

## ARTS

## TELEVISION

## Dancing with a master director

Eva Marie Saint tells Euny Hong-Koral how Hitchcock helped her find her bearings

One of Alfred Hitchcock's most famous utterances is that actors should be treated like cattle.

But actress Eva Marie Saint, who played Eve in *North by Northwest*, recalls Hitchcock more as a dance choreographer than dictator.

Hitchcock eased Saint into the role of agent Eve Kendall by repeating the mantra: "Lower your voice, don't use your hands, always look directly into Cary Grant's eyes." With spells such as these, Hitchcock spoke Eve, indeed all his characters, into existence.

As Eve, Saint so successfully pulls off a steely stillness that all else seems to revolve around her.

Saint's most recent project was providing the narration for the documentary, *Destination Hitchcock*, about the making of *North by Northwest* (1959). (Turner Classic Movies. Sunday, September 10, at 8:30pm ET, followed by a screening of *North by Northwest* at 9:30pm ET.)

In the documentary, the film's original screenwriter, Ernest Lehman, describes a scene in which Saint and Cary Grant are kissing in a train cabin: "Hitchcock wanted them to turn [while they kissed], to create a sense of enclosure."

But upon close inspection, one notices that it is Grant who is festooned around her; Saint is the unmoved mover. "That [stillness] is perfect for the sexy spy lady, don't you think?" says Saint in a telephone interview.

Remembering the meticulousness with which Hitchcock set up the scene, she adds: "Hitch [focused on the] external; he didn't delve into the psychological motivations or relationships between characters."

Saint's training had been the opposite: she was a student of Lee Strasberg, though she is disdainful of some of the method



Eva Marie Saint with Cary Grant, left, in a scene from 'North by Northwest'

character's motivation?" Those are things you work on by yourself, you don't ask the director.

"Someone asked Hitch that once, and he said, 'Your motivation is your salary.'"

But, she admitted, her favourite scene in *Northwest* betrays her training. "It's the one in the forest, when I'm standing on one side of the frame and Cary's on the other, and I have my only chance to explain who I am.

"The movie wouldn't have been the same without that scene, but the production

Janet Leigh's Marion (*Psycho*, 1960), in her role as a red herring, or Kim Novak's ridiculously maudlin Madeleine (*Vertigo*, 1958).

Of Hitchcock's notorious fixation on the mysterious blonde, Saint conceded: "It must be something psychological, personal to him. That's so strange, because I remember that when I was little, I always thought the dark-haired ladies in movies were more mysterious.

"In *The Sandpiper* [1965],

documentaries about classic Hollywood films is a recent trend.

At the time, Hollywood's studio system considered such screenwriters to be expendable.

Lehman appears to have been the chief receptacle for Hitchcock's raw thoughts during the making of *Northwest*, and the screenwriter didn't seem to receive marching orders from Hitchcock.

Lehman says the director gave him bare-bones suggestions: "Hitch told me, 'I've always wanted to do a chase across Mount Rushmore.'" Then Lehman would bang out a scene at the keyboard.

One gets the impression from this documentary that it was the audiences, rather than the actors, whom Hitchcock regarded as cattle.

Lehman recalls the time Hitchcock confided in him: "We're not making a movie; we're constructing an organ. We press this chord, now the audience laughs. We press that chord, they gasp.

"Someday we won't have to make a movie. We'll just attach them to electrodes and play the various emotions for them to experience in the theatre."

Even if we as an audience are willing victims of Hitchcock's manipulation, we are still enabled; we

### Hitchcock eased Saint into her role with the mantra: 'Lower your voice, don't use your hands, always look into Cary Grant's eyes'

company wanted to cut it, and Hitchcock of course put his foot down."

Though Hitchcock usually got his way, Saint defies a common perception of him as a manufacturer of blonde porcelain dolls: "I didn't have a Pygmalion-type experience. I've met some of his other heroines, like Tippi Hedren, and it was like meeting different ex-wives of the same man and discovering that he was completely different with each one of us."

my character was married to Richard Burton and Liz Taylor takes him away from me. I jokingly said to [director] Vincent Minelli: 'I don't want to be the wife; I want to be the other woman who breaks up the marriage.' "He said, 'Blondes would never do that. It has to be a dark-haired lady.' Each director brings a different thing to the set."

For the documentary, Ernest Lehman gives us his own take on what Hitchcock brought to the set. Lehman's