

# NORMAN C. ALLIN C.S.C.

*President, Canadian Society of Cinematographers*

*Norman C. Allin was born in 1926 at Thorne, a little town just outside of Doncaster, Yorkshire in England.*

*In 1942 he joined the Film Producers Guild at the Merton Park Studios near Wimbledon. He worked at various jobs there for ten years and then decided to emigrate to Canada.*

*When he arrived in 1952, he went to Crawley Films. Eight years later, Allin went on staff at the CBC and has been there ever since.*

*Allin was Director of Photography and operator on the Canadian feature, "The Reincarnate" which had a six-week run in Toronto last year.*

*Among the hundreds of shows, he has been involved with at the CBC, Allin worked on the Hatch's Mill and the Anthology series.*

*He is now Director of Photography on the Whiteoaks of Jalna series. Cinema Canada interviewed Allin in his office at the end of a day's shooting.*

**CINEMA CANADA:** You've just come off the set of Jalna, so we'll start with that. Are you satisfied with the rushes you saw earlier this afternoon?

**ALLIN:** No, I don't think any Director of Photography ever should be satisfied. I think when one is satisfied, then you've missed the target. No, I could always go back and re-do something, and improve on it. I think I can say I'm pleased with it but I won't say I'm satisfied.

**CINEMA CANADA:** If what we read in the newspapers is correct, this is the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the CBC?

**ALLIN:** It is, it is, as we have read in the newspapers, a two million dollar project. I'm not an accountant but it is the biggest thing we've ever tackled. I think it is my biggest assignment yet.

**CINEMA CANADA:** Does the big budget make any tangible differences to what is actually happening on the set?

**ALLIN:** It makes a difference to the point of view that you don't have to pinch. In other words, if I want three arcs on location, I can get three arcs on location providing it's justifiable, and I think they know me well enough to say he really needs those arcs. All the lamps are there at my beck and call, as they should be, because I am, using an old cliché, painting with light. And if I haven't got the light to paint with, I can't reproduce exactly what I think the director wants. I have to have all the lamps available—the ones that I want. I know what lamps will do. I know what the foot candles will be at what distance, and the effects the flags, snoots, barn doors, butterflies, and the hundred and one other things, will have on the set. I have all these things up my sleeve so I can light in such a way that the script is calling for. I am a perfectionist. I'm very fussy, I think the crews will tell you, I'm a very fussy man when it comes to placement of a light, it has to be exact, shaded off here, and taken off there, but I think the results are on the screen.

**CINEMA CANADA:** As DOP on Jalna, what is the size of your crew?

**ALLIN:** There are four electricians, and I also have an operator, a focus puller, clapper boy, and two grips. As far as my crew goes, they're doing a beautiful job. And if they do a good job, then I can do a good job. This job is the most important thing in my life and I believe the crew is the same. It has to be the best; it will be the best. Most people are giving one hundred per cent and I think this is why the series is going very, very well.

**CINEMA CANADA:** Have you had many difficulties or problems with Jalna that you have not encountered previously in your career?

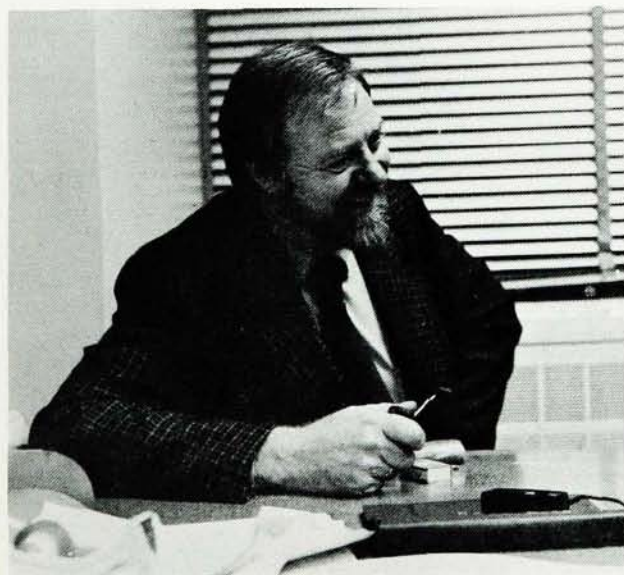


*"A film director and a DOP, they must work together in great unison at all times, at all working hours. And I think both must spend many hours, days if necessary, prior to even commencing a film, so that both can express their points of view, their feelings, and thoughts about handling the script."*

