

## KNOWING WHERE TO GO

Emeric had a simple plot outline in his head: “I have always wanted to make a film about a girl who wants to get to an island,” he told Michael. “At the end of the journey she is so near that she can see the people clearly on the island, but a storm stops her getting there, and by the time the storm has died down she no longer wants to go there, because her life has changed quite suddenly in the way girls’ lives do.”

“Why does she want to go to the island?” asked Michael.

Emeric smiled. “Let’s make the film and find out.”

Since making *The Edge of the World* in 1937 Michael had a passion for islands. He thought they would find just the place they needed on the west coast of Scotland. Erwin Hillier, Emeric and Michael spent a fortnight exploring locations and soaking up the atmosphere from Glasgow to Kinloch Moidart, living on a collection of Hungarian salamis, which Emeric kept in his briefcase. Their island of choice was Mull – beautiful, relatively accessible and close to the awesome whirlpool of Corryvreckan which Emeric had embroidered into his story.

As soon as they returned south, Emeric started work on the script. “It just burst out, you couldn’t hold it back,” he remembered. “I wrote the full script in four days...as with *Blimp* I felt very strongly about the idea.” In contrast to *A Canterbury Tale* the script was neatly, classically structured. The partners then met at Michael’s house in Bratton Fleming, and went through their usual process of collaboration, with Michael ransacking popular Scottish novels for Gaelic phrases (the final script suggested that subtitles would be used). The scripts were then typed up by Curtis and Page and bound in green card. The front page bore an epigraph from Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*:

It lies not in our power to love, or hate,  
For Will in us is over-ruled by fate.

It was Frankie, Michael’s wife, who came up with the film title, taken from an old Irish folk song:

I know where I’m going  
And I know who goes with me  
I know whom I love  
But the dear knows who I’ll marry.

*I Know Where I’m Going* (or *IKWIG*, as it became known) is the story of a headstrong young girl who knows exactly what she wants from life – or at any rate, thinks she knows. “A girl”, said Emeric, “who was brought up to become a

rather superior sort of being, and shoes standards were entirely different from the standards I was aiming at or people I liked were aiming at." The girl, Joan, has caught herself an immensely rich, but rather old, husband, in the shape of the industrialist Sir Robert Bellinger, who, in spite of the war, is planning a no-expense-spared wedding on the Highland hideaway island of Kiloran which he has rented. Joan travels from Manchester by train, boat and car to meet her fiancée, but when she reaches Port Erraig on Mull, from where she is to catch the boat to Kiloran, a storm blows up and prevents her crossing. For a week she has to wait, and while she waits, and despite her best efforts, she falls in love with Torquil, a young naval officer who tries to teach her the values of the island communities:

JOAN: People are very poor around here, I suppose?

TORQUIL: Not poor. They haven't got any money.

JOAN: Isn't that the same thing?

TORQUIL: Oh no, something quite different.

Torquil is the real laird of Kiloran and has leased the island to Sir Robert. "The clash of these two characters", said Emeric, "was something that interested me."

The more the girl fights against her passion, the worse it becomes. In a desperate last-ditch attempt to reach the island – "I'm not safe here, I'm on the brink of losing everything I've always wanted!" – she risks her own life and that of Torquil and the young ferryman, Kenny, trying to cross in the storm. The engine stalls, they drift closer and closer to the whirlpool of Corryvreckan, the external symbol for her internal maelstrom. They escape drowning by the skin of their teeth and return to the mainland. The following morning the storm has subsided and tranquillity reigns. The girl no longer wants to go to the island: she would rather stay with the poor laird, and learn the values of the islanders.

In common with *A Canterbury Tale*, the film has a tremendous sense of place and a sprinkling of mysticism. "There must be a curse," Emeric told Michael, "people will expect it." In a Chestertonian way, it is a curse that turns out to be a blessing ("He shall be chained to a woman for the rest of his days..." meaning he will fall in love and marry). "It reads like an old-fashioned message," recalled Emeric, "from Emeric Pressburger the Hungarian Jew who has come from Berlin to France and then to this country and he writes this. How does he dare?"

The values espoused in *I Know Where I'm Going* hardly seem to differ from those of the standard Hollywood romantic-comedy: love conquers all, and money isn't everything. But the love is not of the saccharine variety, it is passionate, physical, at times almost destructive. As for the anti-materialism, it can be seen as part of a nationwide disgust at the black-marketeers and war profiteers. Sir Robert Bellinger, it is insinuated, is one of these. Emeric's attitudes, although founded in an old-fashioned conservatism, coincided with those which were to sweep Attlee's socialist government to victory in the 1945 election, with its

programme of nationalization and super-tax for the rich. The 1945 general election, wrote Cyril Connolly in *Horizon*, “was not a vote about queues or housing, but a vote of censure on Munich and Spain and Abyssinia...talk of it s a vote against the religion of money and the millionaire hoodlums.”

