
Interview with Anthony Sloman

By Keith M. Johnston

Anthony (Tony) Sloman has worked in the British film industry since the 1960s, starting out as a runner for Soho-based film companies such as Guild and Caledonian Film. At Caledonian, the editors Jack Harris and Derek York, and directors Charles Crichton and Bryan Forbes, encouraged him to go into editing and sponsored his union membership. Having worked as second assistant editor on films such as *Where the Spies Are* (Guest, 1965), *Othello* (Burge, 1965), *One Million Years B.C.* (Chaffey, 1966), and *Vault of Horror* (Baker, 1972), Tony expanded his cutting room skills as sound editor for television and film projects like *Orson Welles' Great Mysteries* (Anglia, 1973), *Count Dracula* (BBC, 1977), and *The Bounty* (Donaldson, 1983); editor on *Alice Cooper: Welcome to My Nightmare* (Winters, 1975) and *Dance Craze* (Massot, 1981); and as a producer-director-editor of his own films, starting with *Sweet and Sexy* (Sloman, 1970) and *Not Tonight Darling* (Sloman, 1971). Alongside that work, Tony has also written and produced trailers for films as diverse as *The Eagle Has Landed* (Sturges, 1977), *The Long Good Friday* (Mackenzie, 1979) and *Supergirl* (Szwarc, 1984), and it is that work that is (broadly) the subject of this interview.

This transcript is an edited version of an hour-long interview that was conducted at BAFTA London, on Wednesday 21st November 2012.

KMJ [Keith M. Johnston]: Tony, just to get us started, to get a personal perspective... how did you make the move from editing into trailer production?

TS [Tony Sloman]: From the start, I wanted to progress on the classic route, from second assistant editor to dubbing assistant, first assistant, dubbing editor, editor, director... but [by the late 1960s] that route no longer existed because it was cheaper to hire people who had written a script, and get them to, you know, get an editor sorted out... but it was a great time to be working, it was really the end of the studio system - I worked in every studio... so I ended up track laying, and shooting effects, shooting post-sync, working with the director... generally, I wasn't bad at what I did - I was peculiar, I was interested in film and to my horror, most people working in films were not, which was advantageous, because

when the dubbing editor I was working for was listening to the cricket all the summer, I ended up track laying, shooting effects and dialogue, performance for *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (Hughes, 1968), because the director Ken Hughes was still directing the film!

KMJ: But moving into the editing side of the industry was always your aim?

TS: That was a conscious decision, I didn't want to do cameras... in my growing up period, it very slowly dawned on me, what is specific and peculiar that makes film work... editing - cutting as it was called in slang... was peculiar and specific to film. And when I kind of realised that, and that several of my own favourite directors were editors first... [people like] David Lean, Alan Resnais and John Sturges... I decided to centre on trying to get into the cutting rooms rather than on the [studio] floor...

KMJ: And did the experience of working in cutting rooms help you get established in trailer production?

TS: I don't see how you could make trailers without editing experience. It's interesting that when I met the trailer producers from the companies, from National Screen Services [N.S.S.] in particular, they've all come through the practicality of making films, generally in the cutting room... all of the trailer producers, they used to come in and - as second assistant editor [on a film] - I used to meet them because it would fall to me, once the picture had stopped shooting and was cutting, to find them the material that they want; that is, they would come in with scripts, and I would have to find them the slates and dupe them... I learned a lot - you couldn't use the original again, obviously, without duping it, and sometimes [alternative] material found its way into trailers, which wasn't in the film... on *all* of the films on which I worked as second assistant editor, I was involved in ordering, or providing, or liaising with the trailer companies.

KMJ: Was it that liaison, or that experience, that intrigued you about working in trailer production?

TS: I love trailers, I love the whole 'in your face'-ness of it all... The captions, the words, the style of lettering - I mean, I loved MGM because they coloured the lettering, most other companies just had single colour

lettering... but the bigger and more glamorous the picture, the more the actual words twinkled... the trailer for *Singin' in the Rain* (Donen/Kelly, 1952) is a very good example of this, probably the best example of any trailer ever. But, of course, they were costly and they were controlled by the studios.

I grew up loving trailers... [they] were all a part of the wonder of the cinema experience... So, when I actually got a picture and realised that, hey, somebody's got to look after the trailers, and it might as well be the second assistant, who was finished syncing up rushes by then - and on the cheaper budgets would be removed - I guess I kind of offered myself... the trailer companies were always making millions of trailers at once, they would say we'd rather you do it, and send us the material... once the script had been approved... by the trailer company, it was an internal thing - [studios like] MGM, Rank, whatever, trusted them so much...

