

Dorothy Arzner

As a young woman Dorothy Arzner studied medicine but became interested in filmmaking after visiting a movie studio. She held jobs as a script typist, reader and script supervisor, film editor (for films including *BLOOD AND SAND* and *RUGGLES OF REDGAP*) and screenwriter. She directed her first film, *FASHIONS FOR WOMEN* in 1927 and was the first woman to join the newly formed Directors' Guild of America. Her commercially successful career spanned 25 years, ending in 1943 with *FIRST COMES COURAGE*. After her retirement, Arzner initiated the first filmmaking course at the Pasadena Playhouse, filmed numerous Pepsi Cola commercials at Joan Crawford's request and taught at UCLA's Film Department.

Although Arzner thought of herself as an ordinary working director rather than a pioneer, her status as one of the first women directors, and the only one at the time working within the Hollywood studio system,



The Wild Party, directed by Dorothy Arzner, was released by Paramount Famous Lasky Corp. during 1929 and featured Clara Bow and Fredric March.

has attracted feminist attention. By examining the critique of women as spectacle implicit in the *DANCE, GIRL, DANCE* (1940) and pointing out the self-determined, ambitious and independent women in films such as *WORKING GIRLS* (1932) and *CHRISTOPHER STRONG* (1933), critics have reassessed the content and structure of her films.

Although she was working within the constraints of the studio system, Arzner has stated that because she was not dependent on movies for her living, she was always willing to give a film to another director if she couldn't make it her way.

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Films

(this is only a partial list – consult the Archive Research and Study Center for further listings)

As Director:

Wild Party (1929). Paramount. Writer, E. Lloyd Sheldon. Study Copy: VA 11193 M.

Honor Among Lovers (1931). Paramount. Writers, Austin Parker and Gertrude Purcell.
Study Copy: VA 19652 M.

Working Girls (1931). Paramount. Writer, Zoe Akins. Study Copy: VA 17975 M.

Merrily We Go to Hell (1932). Paramount. Writer, Edwin Justus Mayer. Study Copy: VA 11275 M.

Christopher Strong (1933). RKO. Writer, Zoe Akins. Based on the novel by Gilbert Frankau.
Study Copy: VA 6117 M.

Craig's Wife (1936). Columbia. Writer, Mary C. McCall, Jr. Based on the play by George Kelly.
Study Copy: VA 7736 M.

Dance, Girl, Dance (1940). RKO. Writers, Frank Davis and Tess Slesinger. Study Copy: VA 4206 M.

As Editor:

Covered Wagon (1923). Famous Players-Lasky. Director, James Cruze. Scenario, Jack Cunningham.
Silent. Study Copy: VA 985 M.

Print Resources

(for more information consult the UCLA Arts Library)

Dorothy Arzner Papers. ca. 1920-1979. Arts Library Special Collections. Collection 175.

Johnston, Claire, ed. *The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Toward a Feminist Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 1975.

Mayne, Judith. *Directed by Dorothy Arzner*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Related Resources

The Arts Library Special Collections unit of the UCLA Libraries Collection holds various materials related to Dorothy Arzner in the Dorothy Arzner Papers collection. For more information, please contact Arts Library Special Collections: (310) 825-7253.