

THE MAGAZINE FOR FILM & TELEVISION EDITORS, ASSISTANTS & POST-PRODUCTION PROFESSIONALS

# CINEMAEDITOR

## THE TELEVISION ISSUE

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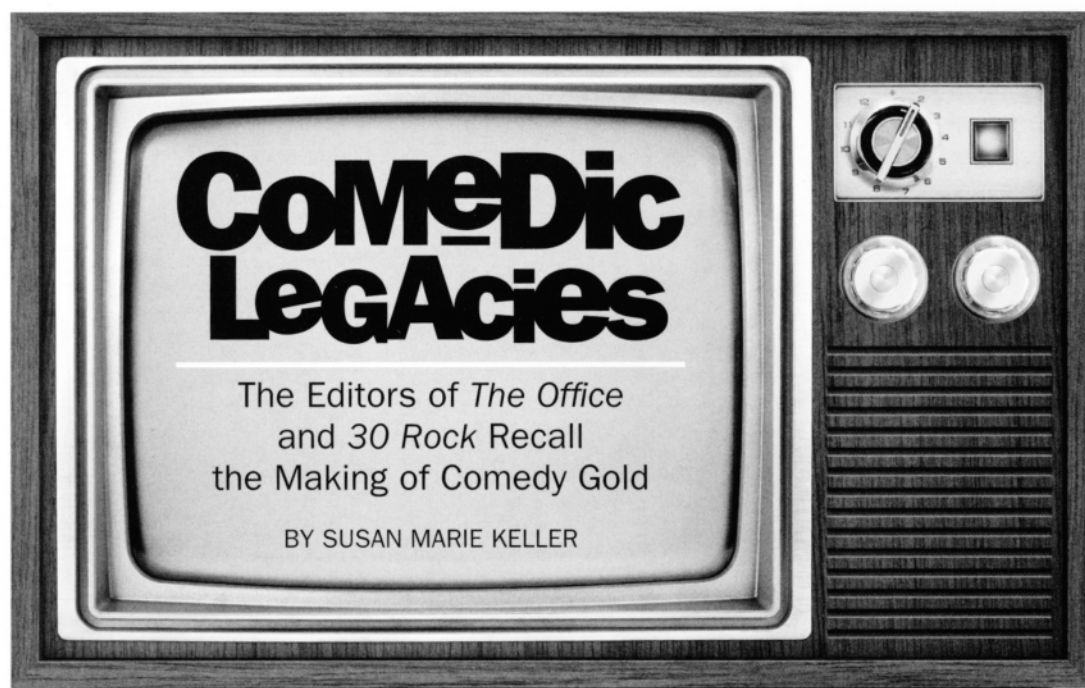


NEXT ISSUE OF **CINEMAEDITOR**: THE AWARDS ISSUE



**T**his past season, two long-standing and much-loved comedy series have come to a close.

While award-winning *30 Rock* and *The Office* (2005) may leave a gap in many fans' entertainment schedules, both series will leave behind an incredible legacy of fresh and inventive storytelling.



## 30 Rock

Doug Abel, A.C.E., edited the pilot of *30 Rock* in close collaboration with the show's creators, and then cut season one with Ken Eluto, A.C.E. The following season, Meg Reticker joined the series.

"Ken [Eluto] was an amazing partner to work with," says Reticker. "Over the course of six years working together, we became good friends. We also worked together between seasons editing *Bored To Death*. It was a real 'family feeling' on the show."

Both editors had come to the show from the world of documentary film editing, as different a format from primetime single-camera scripted comedy as you could get.

"With documentaries you start with a lot of free-form material and try to figure out the story," says Eluto whose pre-*30 Rock* résumé includes *American Experience*, *Homicide*, *Frontline*, *Oz* and *The Irish in America*. "But you always try to react to the material at hand. I try to find a little comedy in everything I do, even the dramatic things. I think I have a pretty good sense of humor, so with the great writing, it made it a lot easier to keep things funny."

For her own move from documentaries to comedy, Reticker feels that it's "part of the joy of working in New York. There is a more fluid movement between genres."

Her path took her from documentaries like *Rikers High* to gritty drama *The Wire*, and through that to HBO's *Big Love*. That, plus her work on the comedy feature *Wet Hot American Summer*, put her in a good spot for the position on *30 Rock* in season two.

Though the show intends to feel like it is shot in a semi-vérité style, everything feels like it's grown organically on the spot. The reality is a lot more traditional than that: classic three-camera set-ups to get plenty of coverage with nothing, they tell me, is actually improvised. It's all on the page.

"The show was all about pacing and they had, as you can imagine, definitive notions of how they wanted that pacing," she says. "And I loved that." Sure, the show changed over the course of seven years, becoming a bit faster as the team learned to work more efficiently with one another, but certain aspects remained the same. For example, every episode was shot on film, which is becoming a rare thing these days.

One of Reticker's favorite scenes to cut was on her very first episode with the show. It was the therapy scene in which Alec Baldwin's character engages in some very specific role playing with Tracy Morgan's character, snapping from one character in Morgan's life to another and another in quick and hilarious succession. "When you have someone like Alec [Baldwin] in a scene – someone with that expertise – he tells you, along with the writing, the pacing of the scene. In order to make it work, I found I had to cut to a new camera each time his character changed. I know the show moved very fast for some people, but it was really enjoyable to cut."

"Over the course of the show, I edited 67 episodes," says Eluto, "so they start to blur together a little. The ones that really stand out for me are the more surreal and frenetic ones, like 'Tracy Does Conan' and 'Apollo, Apollo' and the bits we did for the reality send-up 'The Queen of Jordan,' because it was a really different and fun style to mimic. It's also the only thing we shot on video in the entire show."

