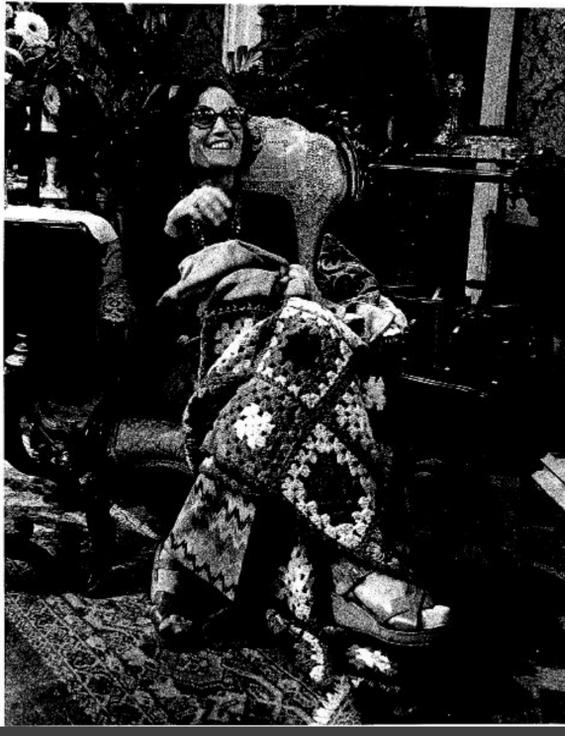


INDIECOLLECT



BARBARA SCHULTZ, 92, Pioneering Television & Film Producer Won Major Awards While Battling for Creative License



When this photo appeared in *People Magazine* in 1977, the caption read: Barbara Schultz visits the set of *The War Widow* that one nervous exec called “porno.”

A pioneering television and film producer when few women held such positions, Barbara Schultz blazed trails for many who followed, including me. She died at her Manhattan apartment on April 10, 2019, aged 92. She was born February 4, 1927, grew up in New Jersey, and graduated from Barnard College.

Barbara Schultz started her career during the original Golden Age of Television as an Assistant Story Editor at Hecht-Hill Lancaster, the company founded by Burt Lancaster. She was also Story Editor for the Herbert Brodtkin series “The Defenders,” starring E.G. Marshall, and for “The Trials of O’Brien,” starring Peter Falk. She spent five years as Story Editor at David Susskind’s company Talent Associates before moving into the producing ranks as Associate Producer of “Armstrong Circle Theater.”

A Pioneering Woman Producer at CBS

Breaking barriers at CBS Television, she was named Producer of its “You Are There” series, then Director of Program Development/East Coast, and finally Executive Producer of “CBS Playhouse,” winning her first Peabody Award. Her “CBS Playhouse” production of *The People Next Door* was nominated for an Emmy Award in 1968.

Launching the “Visions” Series and the Careers of Many

She won her second Peabody Award in 1978 for her work as Executive Producer of the PBS “Visions” series. The groundbreaking anthology was intended as a home-grown American riposte to the British dramas that were so popular on our television sets in the 1970s.

Barbara always sought to put the marginalized in the center of the screen. Under her watch, “Visions” writers, directors and producers were encouraged to tackle stories of racism, labor strife, illegal immigration, and homophobia.

She gave Maya Angelou her first opportunity to direct — two TV dramas, *Tapestry* and *Circles*, written by Alexis De Veaux.

Edward James Olmos made his screen debut in a movie she developed and financed — *Alambrista! (The Illegal)* by Robert M. Young, produced by Michael Hausman, which won the Camera d’Or Award at the 1978 Cannes Film Festival.

Her production of *The Gold Watch*, starring Mako and his East-West Players, with a script by Momoko Ito, dealt with the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII.

Another “Visions” production, *The War Widow*, directed by Paul Bogart, was a quiet drama set during WWI about two women (played by Pamela Bellwood and Frances Lee McCain) who fall in love. It generated controversy at the time.

