

SCREEN DIRECTORS GUILD OF IRELAND

LEFT: George Morrison and Ciarín Scott. Photo by Alice Butler.
BELOW: Ciarín Scott. Photo by Sarah FitzGerald.



SDGI Director in Focus

Director CIARÍN SCOTT talks about making her George Morrison biography *Waiting for the Light*.

AS A DIRECTOR, different types of films require different approaches. With documentaries you are dealing with real events. With a film about an individual either alive or dead you have certain responsibilities, because the interpretation of that person can have far reaching consequences for their lives or reputation both good and bad. So the director has a duty of integrity because material can be shot and, particularly, edited in a way that can radically change the audience's perception of the subject.

Therefore, when I decided to make *Waiting for the Light*, it obviously posed its own challenges. Firstly, George Morrison being so open about himself meant I had to be especially careful how I used the material. Secondly, I was conscious that making a film about another director would be a factor, apart from the fact that he had also trained me.

This meant I had to think carefully about how to show a rounded portrait, how to be fair and balanced and yet not uncritical about his life and work overall. Having wanted to be a director since my teens I understood George's obsession with films. As George says in the film, he trusted me completely to interpret him as I saw fit.

George makes his own films as a director in a structured way. He first works for a considerable time on the script and then sticks to that script, using a very small ratio on each shot, almost to the frame. In contrast I wanted a more freestyle approach because he is so aware of the camera and what we were doing. Apart from when we filmed the interviews,

this meant shooting fly on the wall, as you never know when you are going to get a telling moment or scene. George was of course astonished by the high ratio needed for this type of filming.

Charm and humour

As he can come across as didactic, I wanted the style to be almost conversational when shooting the interviews. I also wanted George's charm and humour to drive the film so the audience would be drawn to him. To help make it more intimate the cameraman Steve O'Reilly, who I work with, also did the sound and was most flexible about the filming so we could get the material. Given his age and health, we only filmed in the mornings (and then all had a good lunch!) once or twice every few weeks or so for over a year. George, of course, would keenly watch what Steve and I were doing – always the director.

Though he could not wait to see what we had shot, I did not show him anything until the penultimate cut. Showing it to him was nerve-racking, as I knew George would judge the film on its merits as a film, even more than how I portrayed him. He came ready to make notes and comments, but after the first opening scene he shouted his approval (it could easily have been the opposite reaction!) and after that the showing was fine.

When you are the producer and writer as well as the director it is imperative to show versions of your cut to trusted colleagues and friends. They are

your future audience and by God they did not shirk their remit! My first cut was a standard biography in the third person, but was just not working. In various forms the basic comment was the same: that I would have to put my friendship with George over the years into the film and narrate it in the first person. Vital input came from Henry Richards, whose credit as additional camera does not do justice to his overall contribution.

For these reasons the edit took longer than envisaged and it was only because the editor Lawrence Fee was willing to work in such a creative way that I was able to make the film the way I wanted and also because none of the financiers tried to change the film.

Laughing and crying

I showed a preview version at Galway, which went down really well. I then made various changes to that version, which gave it the extra 10% every film needs to finally work. It has just been shown at the Stranger Than Fiction festival and I was astounded by the audience's response – they laughed and cried, which you don't always find in a documentary.

Now *Waiting for the Light* is going out to other festivals where hopefully it will find an audience. I would hope that directors and filmmakers like it, as it is a film about a director by another director and what it is to be a director.

Now my next project is to finish a film I have been making (in between the others) for the last five years and to first find the money – always the biggest challenge!

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