**ALLIN:** Yes, there're a couple of things. The two leads, Paul Harding and Kate Reid are both taking an old part and their normal age, I think Paul and Kate are somewhere, let's say early forties. Kate is playing a woman of about ninety, and I believe Paul Harding was 86 a few shows back. So, I'm finding it a challenge trying to portray them in their young stages and trying to get rid of any little wrinkle or crow lines they may have around the eyes or mouth. Then, doing the complete opposite when they're make up with latex, attempting to heighten the crease and age lines. The other interesting problem concerns the sets. The series is in the early 1920's and 1971, and the sets are exactly the same, even the wallpaper doesn't change from one era to the next. But it has to be lit in a different way—I'm making the early '20s in a semi-Rembrandt style where it has a vintage appearance. Night interiors in the house for example, are presumably only lit by oil lamps or candles while of course, now we have complete hydro lamps all over the place. So there is that challenge in mood for me to create something which can still be televised in a very, very low key in color for the twenties. Some people have asked me why the moonlight is so strong coming through the windows in the twenties. Well, if a candle, say, is six feet away from the window and can give a certain amount of light to a character's face, but the character can also have a shadow side fill for moonlight, to my way of thinking it has lowered the whole over-all intensity of both to the same level. Now obviously because of the ASA and the speed of the film, we have to imagine that illusion, and obviously we have to put more foot candles on than just the one candle.

**CINEMA CANADA:** Do you want to go into further technical details?

**ALLIN:** Well, on the moonlight I'm using a number 18 blue which is a little heavier than I've used in the past, but I feel it will give a more definite blueness on the television screen. I used to use a number 17 or even a Steel blue. I feel that the Steel blue itself was a little washed out by the time we saw it on our home receivers. On the exteriors at night time we're using open arcs, no filters on at all, and using them at a good 45 degree angle to give as much shadow side as we can. In the scripts, they often call for, as I say in 1925, where the characters are in bed and there's only one oil lamp. It is the only form of illumination. If I have only one light on the set,



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then, whether it's an oil lamp or candle lamp, that must be my only source of light. I don't falsify it other than raising the illumination level to recording it on film, but I make that be my light source. So, I have to take the bull by the horns, I feel it's right, I will know it is right when I see it on my own home set, and I'm sure I'm correct, I'm sure I'm right, otherwise I wouldn't do it. But this is my whole theory. I'm a perfectionist, I think. I think I am, I want to be. Especially on this treatment of *Jalna*.

**CINEMA CANADA:** What kind of film stocks are you using to capture these subtle light differences?

**ALLIN:** We're using Eastman Color Negative, yes, 16mm.

**CINEMA CANADA:** It has enough latitude to be very sensitive for the night sequences and still be excellent for shooting in bright sunlight?

**ALLIN:** I'm getting some terrific results. I am very pleased with the result, and I've had a few nice sayings from both the artists and from my producers telling me that is the effect they want.

**CINEMA CANADA:** What kind of camera are you using?

**ALLIN:** The Arri 16 in the blimp, and the occasional BL.

**CINEMA CANADA:** Don't you find with the 400 mag and the blimp, the camera becomes rather cumbersome?

**ALLIN:** Well you do on any blimp. Yes, it is a cumbersome cart, it really wasn't designed for this kind of work. It was an afterthought because the camera was only recently designed as a combat news camera for the Germans in the last World War. It's a marvellous camera, let's not kid ourselves, but it still isn't a quiet camera in a blimp, simply because the blimp was designed after instead of first.

**CINEMA CANADA:** Why do you use the Arri instead of a quieter camera such as the Eclair?

**ALLIN:** Well, personally I do not like the Eclair. In the Corporation, it is not the type of camera to be relied on with a lot of people using it—it is a very delicate piece of equipment. But the main reason for not liking the Eclair is basically that I can't do a safe scratch test on the film. Anytime film goes into a film gate, our biggest enemy in this business is dust as far as the camera is concerned, and with only a few frames visible, I can't do a good 20 foot scratch test. And, the Eclair really wasn't designed for studio practices. If we stay in 16mm, I wouldn't mind using the 16 Mitchell for the next thirteen episodes.

**CINEMA CANADA:** What kind of lenses are you using?

**ALLIN:** Schneider lenses. the Mitchell has the Cooke, and they are the superior lenses. I think that Cooke makes the finest lenses up to about the 75. The finest lenses in the world, really superb.