Winning Awards and Challenging the System

As the creative force behind “Visions,” Barbara Schultz won two Christopher Awards and the Evelyn F. Burkey Memorial Award from the Writers Guild of America East. She was named an “Outstanding Woman in Film” by Women in Film in 1979, and was a Paley Center “She Made It!” honoree.

But her daring choices did not always please CPB and PBS executives or members of Congress. A 1977 story in *People Magazine* noted, “*her Visions — which treats tough topics from lynching to lesbianism and showcases young American playwrights (instead of dead Britons like other PBS series) — is in jeopardy. ‘We’re trying to do honest and outspoken things,’ says executive producer Barbara Schultz, ‘and if we pleased everybody every week, we’d be doing something wrong.’*”

After PBS pulled the plug on “Visions,” Barbara briefly directed for television, including episodes of *Family Ties*. But the industry was not very receptive to a woman director of her age and she moved back into production. Before retiring she served as Vice President for Television Movies & Miniseries at Warner Bros. Her last two years in the business were spent as Vice President of Ray Stark’s company, Rastar, where she got to work with writers whom she admired, among them Nora Ephron, Alvin Sargent and Carol Sobieski.

Barbara had an impact on dozens of talented men and women whom she encouraged and supported. They include Jeff Bleckner, Paul Bogart, Burt Brinckerhoff, Nell Cox, Gordon Davidson, Ed Folger, Michael Lindsay-Hogg, Stanton Kaye, David Loxton, Richard Pearce, Lloyd Richards and Robert M. Young. Among the actors who appeared in her productions were Mary Alice, Adam Arkin, Ned Beatty, Verna Bloom, Peter Bonerz, Eileen Brennan, James Broderick, Tyne Daly, Severn Darden, Brad Dourif, Charles Durning, Lou Gossett Jr., Philip Baker Hall, George Hearn, Mary Beth Hurt, Carol Kane, Robert Klein, Christopher Lloyd, Mako, Marian Seldes, Gale Sondergaard, Glyn Turman and many many more.

Preserving Barbara’s Legacy

I’m writing about Barbara because I was one of the legion of young talents she mentored. When she offered me the job of “Visions” Story Editor in 1974, I protested that I wasn’t qualified and that I was happy working for TV newsman Gabe Pressman. “That’s why I want you,” she replied. “I want someone who is interested in the real world and can help bring those concerns to our dramas. You can always go back to news if you don’t like fiction.” I bit.

We packed up our New York lives and opened shop in a trailer on the old KCET lot on Sunset Drive in Los Angeles. KCET promised to give us proper offices but never did. The whole series was produced out of that trailer, not even a double-wide.

Barbara Schultz not only taught me how to read scripts and prepare them for production, she changed the course of my life. She introduced me to the world of indie film — to the people whose work I went on to champion through New Front Films, the IFP, First Run Features, and now IndieCollect.

Some of the 33 “Visions” TV dramas and theatrical movies are archived at the UCLA Film and Television Archive and at the Academy Film Archive. With support from the Women’s Film Preservation Fund, four of the TV episodes were digitized and restored, including *The Gold Watch* and the two dramas directed by Maya Angelou. Much work remains in order to locate and restore the master elements for all the films and teleplays that Barbara commissioned and produced.

In recent years, Barbara and her contributions to our field were largely forgotten — but not by all. I’m so grateful to New Day filmmaker Josie Dean (*Joint Custody: A New Kind of Family*) who became Barbara’s close friend and supervised her care in her final years, and to Terry Lawler, Ann Levy, and Kirsten Larvick of the Women’s Preservation Fund for restoring some of Barbara’s work in cooperation with Chris Horak and Todd Wiener of the UCLA Archive.

Barbara Schultz defended the artistic freedom of those she championed and she paid the price. That’s why I admired and loved her so much. She called herself a maverick. I claim her as an independent. May her memory be an inspiration to us all, especially to younger women who will follow in her tracks and zoom beyond.

All my best,

Sandra Schulberg

PS: Contributions in Barbara’s memory can be made to the [Women’s Film Preservation Fund](#), [IndieCollect](#), or your local chapter of the ASPCA. (She loved animals!)



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