It seemed to me a very glamorous part of the business... the essence of the film in a minute and a half, if that - wonderful colourful captions, and specially written captions... it's interesting, David Lean, an editor I respect very much, and a director I quite like, sent up trailers magnificently in *Brief Encounter* (Lean, 1945) - 'Flames of Passion' all next week, and I never realised there was a film called *Flames of Passion* until much, much later... I did some work on a few films that incorporated trailers as library material, most notably the 70mm *Dance Craze* (1980), and we did the centre section with some trailers, and I got to see an awful lot of trailers of the period... because the copyright is different on trailers, you can show trailers and bits of trailers when you can't show bits of the film...

KMJ: If we can turn to the list of trailers you've actually worked on...

TS: Well, the first trailer I had control over was the second film I directed because I loathed the trailer done for the first film I directed, which was done by the film's producer. We were kind of proud of it [the film], but it really was only a very, very cheap sexploitation film... He'd made a trailer which incorporated the Rice bunny *The Kiss*, from you know, 1896, to make it - and honestly, that's not our audience... it was too long, and I thought why didn't I offer to do the trailer? You know, I've got the background... I co-wrote, directed, cut it and co-produced it, why didn't I do the trailer? I don't know, probably psychologically, I'd had enough by then - control is a hard thing to keep at the end of a picture, any director will tell you, so I let Ray do it, and I thought... just no... it was so awful, I didn't want to keep a copy of the trailer of my own film.

So, when I got to do *Not Tonight Darling*... I realised I could do my own trailer for my own film, because nobody else was going to do it! I won't get paid any more, I didn't get paid much for doing the film, but at least I'll make a trailer, so I do at last have a trailer for my own film, and it seems - although its scratched - that it may well be the only... copy, because it was for Border Film, and they junked everything...

KMJ: And after *Not Tonight Darling* you move onto the trailer for *Can You Keep it up for a Week* (Atkinson, 1975)?

TS: Now, with *Can You Keep it up for a Week*? I'd gone back into the cutting room because I'd failed to get anything set up [as a director]... I didn't want to do another sex film... like a few people at that time, [I tried] to set up horror things, science fiction things - and then the dubbing editor Jim Atkinson who I had assisted, and knew quite well, actually got a picture to direct. He'd cut - or dubbed, I think - *Clinic Xclusive* (Chaffey, 1972), with an X, for Elton Hawke (Hazel Adair and Kent Walton of *Cool for Cats* and wrestling fame)... Elton Hawke did quite well with *Clinic Xclusive*... [and Jim Atkinson asked] would I mind assisting David [Docker].. so, I'm on the picture doing first assistant, and I work a bit with the dubbing editor (the great Chris Green, who got an Oscar for dubbing *The Guns of Navarone* (Thompson, 1961)... Chris dubbed, without a pseudonym, *Can You Keep it up for a Week*?, and I moved across to help him, and then I got on very well with Hazel and Ken, and they asked me to do the trailer, and I said yes... and fortunately for me, they had to provide a 'U' trailer and a 'X' trailer so I got about five weeks of work instead of two weeks, so that's how I got to do those two trailers.

And at the same time as doing that, one of my friends and indeed contemporaries in the cutting room, one of the first people I ever met, was Peter Watson... he set up a company called Optical Film Effects... at Pinewood. And he solicited for trailers on films he was doing effects for, and at one stage he was assistant to Anne Coates, and Anne was cutting *The Eagle Has Landed* for John Sturges... Peter and I knew each other, and we used to go to the NFT together, and the rest of it, and I said, you know, we could do the trailer for this - it's an independent film for Lew Grade, produced by Jack Wiener, ITC, they don't have a regular trailer company. So Peter approached them through Optical Film Effects - they were doing the effects for the film, so it wasn't difficult and he'd assisted Anne Coates - and we got the trailer for *The Eagle Has Landed*.

