

# australian | screen | editors

**Transcript – James Manche ASE**

**Interviewed by Deborah Peart  
for the Australian Screen Editors Guild**

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**Q: How did you get started as an editor? What is your background?**

I went to university and did an arts degree and after that thought were do I go from here? I could work in the public service or something, which I didn't like the sound of, so I looked for something else and I studied drama and media which I liked. I found that I was probably not a very good actor but good at photography, filmmaking and stuff like that and I enjoyed it. I couldn't say that I really had a plan to be an editor but then I applied for film and TV school. At that stage you couldn't do directing first year, you had to start off on something else, so I choose editing. I probably always thought that I would do directing, but I really liked editing and decided after first year that I would stay with it and don't regret it.

**Q: And when you finished film school how long a period was it before you started working. Was it straight away?**

Pretty much straight away I sort of tried my hand as an assistant for a couple of jobs and didn't really like it much and I don't think I was a very good assistant (laughs) but then I got offered a job sound editing on a mini series. I'd done a bit of sound editing while I was at film school and it seemed pretty natural to me actually. I got a lot of work doing that but I really wanted to be a picture editor so after about 4 or 5 years of doing mini series and other bits and pieces I decided I wasn't happy doing any more of that work and just concentrated on picture editing. I'd always been doing shorts but I started doing more docos and a couple of telemovies I did a series called Six Pack and landed in TV drama by default . In the late 90's period when there wasn't much around, thanks to John Howard I ended up at Channel Seven because I wanted to keep doing drama, and I've been working with them mainly ever since.

**Q: What's the best advice you've had about the craft of editing. Is there anything you live by in regards to your work?**

What's influenced me and I don't necessarily agree with them but they sort of had an effect on me in terms how I work and how I went about things; but some people have said to me things like every cut has to have a reason, a meaning, you have to think about why you are doing it and what you are saying about a cut and I dwelled on that for actually quite a few years and eventually decided that I didn't agree. There is a lot of what you are creating as an editor that is about impressions and collecting good images, and not every part of that collection has a particular meaning. So it's bigger picture stuff and not getting caught up on every individual cut. If you do that you get stuck thinking about it forever and never making a move. So I started taking risks and making cuts even when I was not sure why I was doing them. Then started refining them and just developing them consequently by practice as well as experience. You develop a thought process, and it's very important to follow that.

Similarly someone said to me once that I'd never be a good editor unless I follow my feelings (laughs) and I thought about that for a few good years and I thought yes and no. Yes it is about your sensitivity but you do have to think about what you are trying to get across and what you are trying to say clearly. So it really is a combination of things. Editing is a whole lot of things you've got to think about all at once and that's really what the craft is. There's a whole lot of layers of storytelling, narrative, emotion, thinking about people's perception of the geography of the situation, the relationships between people, there's all sorts of things to think about and the craft of it is to nail it and bring all those things together and have a knack for it.

**Q: What's the best advice you've been given about your career? Or more so the best decision you've made?**

That's a hard one because I've made a lot of bad decisions (laughs). Sometimes it's good to stick at things. Sometimes you can get stuck doing things you don't want to do, but it can end up being really good for you as well. I think the best thing I ever did was to stick with picture editing and keep working at it. Different gigs are good for different people and you never really know what would happen if you took a different course or if you got a particular job at a certain time or you didn't get the job at a certain time. I guess I mostly always wanted to work in drama and it was a good thing for me when I decided to do tv drama instead of keeping on with the documentaries, because I'd done lots of docs. I'm really happy with that. Follow your heart.

**Q: What have you been up to lately?**

Well for many years I worked on All Saints, a series called Headland and then I did Packed to the Rafters which is now in its third year. I've filled in with a couple of other jobs during production breaks. I did Enough Rope for a couple of months and last year I did Dance Academy which was really good fun.

**Q: How did you find Dance Academy in relation to your other work (Dance Academy is a teen centred drama series premiering soon on the ABC)?**

Dance is a funny thing. Ian Gilmour the director, said he wanted to keep the dance sequences really simple, really simple, with long shots and I thought well I can see where you are coming from, but editing if you do it right, it's a real craft and you can express a lot about the dance with the editing as well. So I sort of took notice and then didn't take notice. And when Ian came in he said "Well you didn't take any notice of me at all!" He recut them as much as he wanted too obviously but he did say that after a while he realised that they (the dance sequences) were actually really good, that I really touched on something about the sensuality of the dance through the editing which he didn't realise could be done. And that was the fun part of it.

**Q: A very wise editor once told me that "editing is like a dance".**

Editing is like dance, editing has rhythms and punctuation in a similar way that choreography does, it's the same with music, and rhythms are very important. In dance you have movements that punctuate through, with the music you have beats. In your editing you have beats in cutting rhythms and in the how you make your choices of cuts. You have the same language going on and you have to make them work together.