

# BRAKING FOR



Lifetime's executives and creative talent (from left) Tanya Lopez, senior vice-president of original movies; filmmaker Dianne Houston; Danielle Carrig, senior vice-president of publicity and public affairs; Sara Rea, executive producer and showrunner on *Project Runway*; director Janice Cooke; and (foreground) director Amy Barrett.

# BROADS

With its Broad Focus initiative, Lifetime proves it wants women running the shows. "Women don't need another internship," says the exec who started it all. "They need work."

BY LISA ROSEN



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# LIFETIME'S BROAD FOCUS INITIATIVE DOES JUST THAT: IT FOCUSES ON BROADS. THE NAME IS SO HILARIOUS — AND SO APT — IT COULD BE A LIFETIME MOVIE. INSTEAD, IT'S THE FOUNDATION FOR EVERYTHING THE NETWORK IS DOING TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF WOMEN BEHIND THE CAMERA ON ALL OF ITS PROGRAMS.

It all started with a gleam in Danielle Carrig's eye. As senior vice-president of publicity and public affairs, she saw that 2015's top five movies on ad-supported cable were all Lifetime movies — and all were directed by women (*Cleveland Abduction*, directed by Alex Kalymnios; *Whitney*, directed by Angela Bassett; *A Deadly Adoption*, directed by Rachel Goldenberg; *Perfect High*, directed by Vanessa Parise; and *With This Ring*, directed by Nzingha Stewart).

"I stepped back and said, 'If we're a network dedicated to women's content and women as an audience, we should be that gold standard for the in-

dustry in terms of hiring women to make the content as well,'" Carrig recalls.

She had long participated in conversations about how to bring more women into the industry, but the time had come to move beyond the talk. "The next iteration of what we do collectively has finally arrived. It's leveraging our positions of power and being unapologetic about it, and saying, 'Panels are great, workshops are great, but we actually can do more,' and start doing it." That meant real, paid jobs — not just the chance to shadow another director. "Women don't need another internship; they need work."

She broached the idea with Nancy Dubuc, CEO of Lifetime's parent company, A+E Networks. That's all it took, Carrig says. "When Nancy heard what the vision would be and how she could be a part of it, it was like, 'Absolutely, we need to do this. I'm going to pave the way and clear all the paths of any obstacles.'"

From there, the rest of Lifetime took up the mandate. "And then we had to name it. Believe me, that was a bigger conversation than the program itself," says Tanya Lopez, senior vice-president of original movies, who was instrumental in putting the plan into motion.

**FUNNY THING IS, LIFETIME WAS ALREADY DOING BETTER THAN THE REST OF THE INDUSTRY.** IN 2015, WHILE WOMEN MADE UP 12 PERCENT OF THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ON TELEVISION OVERALL, LIFETIME'S TOTAL WAS 53 PERCENT. BUT ITS STATS FOR SERIES WRITERS AND DIRECTORS WERE ABOUT AS DISMAL AS THOSE OF TV OVERALL. AFTER INSTITUTING BROAD FOCUS IN 2015, THOSE NUMBERS INCREASED RADICALLY. IN 2016, WOMEN MADE UP 59 PERCENT OF LIFETIME'S WRITERS, 55 PERCENT OF ITS DIRECTORS AND 60 PERCENT OF ITS PRODUCERS. (OVERALL INDUSTRY NUMBERS WEREN'T AVAILABLE AT PRESS TIME.)

Broad Focus takes a multi-dimensional approach. First, simply hire women. And not just the same few women who are on all the lists in town.

"Our programmers who run the shows — *Devious Maids*, for instance — they said, Look, when you hire this year's slate of directors, you

From left: Judy Reyes, Roselyn Sanchez, Ana Ortiz and Dania Ramirez of *Devious Maids*



STUART PETTICAN

can't just come to us with a group of thirty guys and two women, and say, 'Well, those women weren't right,'" Carrig explains. "You have to keep digging." Even worse, she says, programmers would call agencies around town with a project in search of a woman director, "And they would say, 'We don't have any right now.' That just can't happen."

That meant building a pipeline to access new talent. Lifetime set up a partnership with AFI's Directing Workshop for Women. DWW had already provided them with a ringer: Sarah Gertrude Shapiro, co-creator of Lifetime's game-changing series *UnREAL*, came out of DWW, as did her short film on which the series is based.

The ten graduates of 2015's DWW were all guaranteed a gig at Lifetime. "It's not like we're throwing a dart at a board," Carrig says. "There are all these women who are so hungry for the opportunity, and have been waiting in the wings, and have done their shadowing programs. Now it's time to flip the switch."