And the great thing about this... [was] we actually managed... to be the only trailer which actually changed the shape of the film itself. I wrote

this trailer script, which began with... I can't remember if it was 'Churchill Kidnap Plot' or 'Plot to Kidnap Churchill' and I said, wouldn't it be great if we had a newspaper with that as the headline, put it on the front of the trailer for *The Eagle Has Landed*, because that's what it's all about! So, Peter goes off to the newspaper museum, national newspaper depository thing, before it was on microfilm, and he finds something like 'Plot to Kidnap Churchill' and, of course, he's at Optical Film Effects, so he puts it on the optical bench, and shoots it with film. And when Jack Wiener, the producer of *The Eagle Has Landed*, saw this, he showed it to John Sturges, and John said "that's great, why haven't we got it in our film?"... We worked out what we were doing: Anne Coates realised of course, yes it would be good to have it on the front of the film itself, so that's what happened, we found a way of integrating it into the picture... during the first reel somewhere. So, I felt that Peter and I... had actually, as trailer makers, made a significant contribution to the film itself which, as far as I know, is the only time that's ever happened... and they loved it, John Sturges was very pleased, Jack Wiener was very pleased, ITC and Lew Grade were very pleased...

You'd think, wouldn't you, that they'd offer us another picture immediately to do the trailers for - but it wasn't until three years later (more or less... Peter and I submitted a lot of trailer scripts that got rejected... [and] I did get paid for writing trailer scripts) [when we were offered] *Zulu Dawn* (Hickox, 1979)... I did that at Twickenham [with editor Malcolm Cook], did the whole thing myself, script, script approval, shooting commentary, voiceover, working with the producer of the film - never saw the director, Dougie Hickox - who I worked with on *The Master of Ballantrae* (1984 TV movie)... you'll need to talk to Peter Watson, of Optical Film Effects to find out the mechanics of it, but we delivered the trailer of *Zulu Dawn* to them, and they were happy with. And it's now available on the DVD release.

KMJ: You've talked a bit about the autonomy of the trailer writer...

TS: You're totally on your own...

KMJ: So, can you take us through the process of trailer writing and producing on a project like *Zulu Dawn* or *Supergirl* (1984)?

TS: Well, normally this happens before the film is finished. I work from the script - the script of the film - and I'm going to leap ahead to something I mentioned to you before... [the main] National Screen

Services [N.S.S.]... producer was the doyenne of trailers, Esther Harris. And she - I watched her work, so I'd seen her come in on *Where the Spies Are* - the first feature I worked on - I watched her come in, look at the assembly (as far as I know she never looked at the rushes), and took the script away and worked out the trailer, marked it out, what she thought would be a trailer - usually a minute, minute and a half, but some companies went for a longer one, if it was a prestige picture... you had some variation in it, but not much - and she would write the captions which are so important - and then she would give it to a trailer producer...

On *Cross of Iron* (1977), Sam Peckinpah's film, on which I worked as assistant editor... N.S.S. were called in quite early, and they needed an early trailer to sell the film... and I met an editor called Tony Church who had been put on the *Cross of Iron* trailer by Esther Harris, and it was my job to run the film... for Tony Church, and afterwards we went away and had a chat. And I said to him the very thing you just asked: How do you start? What do you look for? And he gave me a wonderful insight in one word - I look for the watershed moment and then I build the trailer around it. And that watershed moment... can be a number of things. It could be a key line of dialogue. In *Cross of Iron*, I'll never forget it, because it's a close-up of James Coburn saying to Max Schell "I'm going to show you where the iron crosses grow" - and that's a great line, a great moment, a great moment of writing... and he built the trailer around that, it became the penultimate shot and then you go 'Cross of Iron' - and I thought, hey, this is trailer making! And that was Tony Church - he taught me all that.

But I guess I'd had an instinct for it before actually meeting him and actually working on it, so that is what happens - the trailer person, whoever that is, and it was usually N.S.S. although not always, comes in - and that's why OFE - Optical Film Effects - had such trouble getting the jobs. Not because Peter Watson didn't know these people - he knew 'em all, he'd assisted most of them - it's just that they went to N.S.S. rather than OFE...

And they do that - they look at what's cut, what effects they think they can use - they have some of their own effects. If it's a war film, they often won't go to the dubbing editors' material, they'll just use their own war explosions and things. You try to find two pieces of music - trailers need music desperately, more than the film itself does - and if you can, you like to find a really good piece of music, up tempo, with a beginning - where you start it - and a really good piece of music needn't be up tempo but invariably is - and with a really good ending - and in the process of the mix, you'll mix across somewhere, usually under dialogue, somewhere where nobody will notice it - except another music editor... So, you're

looking for the two pieces of music remembering that the time you're looking at the film, not only has it not been scored (because it hasn't been cut), it might not even have a composer.