Post-*30 Rock* and both editors aren't short of work. Eluto is in the midst of editing a feature starring Hugh Grant and



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Marisa Tomei for Writer/Director Marc Lawrence. Reticker is editing the feature *Lucky Them*, starring Toni Collette and Thomas Haden Church.

“If the writing is good, that’s where I go,” she says. “Then you know it will all come together. Television is a writer’s medium just now. No studios want to make a film for under \$10 million anymore ... while TV is allowing those smaller voices to be heard. TV is in a golden age right now.”

A golden age, maybe. But one that has lost a little nugget of itself now.

## The Office

On the game-changing and practically genre-reinventing *The Office*—a format originally devised by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant for the BBC and adapted for American television by Greg Daniels—Kathryn Himoff edited the pilot, but as is regularly the case, schedules require a change of editors when going into series. David Rogers was the first in the seat, joined in season two by Dean Holland.

Rogers brought with him a comedy pedigree that would make any producer or director go on automatic drool: a little show named *Seinfeld* and the cult-level *NewsRadio*. His credits also include *The Comeback* (2005), and even *Entourage* to add a little drama to the list.

Rogers assisted Skip Collector on *Seinfeld* and Noel Rogers on *The Single Guy*, and really felt the value of the mentoring they gave him. Because of this, he’s always keen to give his assistants a shot at cutting.

“Rob Burnett came on as a night assistant, and he ended up cutting four or five episodes of *The Office* last season,” says Rogers. “I gave notes, but I never had to touch the controls. Next year he’s coming with me and will be a full editor on *The Mindy Project*.”

Most comedy show assemblies come in at three to five minutes over length, but *The Office* rough cuts were regularly 18-20 minutes over.

“So when people say ‘it must be so hard to decide what stays in!’ that’s what we do every week!” says Rogers. “More than once we’ve had assemblies come in so long that we could make two shows out of one show’s material. That’s just the nature of this show.”

Holland’s experience previous to *The Office* is an interesting brew of comedy features like *Run, Ronnie, Run* and *The Hebrew Hammer*; music and stand-up documentaries, the odd action film, a few comedic television pilots, and a slew of short films for awards shows.

Together, Rogers and Holland earned Emmy® nominations each year from 2006 until 2009, and took home both the Emmy and the Eddie in 2007 for the season two finale, “Casino Night.”

Then, during season five, Holland left the show on the challenge of editing *Parks and Recreation*. Editor Claire Scanlon was hired.

Holland recalls, “She hadn’t done any editing on scripted comedy and, to be honest with you, we kind of liked that. She came



from reality TV [and documentaries] and we were meeting with a lot of veteran scripted guys, but this show was *different*, you know? You had to think outside the box, and in reality TV, that's all you do."

Rogers adds, "We were wondering how she would do with comedy, and she hit it out of the park."

Scanlon credits her comedic abilities to Editor Arnold Glassman (*Visions of Light*), whom she considered a mentor before he passed. "He taught me [that audiences] can't get stuff just shoved down their throat without some kind of a laugh, or they're just going to walk out."

Scanlon's credits include award-winning music documentary *The Wrecking Crew* (2008), reality stalwart *The Apprentice*, *Top Chef*, multiple episodes of PBS's *American Masters* series, supervising producer and supervising editor on *Last Comic Standing*, and since beginning on *The Office*, the pilots for *The Mindy Project* and *Mr. Robinson*.

Looking back at her work on *The Office*, Scanlon says her favorite scene to cut was in the episode "Niagara," during which Pam and Jim go to Niagara Falls to get married.

"*The Office* doesn't have music often, and I really adore cutting with music. It's much more challenging to edit without music, so it gives you a great feeling when you hit something emotional without that cheat. It's more authentic. Here, I had the opportunity to intercut Super 16 footage of the emotional story of Jim and Pam getting married alone on a boat [and] the wedding." The "wedding" featured the humor of the cast dancing down the aisle to *Forever*, from Chris Brown, which recalled the popular viral wedding video from the Internet. "That was a pleasure," she said. "And the last

moment of the scene is Jim looking into camera. I scoured all the material of them on the boat, and in one take he just looked to camera, and to me it said, 'I got her!' It really summed it all up. It was fun showing that sequence to Jenna [Fischer] and John [Krasinski]. They were crying, and I thought, 'Yes!' That's what I always go for. The cry."

Scanlon related that she worked with *The Office* directors of photography Matt Sohn, Sarah Levy and Randall Einhorn. "All come from reality TV, and their camera choreography is amazing," she said. "I can't overstate how much their work affected everything that came into our edit bay. Real documentary filmmakers are just trying to catch the shot as it happens, and these guys have to make it look like they're just catching it, even though the script tells them exactly who is speaking next."

Interestingly, each of *The Office* editors love to direct. "I edited all the episodes that I directed on *The Office*, just as Dave edits his episodes," says Scanlon. "It's a great feeling and creatively rewarding to get to do both."

Holland has plans to direct an episode of the upcoming *Brooklyn 99*. Rogers is set to direct episodes of *The Mindy Project*, and after completing editing work on Stephen Merchant's *Hello Ladies*, Scanlon plans to segue into full-time directing.

"I watched the two last hour-long episodes of *The Office* back to back, and could not stop myself from emailing everyone," says Holland. "In watching them, I was reminded of exactly why I fell in love with the show when working on it. It reminded me of everything that I missed about *The Office*."

That's a sentiment that we can all echo. **CE**