James Mason, riding high on the success of the melodrama *The Man in Grey*, was publicised as Torquil MacNeil and Deborah Kerr as the headstrong Joan Webster. But again Kerr was unable to liberate herself from the MGM contract. Ironically, her replacement was the actress she herself had replaced on *Colonel Blimp*: Wendy Hiller. “I had been very choosy over my scripts. I had been spoilt having Bernard Shaw for my first two films. But when I read *I Know Where I’m Going* I immediately wanted to do it.” The actress, so used to working with Shaw, was particularly impressed by the psychological accuracy of the script: “He’d more than just got the physical side of the Hebrides, he’d got the psychological side of it, you know, in the most remarkable way. I never asked him how he managed to write that story, which might have been written by an indigenous writer, but certainly not by a scriptwriter, however well-educated and erudite, from Europe.”

Perhaps what made *I Know Where I’m Going* so easy for Emeric to write was a certain personal resonance in the characters. Since the birth of his daughter Angela the prospects for a young lady growing up in the post-war world must have been uppermost in his thoughts. But Joan Webster also owes a lot to Angela’s mother. Like her fictional alter ego, Wendy was stubborn, ambitious, sophisticated, materialist and beautiful. That cast Emeric in the role of Torquil who, despite his numerous disadvantages – his lack of classic good looks, the insecurity of his life and his foreignness – had “got the girl”.

Six weeks prior to shooting James Mason dropped out, moaning that he was too old to play boy scouts in the Western Isles. Roger Livesey, who had read the script and loved it, begged to replace him. When The Archers complained that, at almost 40, he was too old and too portly for the part, Livesey immediately lost 20lb and transformed his appearance. Michael and Emeric relented, despite the added complication that Livesey had a prior engagement, to appear in Peter Ustinov’s West End play, *Banbury Nose*, which would prevent him from travelling to Scotland for the exteriors. Michael contrived to blend long shots with a double and back projections so that it is almost impossible to tell that the actor never came within 500 miles of the Highlands. Hiller adored working with Livesey: “He was one of the rare actors who listens to you.” Together they were positively stunning. The combination of Livesey’s growly burr and Hiller’s voice, pulsating with repressed emotion, gives the film an incredible sense of passion.

On *IKWIG*, Emeric and Michael again disagreed over the casting of a secondary female lead. For the role of Catriona Mclean, Michael wanted to cast Pamela Brown – a woman with whom he was soon to have romantic connections. Primarily a stage actress, Brown was a favourite of Gielgud and Olivier – a

strange androgynous figure with a long neck and bulging, bovine eyes. Michael saw here as one of the most beautiful women in the world – Emeric, as one of the ugliest. In Michael’s opinion Emeric disliked brown not only because he thought her “hideously ugly” but because she was “hideously intelligent”. It is true that Emeric, in common with many Eastern Europeans of his generation, thought a woman should be a gorgeous object, seen and not heard – certainly not argumentative and opinionated like Brown. His daughter Angela felt that in some way she had disappointed her father because she was “too intelligent and not nearly beautiful enough”.

After some argument Michael – as was usual on matters of casting – prevailed. But in retrospect Emeric was correct to feel uneasy. Brown’s performance was marred by theatricality and a plummy voice a million miles from the Highlands. Moreover, during filming, Michael let his growing romance with the actress influence his direction. Emeric’s script insinuated that Catriona was in love with Torquil. (“When I realized that this was two love stories and not just one, the story practically wrote itself.”) Her love was a mystical, ancestral one, between her family and Torquil’s. Michael latched on to this and blinded by his own feelings for Pamela Brown, shot reel after reel of exteriors with her hunting on the mountain with her wolf hounds and added other bits here and there. Emeric would have none of it and ruthlessly excised the lot. It was an extreme example of the way the partners always worked. Emeric recalled: “When I am writing the script Michael always says, “Do we need that? ... Don’t you think we could get rid of that scene? Do we really need this dialogue?” And I really begin to resent him. Then he goes off and shoots and shoots and shoots and I have to say, “Michael, do we need that? Why don’t we pull out his bit, or join these two scenes together?” and he hates *me* for it – but that’s really why we work so well together.”

Shooting began on Mull in the autumn of 1944. The locals commiserated with them about the poor weather and couldn’t understand when The Archers explained that they *wanted* rain and fog. They were even more bemused when they learned that the unit had brought their own rain machine with them. “You won’t be needing that!” they laughed.