So, you would go to the company - it would have a distributor in place or a production company - you would trawl through their library to see if they've got anything suitable, which is why music in trailers is very often not the music in the film, but may even be by a different composer.

When I did the *Supergirl* teaser trailer I used the *Star Trek* main theme [from *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, Wise 1979] for the cutting copy, because it worked so well. Everybody knew it was *Star Trek* so they knew we weren't going to use it - and when Jerry Goldsmith scored it, scored *Supergirl*, there are some similarities... because he wrote the main theme for *Star Trek*... I would find all the elements and put them together - hopefully, you always hoped against hope that they would finish the music score and so you could swap the music over and use the music. If you can't, then you have to mix it, and deliver it as it is - and they have to do the clearances.

KMJ: So, with the *Supergirl* example, you put the *Star Trek* music on as a temporary track, and then you replaced that with a final version?

TS: They didn't actually use that one [in theatres], that was used for the festivals, for Cannes and everywhere, because it was quite simply - the one that I did, I'd cut a detailed *Supergirl* trailer from the script, with the scenes from Faye Dunaway and Peter Cook and everything, and underscored it with bits of Jerry Goldsmith, but the one they liked was the cheapest, easiest and most basic - although I was on it for six weeks - which was quite simply S-U-P-E-R-G-I-R-L cut to the main *Star Trek* theme. That was it. Instant. Terrific. They sold the film on it. I'm very proud of it, but it wasn't a proper trailer. And eventually they went back to my original scene-by-scene trailer, and eventually they cut that really short.

There was no trailer company - I was the trailer company on that, I was brought in to do that, I was working directly for Pierre Spengler, who was the producer of the film, who represented the Salkinds, and I got on so well with them that they offered me the picture that they were making with the leftover cash from *Supergirl* called *Where is Parsifal?* (Helman, 1984), with Tony Curtis, they offered me that as dubbing editor because they liked my use of sound on the *Supergirl* trailer. It's bizarre, the way you get jobs...

Generally, if you have access to a studio library - and the time - then you can listen to pieces of music but by the time you... [become] a trailer editor or trailer producer, you will have a pretty good idea of the record library and you'll know who you like, what you can use, and how to make it work. There are several schools of thought over should you use effects in a trailer, should you use a voice-over - really, generally, the trailer script is approved first. You don't take bits of film and stick them together - that's time consuming and costly - it would all be in the script. The script would be approved, the pages would be initialled - by whoever has to initial them, sometimes nobody has to - you show it to a group of people... my experience is that it's the hardest thing to do, is to get people together to watch a trailer all at once. You can never get the distributor and the producer... in one theatre at one time. And always show it theatrically, try not to show it in a cutting room, or now on a TV, because it's a trailer... it needs the scale.

KMJ: Of the three elements you've just identified - scenes from the film, titles and music (or soundtrack) - are they the strongest pieces that a trailer producer looks for? Is that what you build a trailer round?

TS: No, you build the trailer round the watershed! Once you've identified that, you think: are you selling the stars? Are you selling the image? Are you selling the plot? Remember that all trailers have to have a U or a PG certificate, so if it's horror you can't really show any horror, you can only suggest it, or obscure the action with titles - that's another way of doing it. No sex. And try and keep the plot down, don't give anything away, if it's a thriller or whatever... a highly-plotted film. You have to identify your target audience, which will already have been identified, or the film wouldn't be being made... there are exceptions, but there's no point in selling a war film as a romance because you're not going to get the people in, and I cite *Hannover Street* (Hyams, 1979) as an example - maybe that was a romance masquerading as a war film, it doesn't matter - but genre stereotyping, which people and critics seem so anxious to avoid is the *sine qua non* of movie making - you can't avoid it, it shouldn't be avoided, and more to the point, it should be embraced.

And if you know what you're selling, if you know what you're making, then that's what you sell in the trailer. Now, I've kept that rather vague - if it's a western, I want to see cowboys; if it's a war film, I want to see explosions; if it's a romance, I want to see kissing - so there's no point in making a deliberately obtuse trailer. People do - Tarantino does. Tarantino now has a reputation, so he doesn't have to worry about it. But generally you've got the investors to protect and the trailer is a sales tool - you'll hear that time and time again, 'sales tool', when you talk to trailer

people - that's all it is, let's not get into art or fun fantasy or, you know, nostalgia, even - it's a sales tool.

