



STXFILMS

Jessica Chastain, who stars in the upcoming *Molly's Game*, champions gender equality in the film industry. She is nominated for a Golden Globe for the title role of Molly Bloom.

Women of Hollywood take control

Female actors and directors are breaking silence, records and celluloid ceilings in 2017

LINDA BARNARD
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

A female superhero movie packed multiplexes this year and brought in \$821.8 million internationally. The Patty Jenkins-directed *Wonder Woman* also marked the highest box-office take ever for a female-directed movie.

Just as important, says Heather Webb, executive director of Women in Film & Television Toronto, Jenkins has been signed to make the sequel.

“That doesn’t always happen with women directors when they’ve done well,” says Webb, citing director Catherine Hardwicke, who didn’t return to the franchise after making the blockbuster *Twilight*.

While this year has seen an uptick in strong female-director and female-protagonist movies, Webb points out that women are still lagging behind male filmmakers.

She cites San Diego State University’s annual *Celluloid Ceiling* report, which shows women made up only 7 per cent of directors of major films in 2016, down from 9 per cent the previous year.

“So, I’m always a little bit hesitant to put on the rose-coloured glasses,” Webb says.

Yet, Hollywood is showing encouraging signs of change, making more movies centred on female characters in compelling stories.

Take *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, embraced by critics and fans alike. The massive blockbuster turns on a young woman, Rey (Daisy Ridley), as she fulfils her Jedi destiny. Indeed, women are onscreen throughout *The Last Jedi* — from heroic fighter pilots and capable ship’s officers, to high-ranking commanders Gen. Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher) and vice-admiral Amilyn Holdo (Laura Dern).

Onscreen exchanges in *The Last Jedi* pass the feminist benchmarks of the Bechdel Test: Two women in a scene talking about something other than a man.

The trend continues as powerhouse studio Disney releases three female-directed films, each with a \$100-million-plus budget, in the next

A history of female trailblazers who made their mark in show business and beyond the screen



Mary Pickford was one of the founders of Oscar’s governing body.

Mary Pickford: There was far more to this Toronto-born early film star, dubbed “America’s sweetheart,” than her prolific work onscreen that made her Hollywood’s highest-paid star. She was a savvy businesswoman who made sure she got a big piece of the profits on her pictures. A studio head, she became a producer and was one of the founders of Oscar’s governing body, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. She also co-founded studio United Artists with Charlie Chaplin, D.W. Griffith and her husband, Douglas Fairbanks Sr.



Actress Hedy Lamaar co-invented “a secret communication system.”

Hedy Lamarr: The release of the documentary *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story* this year helped reveal the remarkable other side of the 1930s-1940s star called “the most beautiful woman in the world.” With her friend, composer George Antheil, Lamarr invented “a secret communication system” for the Allies during the Second World War to ensure the guidance system on torpedoes couldn’t be jammed. The random-switching frequency she helped create was not only successful, it led to technology used today in cell-phones, Bluetooth, GPS and Wi-Fi.



Callie Khouri wrote the screenplay for Oscar-winning *Thelma & Louise*.

Callie Khouri: Hollywood had no interest in making movies about women for a long time. Then Callie Khouri wrote the screenplay for *Thelma & Louise*. Starring Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis, it followed two women whose road trip turns into a literal getaway, and it became a monster hit. Khouri won an Oscar and Sarandon and Davis have gone on to be powerful forces for women in Hollywood. Davis, who established the Geena Davis Institute On Gender In Media, found *Thelma & Louise* didn’t spark the onscreen revolution many were hoping for.



Sherry Lansing became the first woman to head a major studio.

Sherry Lansing: An actress who switched from working in front of the camera to the business side of moviemaking, Sherry Lansing was dubbed the “most powerful woman in Hollywood.” The first woman to head a major studio, she was named president of 20th Century Fox in 1980 and later produced *Indecent Proposal*, *The Accused* and *Fatal Attraction*. She went on to become chair of Paramount Pictures’ Motion Picture Group from 1992 to 2005. While she was at the helm, the studio made Oscar-winning blockbusters *Forrest Gump*, *Braveheart* and *Titanic*.

two years: Ava DuVernay’s *A Wrinkle In Time*, based on Madeleine L’Engle’s young adult novel, opens in 2018; the following year, Anna Boden will co-direct *Captain Marvel* for Marvel Studios with Ryan Fleck; and *Room*’s Brie Larson takes the title role of superhero Carol Danvers/Captain Marvel.

“This is what I want to dedicate my life to,” Larson told me in a 2016 Toronto Star interview. “When the opportunity came to play this symbol of feminism, to play this empowering role for women on arguably the biggest platform we have right now — it’s undeniable that this is an important step and I want to be part of it.”

Award dominance

As awards season ramps up, there’s a good chance writer-director Greta Gerwig’s *Lady Bird* will be a significant part of the conversation. The Golden Globes may have snubbed Gerwig the Best Director category earlier this month, but the Toronto

Film Critics Association honoured her in this category.

Other female-directed, written and produced films that could show up in Oscar’s list include Canadian co-production *The Breadwinner*. The Golden Globe Best Animated Feature Film nominee is directed by Nora Twomey, with Angelina Jolie as an executive producer.

Jolie’s *First They Killed My Father*, Cambodia’s entry in the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar race, didn’t make the short list of nominees. But the drama, directed and produced by Jolie, has been nominated for a Golden Globe.

Dee Rees could get a Best Director nomination for *Mudbound*.

Sofia Coppola, who won the Best Director prize at Cannes in May (only the second woman to do so) could also be an Oscar contender for *The Beguiled*.

Meanwhile, cinematographers Rachel Morrison (*Mudbound*) and Charlotte Bruus Christensen (*Molly’s Game*) are being mentioned as

possible nominees. They would be the first women ever nominated for Oscars in this male-dominated category.

In addition to *Lady Bird*, potential Best Picture Oscar nominees *The Florida Project*, *The Post*, *The Shape of Water* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* centre on women’s stories.

The post-Weinstein era

If we are on the cusp of a female-centric era in the entertainment industry, it’s coming at a time when women are increasingly speaking out about sexual assault and harassment.

The list of boldface names adding their voices to those with complaints about producer Harvey Weinstein and others continues to grow. As does the list of men accused of victimizing women grew with the #MeToo social media campaign, which had such far-reaching impact, Time magazine named “The Silence Breakers” its 2017 Person of the Year.

Jessica Chastain, nominated for a Golden Globe for the title role of Molly Bloom in *Molly’s Game*, told the New York Times she was surprised to be among Best Actress nominees after she spoke out about Weinstein on Twitter.

The drama, which focuses on the real-life story of a woman who ran a legendary (and illegal) Hollywood high-stakes poker game, opens Dec. 25.

“As an actor, I have a lot of fear, thinking that if I speak my mind, or something that feels like it deviates from the norm as a woman, am I going to be made to disappear in my industry?” she says

Known for her outspokenness about gender inequality in film, Chastain says she worried she may be “destroying my career right now,” when she tweeted about Weinstein. “I was warned from the beginning; the stories were everywhere,” she says.

“To deny that is to create an environment for it to happen again.”



2

GOLDEN GLOBE® NOMINATIONS

INCLUDING

BEST ACTRESS

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

MOLLY'S GAME

IN SELECT THEATRES CHRISTMAS DAY



“JESSICA CHASTAIN AND IDRIS ELBA ARE POSITIVELY ELECTRIC.”
COLLIDER

“SERIOUS FUN.”
VANITY FAIR

 COARSE LANGUAGE, SUBSTANCE ABUSE

STX

 @OneFilmz