Emeric only visited Mull twice during shooting. Otherwise, he stayed in London to supervise Alfred Junge’s sets and check the rushes. Michael enjoyed roughing it in the great outdoors. As always he dressed for the part (he had a theatrical love of fancy dress) and wore a saffron kilt and fisherman’s jumper. Emeric, as usual, was his partner’s complement. Wendy Hiller remembers one of his infrequent visits to the location: “One day while we were on the Isle of Mull, Emeric appeared. We were all standing around waiting for the wind to blow the right way – of course, it never did! – and I remember Emeric standing dressed as I imagine he always dressed, impeccably, for the café life in Vienna, with a suit and tie and a black homburg hat, totally in appropriate but absolutely lovely! He hadn’t changed it for Mull, of course! And I remember him looking out, as we

were waiting for this weather, when the wind started to blow and all the grass on the sand dunes started to move – and he said softly, “That is what I want. That is what I know I want, that wind that blows up there” and I *knew* that in that wonderful way of a true artist he had the essence of those islands – he had caught it and he knew that that wind was the essence of it.”

In October, the crew returned to Denham for the interiors. A huge tank was constructed by Rank’s art department head, David Rawnsley, in which an imitation whirlpool was created, using a technique of jellied water learned from Cecil B. de Mille’s classic ‘parting of the waves’ in *The Ten Commandments*. Back projections shot by Erwin Hillier – “myself and the operator went out in a boat and almost got ourselves drowned in the whirlpool collecting that stuff!” – completed the illusion. It was the kind of technically challenging task which made the best technicians in the business want to work with The Archers.

The whirlpool accounted for a large proportion of the £40,000 spent by the art department. *I Know Where I’m Going* had a surprisingly large budget of £200,000 (£20,000 more than *Colonel Blimp*), and a final cost of some £30,000 more. The partners themselves were still on £15,000. The largest single expense was talent – a total of £50,000, a third of which represented Wendy Hiller’s fee.

Hillier did not find Michael n easy man to deal with, on or off the floor. There were disagreements and rows throughout production, which Emeric, forever the diplomat, was called upon to smooth out. Things reached a head in the last days of filming:

*“Michael took it for granted that when my contract was up I would be willing to go on working for several days over it. He didn’t even ask me, nobody did. It was just assumed. And he treated me so badly that I just stormed out of the studio – something I’ve never done since and hope I’ll never do again. I wept with rage and swore I would never return. About five days later in a large car came a small, compact Emeric Pressburger. He gave a note of apology from Michael which I tore up, and then he sat me down and we talked. He apologized for Michael, and said that they were absolutely stuck without me, would I please come back? And he was so calm and diplomatic that next morning there I was, on set, on time.”*

Emeric believed passionately in beginnings. “There is a right way and a wrong way to start every story,” he said. All The Archers films have startling openings: the mystery of the Marie Celeste plane in *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, the skyline of Heidelberg in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, the hawk transformed into a plane in *A Canterbury Tale*. The beginnings were like little films in themselves, which drew the audience into the story and gave them clues as to what was to come. These opening sequences never appeared in the script, but Emeric would work on them while Michael was shooting the body of the film.

*I Know Where I'm Going* is a perfect example. "Are you sure it won't empty the cinema?" said Michael when Emeric told him that they would start the film with a series of shots showing a girl growing up. In the first she would be a baby crawling determinedly across the floor, then a schoolgirl, then a working girl. Each sequence would incorporate one of the titles: on the side of a passing van, on a blackboard etc. The Archers liked to play with their audience, and the opening was often in a totally different register or genre from the rest of the film. In *A Matter of Life and Death* it would be a documentary introduction to a fantasy film; in *A Canterbury Tale* a romping historical introduction to a modern parable, and in *IKWIG*, the opening is like a kitsch commercial – in complete contrast to the values espoused by the film. It is yet another example of The Archers taking an ironic step back, of telling the audience: this is only a film!, before plunging them into the story.

*IKWIG* was a commercial hit. British film attendance was at its peak – a staggering 30 million seats were sold a week, and even an expensive film like *I Know Where I'm Going* could show a profit in the home market alone. The Rank Organisation, nervy after Gabriel Pascal's enormous flop with *Caesar and Cleopatra*, was pleased. So in general were the critics – though after the debacle of *A Canterbury Tale* they were on the look-out for dubious lapses in realism and unpleasant eccentricities. C. A. Lejeune objected to the opening and the playful dream sequence in the train, asking the film-makers to 'stick to the plot'. The *News Chronicle* found the story itself confused but charming: "It can be said that Powell and Pressburger don't know where they're going, but they're so madly enthusiastic about the trip that they sell you on it."

The finest compliment came a few years later. In 1947, while on a trip to Hollywood, Emeric visited his old friend Anatole Litvak at Paramount. Having lunch in the studio restaurant Emeric was introduced to the head of the script department. Paramount, he said, owned its very own print of *IKWIG*. Whenever his writers were stuck for inspiration, or needed a lesson in screenwriting, he ran them the film, as an example of the perfect screenplay. He had already screened it a dozen times.