**CINEMA CANADA:** Could you give a brief synopsis of your background and experience up to date?

**ALLIN:** I started thirty years ago in 1942 at the Merton Park Studio in Wimbledon, just outside South London. I was offered a job in the studio as a tea boy. And I took this job of selling tea to the crew for about two weeks. Then, after that my production manager came to me and said: Look I've got an opening in the editing room, would you like to go in there? I spent a month there, another month in the sound department, and finally another month as an assistant-director. After that I went into the camera department for a month, and the manager called me into his office and told me that I should now have a very good idea of what's going on and what department would you like to be in? I said the camera department, and I haven't looked back yet. I've got an awful lot more to learn, too. I was there almost ten years. I had a tremendous Chief cameraman who trained me all the way through focus-pulling to operating on documentaries, to finally getting on second features. He eventually gave me my first opportunity to light my first half-hour show in black and white. Since then I've been a cameraman. I came to Canada basically because my chief relied on me so very strongly, I found that whenever he had a big film to make himself, he wanted me on it too. That meant I wasn't going



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to light another film so I decided that if I was to keep advancing I'd have to move from the company. As I was on my own, I thought of Canada. I'd read an awful lot and I had hopes that the feature industry was going to be much quicker than it is now, but I came over in '52 and started with Crawley films. We did a few documentaries and took some awards on some. Then we got into the RCMP series which, because I was the only one at Crawley's who had any 35 experience, they asked me if I would be operator and devote some of my time to training the assistants who'd never seen a 35. In those days you'd kind of make them on a shoestring, and this was a real shoestring, from that point of view. It was a case of training crews for the first couple of months while filming was in progress because you'd pick them up on the Monday morning shooting started. When that was over, I came to the CBC in '60. Since then I've done over three hundred half-hour shows, and more than one hundred hour long shows in my eleven years here. I was DOP on four out of the ten Hatch's Mill series. I thought the series was really going to go but it just didn't hit the public strong enough and it fell through unfortunately. Incidentally the sets, the exterior sets, are still up at Kleinburg, and that's nearly five years ago, so if anybody wants a complete village facade? Recently, I've been doing the Anthology series for Ron Weyman, the executive producer, and to bring you right up to date, I've been on Jalna since the first week in November.

**CINEMA CANADA:** Have you worked on any feature length film?

**ALLIN:** Yes, yes I have. I had one lucky break; I'm hoping for many more. But no, in 1970, I was shooting on Stage 7 in the Corporation and we'd just come to the end of the tape and the camera had to be re-loaded. Someone said to me that I was wanted on the phone. I went to the phone and I was asked if I wanted to make a feature film. I jumped in the air and said yes, but I'm committed to the CBC for 52 weeks a year. He said that I should try and get some time off, and to cut a long story short, the management came through and said yes. So I went to Kleinburg and shot the Reincarnate which I hear is making a lot of money. I didn't think it would go as long as it did, it held for 6 weeks at the Uptown Cinema here. I know one particular week, it was in 5 different movie houses in Toronto and I think that is fantastic for a Canadian feature. Before we even started shooting the Reincarnate, the blueprints

were given to me to see if they were going to be large enough to work with according to the script. I think I had a week and a half to operate, that is testing, picking every member of the crew that was to be directly concerned with me. It was great to be able to say to the painter that I want a particular shade of green or blue or whatever and knowing that it would be put there because I said so. We used the SPC Mitchell. I had a tremendous camera assistant. I operated myself. I asked them about an operator, and they said, "Who are you going to find better than you?". I thought that was a nice recommendation for me so I operated myself. It was really too much for me to operate as well on a feature because there's too much to watch for the final touch. It is a problem to be doing both things at once.

**CINEMA CANADA:** You said you'd like to work on more feature films, is there anything specific you'd choose?

**ALLIN:** Yes, I think it would have to be a dramatic story. A good script, yes. Something I can believe in my own self when I read the script to know that what I would try and do with it to try and light it. There'd have to be a discussion with the directors of course. A film director and a DOP, they must work together in great unison at all times, at all working hours. And I think both must spend many hours, days if necessary, prior to even commencing the film, so that both can express their points of view, their feelings, and thoughts about the handling of the script. I would love to make a film with about 95 per cent being night effect. I think it's the most creative of all the illusions one can give. Sure, daylight is interesting too, I realize this. But I think that the night effect, to use that horrific expression on film, adds mood and character. You are always there if you can't see behind, because there's dark and shadows, and one always has the illusion something is there.

**CINEMA CANADA:** A thriller or melodrama?

**ALLIN:** Yes, a really good thriller, yes, I mean a good thriller. I don't think it could be done on three hundred thousand dollars. I think my personal opinion is that if Canada really wants to go out and make films, and we really don't have to prove it to the world—we've made some good films here—but I feel the films have got to be in the three, four, five million dollar category. And really make something people are going to queue up six blocks every night to see. Not just a small budget because they really don't hold the great strength outside this country.

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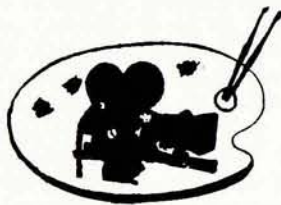
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