

Walter Lassally (Cinematographer)

b.18/12/26

by [Jon Stubbs](#) — last modified Jul 30, 2008 11:28 AM

BIOGRAPHY A major figure in the British New Wave, Walter Lassally was born in Berlin, the son of an photographer of technical films. He arrived in Britain in 1939 as a refugee from Nazi Germany and spent his early career working at a photography studio, an industrial documentary company and as a clapper boy at Butcher's Film Service. He worked on documentaries for much of the 1950s and began a fruitful association as cinematographer with the Free Cinema directors Tony Richardson, Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz. He remains best known for his feature film work with Richardson, for whom he shot *A Taste of Honey* (1961), *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner* (1962) and *Tom Jones* (1963). But despite his association with British realist cinema, Lassally's career has been remarkably international in scope, as the title of his biography, *Itinerant Cameraman*, suggests. His first feature film as a cinematographer was the Greek production *A Girl in Black* (1956), directed by Mihalis Kakogiannis. Lassally worked with Kakogiannis on several other projects, including *Zorba the Greek* (1964), for which he won an Academy Award. In later years he continued to work on Greek projects, and shot three films for the Merchant Ivory company, notably the Indian-set *Heat and Dust* (1982). **SUMMARY** In this interview Lassally talks engagingly about the persecution of his family in Germany and their subsequent experiences in Britain as 'enemy aliens'. He provides a great deal of detail about his early career in the British film industry, particularly his work as a clapper boy for Butcher's Film Service and his parallel efforts as an amateur filmmaker. His observations about class hierarchies in postwar camera crews, as well as his experiences of Communist and union politics, are revealing and well told. However, this interview contains very little about his major films with the Free Cinema and New Wave movements, or his association with Richardson, Anderson and Reisz, presumably because this material is covered in his autobiography. The final section of the interview is rather digressive, although Lassally's thoughts on the growth of video and digital photography seem remarkably prescient.

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