

## Women in Hollywood

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## NANCY MEYERS

She's a trailblazer who showed Hollywood that writing and directing about and for women was not only good moviemaking but good business. Here, the behind-the-scenes star gets the hot-seat treatment from her frequent muse Diane Keaton

PHOTOGRAPHED BY THOMAS WHITESIDE STYLED BY JOE ZEE

In a Hollywood dominated by superheroes, wizards, and werewolves, it sometimes seems as if the cinematic world of Nancy Meyers occupies an alternate dimension unto itself: one where a generation's greatest actresses have a sunlike gravitational pull and don't play just the mom or the queen; where women are desired more for their seasoned charm than their Pilates-toned figures; where the convulsive challenges of midlife and beyond—divorce, separation, parenthood, and more—are rendered with the same care studios expend on toy-robot invasions. Perhaps the most influential female filmmaker of her generation, Meyers began creating this universe as a trailblazing screenwriter. In 1980, her whip-smart script for *Private Benjamin*—cowritten by her ex-husband and longtime collaborator, Charles Shyer—reclaimed Goldie Hawn as a screwball feminist, secured Oscar nominations for both Hawn and Meyers, and foreshadowed the next generation of bold women's comedy. Her script for 1984's *Irreconcilable Differences* tackled divorce with uncommon empathy, and her 1998 directorial debut, *The Parent Trap*, launched a historic career: 2000's *What Women Want* earned \$374 million worldwide, making it the most successful film ever directed by a woman (until *Twilight* came along), and then came the extraordinary *Something's Gotta Give*, *The Holiday*, and *It's Complicated*. At the mercy of her longtime collaborator and friend Diane Keaton, Meyers discusses leading men, what it takes to actually get a film made, and the state of female-driven comedy.—L.H.

**DIANE KEATON:** I want to know everything about you. So let's start. Has any woman particularly influenced your career?

**NANCY MEYERS:** Every woman I've ever worked with has influenced me. I think about certain people when I'm writing, and I write things I imagine them doing. I have thought of you on many movies, as you know.

**DK:** You have?

**NM:** Many. Starting with *Baby Boom*. Well, before *Baby Boom*. But *Baby Boom* was when you finally said yes. I was a little scared of you.

**DK:** Afraid of me? That's so stupid.

**NM:** You were iconic even back then. And then *Father of the Bride*—

**DK:** You were very cute, by the way.

**NM:** Who?

**DK:** In those days, you were adorable, Nancy. Very, very attractive.

**NM:** And pregnant, I think, is what you're

trying to say.

**DK:** And so pregnant!

**NM:** And then *Something's Gotta Give*. I just wrote it for you, and honestly thinking of you led me to scenes I knew only you could do.

**DK:** What film, Nancy, are you most proud of?

**NM:** Our movie *Something's Gotta Give*. The story in that was very personal to me, and I thought I had the best possible actors.

**DK:** Do you wish you'd started directing earlier?

**NM:** You mean you think 48 was too old? Well, yes and no. Because I had two kids who were then small, I got to spend more time with them, and that was what I wanted to do. When I finally directed, [my daughter] Hallie was maybe 10. And I was making a kids' movie, *Parent Trap*, so she was with me everywhere. If I were looking at my résumé and interviewing myself, I'd ask, Why did you not direct a movie before you were 48? And I don't know the answer, except that it worked for me.

**DK:** Your first film, *Private Benjamin*, was turned down by many studios. Why? Goldie's hilarious!

**NM:** The resistance, I think, was partly because Goldie was playing a woman who was walking away from a conventional life. That script went out for sale in 1979. And in the last scene in the movie, she takes off her wedding ring and punches the guy at the altar. She lifts her veil above her head, throws it into the wind, and the wind blows it away. One person who ran one studio called her and said, "I like you, Goldie. Do not do this movie. You will have no career afterward."

**DK:** No! I loved it! Do you have a favorite joke from one of your movies?

**NM:** I don't think you should say that you think something you've written is good—but I like when Goldie gets her army uniform and asks, "Is green the only color that this comes in?"

**DK:** Yes! Is it getting better for women in Hollywood?

**NM:** Uh....

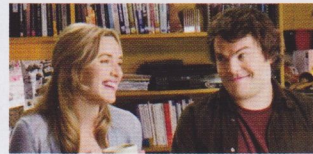
**DK:** A little? We've got the *Bridesmaids*, we've got Melissa McCarthy. I mean, that's pretty exciting, right?

**NM:** But movies have changed, Diane. Let's face it. The studios are looking for the biggest movies for the biggest audience. And it's hard to think of half the population as a niche market, but that's how the studios look at women. They want franchises. I think it would be very hard for our movies to get made today.

## Watch List



**It's Complicated, 2009** "Meryl (Streep) and Steve (Martin)'s characters had just smoked pot for the first time in 30 years. Watching them giggle that much was contagious."



**The Holiday, 2006** "I love how Jack (Black)'s improves toward the end of this scene made Kate (Winslet) really laugh. I think this moment made us root for them as a couple."



**Something's Gotta Give, 2003** "This was Diane's last scene to shoot, and when Jack (Nicholson) hugged her goodbye, I realized this moment in time was over and I started to cry."



**What Women Want, 2000** "There was a real chemistry on this movie that was unique—a great energy between us all that never diminished."



**Father of the Bride, 1991** "The best time I ever had on a movie set. Steve was wonderful, Marty (Short) gave an insanely funny performance, and Diane was the icing on the cake."



**Private Benjamin, 1980** "Sometimes it happens: the perfect actress at just the right time in a part that only she could play. My first movie. I turned 30 on the first day of shooting."

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