to work with?

Well on a five week shoot there is not time for a lot of coverage. Jim would often run a master for scenes, and go for coverage if he thought he really needed it. Choices were made on set, and Jim would talk with me every night, (my assistant Luca Byrne and I were not in Adelaide), to discuss what was working and not. When I asked for pickups for details sake only, there was never any time we could schedule. I never had to ask for performance pickups, they were excellent from the start.

The opening scene shows Margaret taking a baby into care. It's a real statement to start the film that way.

There was debate about this during the edit. It was written and directed this way, but after a couple of screenings we did wonder if the film started in too "heavy" a way. Originally we had a much harsher take, but changed this out close to the end of the edit and scored Emily a little to soften the moment. We felt that it was important to have this moment in the film where Margaret takes away a baby, to not only show her profession but because she gets so caught up in returning other people's babies for most of the film.

The film really plays with placing Margaret's family life beside the lives of those who have been taken away from their families. Was it difficult to find the balance?

The story ultimately was Margaret's. It's her discovery of what happened to these children, and how nobody would take responsibility for what happened to them, which shocked her greatly. The search for family was the B story, but the A story was her obsession and the impact it had on her own family resulting in finding out towards the end of the film that Margaret has post traumatic stress disorder.

Margaret's family life suffered because of her need to go find other peoples mothers. The film was never about the migrant children on their own. It was written and directed through Margaret's eyes. The balance was tricky as a result. I think we got it, but you see the film was never meant to be a "who done it" story. You could say that if a normal white middle class social worker can do so much good for the world then we all can.

One of the most powerful scenes in the film takes place in a mental hospital that is then juxtaposed with Christmas in England. How did that sequence come together?

That particular scene went through a number of incarnations. It was much longer, however that final look that Walter ([Geoff Morrell](#)) gives is so amazing (it came just before he went into a lot of detail about being raped) that we thought it best to leave the scene on that look and let Margaret's reaction to the choir boy and tearing down the Christmas decorations be the final statement.

The scene was built on action/reaction, and the trick I felt was not to say the same thing twice. The music was used like the thread through out and the silence at the end of the music before Walter looks down and the choirboy sings is very important. I protected that moment throughout the cut and the mix. The silences are very important in this film.

This scene was also about Margaret's emotional development. She really is in a little deep here, and quite suddenly. We thus wanted to feel that a lot of time had passed, especially as she arrives back in London in the middle of it. [Rona Munro](#) (screenplay) had mashed the time a little and we took it further in the edit. I think Geoff Morrell gives a wonderful performance.

Another scene that really stood out for me was the one with the politicians sitting around a table. Their lack of empathy was quite startling.

The section used is a snip of a much longer scene. I think it ran for about 7 or 8 minutes prior. We found that it made the audience feel like they were entering a "who done it" film, which was not what we wanted. It was a very good scene and I always loved it at full length, but it got cut leaving the pith.

The film has been praised by the likes of *Margaret Pomeranz* and *David Stratton* for avoiding being overly sentimental. What did you and Jim discuss in terms of emotional tenor?

I think the emotional tenor came from the script and performances, and it was really a matter of putting the best ones up on the screen. Everything was treated very simply, which is what Jim wanted.

The music also had a huge affect on the tone. Jim handed me a Yann Tiersen track to start with for temp, which lead to a lot more of that and the use of some rather brilliant Nick Cave/ Warren Ellis instrumental material.

Further into the cut we let that go and worked with Lisa [Gerrard](#), (composer). I tried to get this happening as soon as possible as it's great to have access to demos as close to the real music to work with. It becomes a conversation between the cutting room and the composer and there is time to adjust on either side to create something more powerful. As a result of this, I was brought back onto the picture after Lisa had done a full draft of the film after picture lock off took place to cut the completed music demos for the mix. This way Jim and I could look at the film as a whole, with as many elements in as possible. It's such a simple thing to do, fitting the music demos - it took us a week and as a result when we got to the final mix we were in a very precise state.

There's a scene, I'd guess about two thirds of the way through the film where we see a number of the men who had been deported from England as children in an interview setting with Margaret. We see them speaking but cant hear what they're saying. I found this really powerful in terms of setting up the fact that there was something really awful coming.

We had already set up a couple of the boys, Bob ([Greg Stone](#)) had an interview about his name "I've got the wrong name", and another of the men only turns up at a BBQ, and then tells Margaret he wants to leave.

I felt that we needed to introduce these guys again before the final scene where they tell you what happened to them in order for the audience to identify them. The shots were from the final interviews, but the combination of radio interviews, sound bites etc, laid over the top of them were written during the edit. The same device was used at the end of the politician's scene moving through to the front of the potato-peeling scene.

These interviews put us back into the public domain when so much had been focused on the private. Also it was a good thing for Margaret to be seen actively listening to their stories which strengthened the final telling.

The severity of the abuse wasn't revealed until the very end of the film. Was this something that was decided in the edit?

It was written this way. Rona Munro specifically held the abuse back, but we heightened it during the edit as mentioned previously and the final scene with the priests had many incarnations. The interviews were very powerful and very real. We knew they were more powerful than any dramatic recreation. The spoken word after everything you had heard (and NOT heard) was startling the first time we played the scene. The brothers were silent in the script, but Margaret and Len (David Wenham) had more dialogue.

Were there any major structural developments in edit?

Oranges is divided into 3 parts. The opening, where we meet the characters, and set up the dilemma, the middle where Margaret starts going to Australia and meets the grown up child migrants culminating with Margaret realising she has a stress disorder, the ending where she and Len go face "the monsters in their heads".

Its very simple but within those three parts there are a lot of scenes, and the order of those scenes are placed in is crucial for emotional build. We changed things around, moved scenes backwards and forwards. Deleted some scenes; the end in particular got a lot of attention. Some changes stuck and some didn't, but it was always about the emotional through line of our three main characters.
