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AWARDS

In the edit bay, these filmmakers change endings, discover a score and shift scenes





(Maria Corte / For The Times)

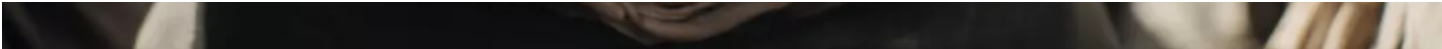
By Randee Dawn

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Most audiences will feel that the magic of a film happens on camera or on the screen in a darkened room. But there’s plenty of magic and drama to be had in the edit suite, where everything comes together, falls apart and gets remade one more time. “It’s somewhere between a writing room and a workshop,” says Nicholas Monsour, editor of “Nickel Boys,” while “Maria” editor Sofia Subercaseaux likened it to a giant wall pasted with clues — like the crime boards we see on TV. But it’s different for every director-editor pairing, a chemistry that can create surprising changes down to the last minute before a film is locked.

We stepped virtually into several edit suites to discuss those surprises, discoveries and relocated scenes from four of this year’s awards season contender films.





(Warner Bros. Pictures/Warner Bros. Pictures)

“Dune: Part Two”

Director: Denis Villeneuve

Editor: Joe Walker

The Pairing: “This is our fifth film together, so things are really well-oiled,” says Walker, who won the editing Oscar in 2024 for “Dune: Part One.” “If Denis weren’t one of the top directors in the world, he’d be a fantastic editor himself.”

Surprise! Editing might seem exclusively visual, but sounds can also come into play. In a scene where Stilgar (Javier Bardem) refers to Arrakis’ desert spirits, he created a unique, breathy noise to imitate them. Walker took that audio, slowed it down using Metasynth software, then “feathered” that into the desert wind atmosphere. “I come from a sound background, and what you want in the finished [print] is a fully finished rhythmic model,” Walker says. “It becomes a score to the scene.” The sound also has a metaphorical meaning: “It joins the dots. The film is a battle between self-determination and fate ... whether mystical things exist or are they manipulated — and the context in which magical things happen.”

“Oh, Canada”

Director: Paul Schrader

Editor: Benjamin Rodriguez Jr.

The Pairing: “Most of my movies have been with Paul, and it’s always just me and Paul,” Rodriguez says. “He tries to do a lot of cutting in camera — sometimes that’s good and sometimes that gets us in trouble in the edit room.”

Surprise! “Canada” originally had an epilogue, in which Emma (Uma Thurman) and

her son (Zach Shaffer) mourn the late Leo (Richard Gere). Schrader fought to keep it; Rodriguez preferred an ending with young Leo (Jacob Elordi) crossing the border. The epilogue was cut shortly before the film locked, after Schrader got feedback from Gere and some trusted advisers. Rodriguez senses that the movie's ending, which is very "autobiographical to Paul," may have resonated so strongly in part due to the "difficult time with [Schrader] and his wife," actor Mary Beth Hurt, who has Alzheimer's and entered memory care in 2023.



(Netflix)

“Maria”

Director: Pablo Larraín

Editor: Sofía Subercaseaux

The Pairing: “Pablo is very confident and not afraid of trying new things,” says Subercaseaux, noting that the director kept a 9 to 4 working schedule because they both had young children at home. “There’s this idea that you need to work 20-hour days to edit a movie, and that’s not only fake — it’s not sustainable.”

Surprise! Among several timelines overlapping in “Maria,” there was a scene where as a young girl she sang for German soldiers, with the older Maria (Angelina Jolie) looking on and touching her hand. But “we never felt like it was the right moment where it was scripted to be,” Subercaseaux says, “but it was a powerful moment — the idea of her feeling compassion for her younger self.” They left it out until the final week of editing, focused on Maria’s final days. In the scene, she sings to herself, in her home — and as a quick flashback the moment was slotted back in. “It added a layer of emotional depth to the scene, because you remember [her] suffering as a child. It immediately made sense — but it wasn’t supposed to be there.”

“Nickel Boys”

Director: RaMell Ross

Editor: Nicholas Monsour

The Pairing: Monsour and Ross were newcomers to working together but connected over their shared documentary and art school background, Monsour says. “I was familiar with the way you approach a film’s structure, like you’re creating a story out of moments — rather than reconstructing moments that you intentionally capture.”

Surprise! In the film about two teens in a reformatory school, the camera becomes the point-of-view of a couple of characters, while other characters look directly into the lens. For much of the early part of the film, that character is Elwood (Ethan Herisse) — but a big change comes when it flips to Turner (Brandon Wilson) during a cafeteria scene. “In [Ingmar Bergman’s] ‘Persona,’ there’s a scene where the

characters repeat the same dialogue twice — and it occurred to me that that was the way for the audience to understand that it’s not just switching live POV but the memory of these characters,” Monsour says. Now, the film’s cafeteria scene shows Elwood’s dialogue from what cinematographer Jomo Fray dubbed his “sentient POV,” cuts to other material, then returns to Turner’s “sentient POV,” where the dialogue is repeated. “That discovery of doubling moments became a common theme in the film,” he says.

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