

What do Francis Ford Coppola, Mike Nichols, Ang Lee, Robert Duvall, Tim Robbins, John Sayles, and Edward Burns all have in common?

They directed films featuring the music editing of Pat Mullins, born in the Bronx, N.Y., raised in Ramsey, N.J., and now working as a documentary filmmaker and a senior lecturer in the Department of Communication at the University of Texas at El Paso.

The movies were Coppola's "The Cotton Club"; Nichols's "Heartburn," "Biloxi Blues," and "Working Girl"; Lee's "The Ice Storm" and "Ride with the Devil"; Duvall's "Assassination Tango"; Robbins's "Dead Man Walking" and "Bob Roberts"; Sayles's "Sunshine State," "Limbo," and "Men with Guns"; and Burns's "Sidewalks of New York" and "No Looking Back."

But even with 30 or so movies and a year of work on the

ABC-TV series "Young Indiana Jones" as a music editor, 57-year-old Pat Mullins is better known to followers of Irish traditional music as the producer, director, editor, co-camera operator, co-interviewer, and distributor of an outstanding 1993 documentary film, "From Shore to Shore." Nearly an

hour long, it focused on the vibrant Irish traditional music of New York City during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and among the musicians speaking and performing in the film were fiddlers Andy McGann, Paddy Reynolds, and Martin Wynne, melodeonist Tom Doherty, and music teacher and fiddler Maureen Glynn Connolly. All linchpins of New York's Irish traditional music scene, those five have passed away since the initial, videocassette release of the documentary, which received renewed interest from public and critics alike with the DVD reissue in 2006 that included 52 minutes of additional footage called "Retrospective Reels." (Note of disclosure: I'm interviewed in the latter.)

The son of a Cork City-born father, Denis, and a New York-born mother, Mary (nee Shanley), whose grandparents hailed from Galway and Leitrim, Pat Mullins fondly recalled the music he heard as a young boy in the house. "My family loved to sing," he said by phone from his own home in El Paso, "and at Sunday dinner we'd sing songs like 'Paddy McGinty's Goat' and American standards. It wasn't traditional, but there was Irish in there for sure."

In high school Pat showed an aptitude for fine arts. "I liked to paint and draw, and I started fooling around with making films with some friends," he said. "But I didn't think of film as a career until I got out of college."

After earning a B.A. in Fine Arts from Ramapo College, Pat had a brief stint as a commercial artist in New York and then spent two years with a production company in California. In 1980, Pat returned to New York to start freelancing as a music editor on feature films. One of the early movies he worked on was "Belizaire the Cajun," starring Armand Assante and featuring the authentic Cajun music of Michael Doucet from the band Beausoleil. "Doucet came up from Louisiana for our spotting session," Pat remembered. "It was a fun editing job, and the music was great." Convened near the end of an edited



Transplanted to Texas: New York City-born Pat Mullins.

## It's a long way from the Bronx to El Paso

### Documenting documentary filmmaker Pat Mullins

movie, a spotting session customarily includes the music editor, director, composer, and film editor, who discuss "what music cues there will be for certain frames or segments in the film," Pat explained. "I sometimes brought five or six music options for a segment, and I put them up against the film and auditioned them for the director. I also dealt directly with the composer about timings and music emphasizing a certain action or fitting a certain mood. On occasion I did some temp scoring, which is creating a temporary underscore with music that approximates what the final music may be. I really enjoyed the process, though it could get intense when I put in a lot of overtime."

Pat's own musical tastes evolved from Sunday dinner table sing-alongs to the recordings of Dylan, Donovan, and singer-guitarist Bert Jansch (of Pentangle fame). In 1981, while backpacking in Europe, Pat decided to visit Ireland, where he attended Fleadh Cheoil na

hEireann in Listowel, Kerry. "It was a major dose of Irish traditional music," he recalled, "and soon I was picking up on De Dannan records and checking out albums in Angela Carter's Irish bookshop in lower Manhattan. That's where I saw a poster for the 1987 Irish Arts Center's festival on Staten Island."

The festival was a watershed experience for Pat. "I sat there in amazement at the music and scene I was witnessing," he said. "I saw this strong relationship between musicians, and I thought it would be a great subject for a film documentary."

He began filming at the festival in 1988 and filmed there again in 1989. After incorporating other original footage and archival materials, Pat issued his first documentary, "From Shore to Shore: Irish Traditional Music in New York City," which has gained in poignancy and impact with the passing years.

His next documentary was even more personal: "Sleuthing Mary Shanley," a 24-minute film about the intriguing private and public life of his great-aunt (1896-

1989), who became the fourth woman in the history of the New York City Police Department to reach the rank of detective first grade. Appearing on camera was Pat's mother, Mary, whom he interviewed, and Pat's brother, Denis, contributed music to the film, which won the award for best documentary short at Long Island University's Big Mini-DV Festival in 2006.

The most recent documentary by Pat Mullins is also his most topical, "Bracero Stories." It is a bilingual, 56-minute film about a temporary, "guest worker" program in the U.S. that lasted from 1942 to 1964 and employed millions of Mexican immigrant laborers, called braceros. The documentary's pertinence to today's debate about immigration and a possible revival of a temporary or guest worker program is obvious.

"My dad was an immigrant from Ireland, and so was his father," Pat said, "so I came to the subject with my own family's history. But my job as a documentary filmmaker is to present evidence and different points of view, not to tell people what to think."

Archival materials, largely drawn from UTEP's own Bracero Oral History Project, and fresh interviews conducted with five former braceros create a fascinating documentary on a period of U.S. employer-labor relations mingled with tension, suffering, exploitation, greed, hope, perseverance, fulfillment, and even dignified gratitude. "Bracero Stories" has won awards for best social justice and audience documentary as well as for best cinematography at film festivals, and Pat is finalizing negotiations to have a slightly shorter version of the documentary broadcast nationally this fall on the PBS-TV program "Voices."

In the meantime, Pat Mullins will work on some backlogged editing projects for his own Cherry Lane Productions, named after a street in Ramsey, N.J., he loved as a boy. With his two master's degrees (one in communication from William Paterson University in N.J., the other in cinema studies from New York University), he continues to teach three or four courses each semester at UTEP, where he joined the faculty in 2002. His wife, Susan (nee Tollefson), is a former Maryknoll worker who now teaches at El Paso County Community College.

"Susan was already living in El Paso when I first moved here, but I didn't have a job in El Paso, so I commuted to New York for film work," Pat said. "After a while the freelance music editing jobs weren't coming as often, I was beginning to get tired, and I felt I needed a change. It was a radical move for me to come here, but right now I'm looking out my window at the mountains of Mexico across the border. The sun shines most days, I don't miss snow, and there's a slower pace of living. I miss the people I knew in New York, and I wish I could visit more often. But I really like teaching at UTEP, which has over 20,000 students, and I get enough time to pursue my own film work. I like crafting stories out of pieces of reality and shining a light on something overlooked or not given enough attention."

The DVD's of Pat Mullins's "From Shore to Shore" (it includes "Retrospective Reels"), "Sleuthing Mary Shanley," and "Bracero Stories" documentaries are available at [www.cherrylaneproductions.com](http://www.cherrylaneproductions.com) and Cherry Lane Productions, PMB 100, El Paso, TX 79968-9991. The e-mail address is [info@cherrylaneproductions.com](mailto:info@cherrylaneproductions.com). "From Shore to Shore" in its original, 57-minute release can be found online at [www.folkstreams.net](http://www.folkstreams.net).



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Texas  
The Irish Connection



Pat Mullins's three documentaries reflect his passion for research.