KMJ: So you wouldn't regard any examples of trailer making as an art form? You mentioned the *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941) trailer earlier on, is that a sales tool or is that art?

TS: It sells the picture! Very much so, because you're introducing in the *Citizen Kane* trailer people the public have never seen before. It's the way Welles introduces them, he chooses snatched moments, particularly of Joseph Cotton, he intrigues you. Welles is the magician superb - even in trailer making, it's a unique trailer because he knows you don't know any of these people, not even him. So he shot - during the making of the film - them entering doors and dropping things, and that's the trailer. That's the exception.

Look, I don't like using the word art even in connection with commercial cinema, but I acknowledge that it is, of course. I spend a lot of my time persuading other people that it is as well. But when I'm working... my job is to sell the picture, let somebody else decide if it's art...

KMJ: You've been working on trailers since 1971...

TS: I've been doing them - well, I won't say between features... I like doing trailers very much, but I'm not an official trailer maker - they're the people who will have done hundreds of trailers, roughly one a week or more.

KMJ: But over that time, what do you think has changed in trailer making?

TS: The whole style. Trailers, in general, are much more sophisticated - I think probably the most... iconic trailer, that changed everything, was *Alien* (Scott, 1979). And from that, trailers realised they could be a little bit more intelligent, a little more subtle, maybe less star driven - you sometimes don't see the star until halfway, a third of the way, through the trailer... It varies, but I think there's less dependence on captions and voice-over, they tend to show you more of the actual scenes, which tend to be better integrated, not cut together, they tend to dissolve or wipe - a device I like very much...

Some trailers today I think are just too subtle for the public - for their product, because it is a product - and you see something and go, 'oh, that's very nice but I won't go and see it' and that's not what a trailer's all about. I like hard sell - I think hard sell is very necessary with a certain kind of film. But the kind of film that needs a hard sell doesn't have an audience any more - people don't go every week to the pictures, so trailers tend to be if not made by, certainly they tend now to involve advertising consultants and marketing people as opposed to the companies themselves. The same companies - MGM, Paramount, Universal, RKO, Warner Bros., Fox - they knew how to sell, they didn't have to have marketing people, they had marketing people on the lot - publicity people. And there was a formula - or certainly a format that was followed in trailer making - I think that's gone...

I think trailers now have more individuality - you can't tell a Columbia trailer from a Universal trailer anymore, which you always could in the past by the style of editing - and I think that's a concomitant loss with cinema in general. Purists, artists, I think perhaps prefer it - and it may be generational... but I think the key change was *Alien*, it can be clearly pinpointed to a large egg, and single letters coming up to form one word. After that, anything goes.

KMJ: Saying that, is there still a need for the watershed? Are trailers still built around that?

TS: If you don't have the biggest star in the world, who these days varies - a star used to last seven years, now they last about two and a half... then there is still the need for watershed. But watershed may be the appearance of the star - you could pretty well guarantee that a Clark Gable film would make a certain amount of money if it was advertised in a certain style... but today there's no guarantee that a Brad Pitt film will make money, there's no guarantee that a George Clooney film will make money... there's no guarantee that a Meryl Streep film will make money - you need to sell them individually and with a very, very different approach.

In the current case, a Robert Pattinson film will be sold to a very specific audience - the rest of the world doesn't even know he exists. So, in a trailer, you really are after that audience that is the rest of the world, you are selling to people who may never have heard of the film, may never had heard of the star, but who want to be entertained - or at least thought-provoked - because the audience has changed itself now... it doesn't apply of course to films that have won awards, you can have nobody in them and show that Oscar or BAFTA and suddenly *The Artist*

(Hazanavicius, 2011) or *Life is Beautiful* (Benigni, 1997) will make money, because people don't know who's in it. Paradoxically, *The Artist*, which has an excellent trailer, had massive walkouts throughout the States when they discovered it was in black-and-white, foreign, with no dialogue. So, the trailer has to sell that - because, of course, you can't tell from the trailer that it has no dialogue.

Trailer making is a very, very specific skill, I think, rather than an art... and it's a craft. It's hard to do. It looks easy - it should look easy - it should be easy, fast, pleasurable and over - watershed or not. And I think that still applies. I think today because trailers tend to be shown in batches or four or five of what's coming up, they tend to merge with the adverts themselves, because the techniques are the same...

I think it's still a very young craft. Whether it develops into an art, I have absolutely no idea.

KMJ: And on that note, thank you very much, Tony Sloman...

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