The DWW graduates went into the offices to present their reels and themselves. "We had the head of every channel, plus their programmers — I'm talking History, A+E, FYI, Lifetime — they were all in that room to hear what these women had to offer," Lopez says.

**AMY BARRETT WAS THE FIRST DWW GRADUATE TO LAND WORK AS A DIRECTOR THROUGH THE INITIATIVE. SHE WENT TO VANCOUVER TO DIRECT FOUR OF TEN WEBISODES OF *UnREAL THE AUDITIONS*. WHILE ON SET, SHE ALSO SHADOWED JANICE COOKE, WHO WAS DIRECTING THAT WEEK'S EPISODE OF *UnREAL*.**

"It was fantastic," Cooke says. "She's such a smart director; it was just a pleasure to share my information with her. Because of her education at AFI, she understood what I was talking about. She really got it."

Barrett also shot behind-the-scenes footage of Cooke at work, which aired as interstitials during breaks in that episode. The same was done for the other female directors during their programs.

"What's important to me is that you see their faces, you see them with cameras in their hands, you see them directing crews on set," Carrig says. For a historical comparison, consider the story behind *Hidden Figures*, the 2016 theatrical feature about African-American women who helped launch the U.S. into space. It's not enough to do the work — recognition is critical.

As is trust. Barrett says, "They weren't treating me like a student filmmaker whose hand needed to be held." She came home more excited than when she left. "I figured out that I could do it. I had the tools to make the fast choices, to work on the fly, and I discovered I loved directing just as much [when] doing it for hire. It didn't have to always be my material to bring that giddy feeling being behind the camera."

After finishing her assignments, Barrett didn't hear from Lifetime, which is the norm — "You do

your job, you move on," she says — so she was unprepared for a call from Tessa Blank, DWW's interim director, a few months later.

"Tessa told me that I should sit down, and then she choked back tears. I thought something terrible had happened," Barrett says. She braced herself. *UnREAL The Auditions* had been nominated for an Emmy. Not bad for her first job out of the gate. And now the gate is wide open.

## WHEN BABY CALLS THE SHOTS



Sara Rea and daughter Reese

**SARA REA LOVES A CHALLENGE.** She's been executive producer and showrunner of *Project Runway*, a twelve-time reality-competition Emmy nominee, since it moved to Lifetime in 2008. She added its offshoot, *Project Runway Junior*, to her workload in 2015.

But 2016 presented a timely twist: after years of trying to conceive, Rea became pregnant. Her due date was expected two weeks into shooting *Runway*'s fifteenth season. "I wasn't planning my pregnancy around dates," she says. "I didn't have that luxury."

The show takes place in New York; Rea lives in Los Angeles. It was — say it all together now in your best Tim Gunn voice — a make it work moment. And she did make it work, with the full support of show producer Bunim/Murray Productions and Lifetime.

"The first person I told was our tech guy," Rea says. He and his crew built a control room in her L.A. home, with monitors and a microphone to talk to the New York control room in real time. For remote shoots, the crew brought her along via iPad and Facetime. "They'd roll me around — I could look at the setup, and we'd talk through it."

The workarounds were in place not a moment too soon; Rea's daughter, Reese, decided to arrive early — two days into shooting. "It was flawless. I was able to have my baby, be a new mom and run the show from my living room, literally while nursing my child." She didn't even miss early conference calls, she says, "because at four in the morning in L.A., I was already up."

As fantastic as the technology was, the support she got from the crew, talent and execs was even greater.

"I felt it. No one blinked an eye and said, 'No, we're going to find someone else,' or, 'No, you're going to have to have your baby in New York,' or any of that. It was almost like, 'Let's lead with the baby and we'll figure out the show.'"

Rea's time at the network long predates *Broad Focus*, but she feels she's living the promise of the new initiative. "Lifetime is a very special place," Rea says. "It really has nurtured and continues to nurture women in the workplace, and everything that comes with that."

Including little Reese. —L.R.



Top: Shiri Appleby and Constance Zimmer of *UnReal*; bottom, from left: Kellee Stewart, Meagan Good, Keri Hilson and (back to camera) Kelly Rowland of *Love by the 10th Date*.

JAMES DITTMER; JACK ZEMAN

"I was just at Lifetime yesterday, pitching a true-crime movie," Barrett says. "I'm pitching something else to A+E. Doing the job and having it go well opened up doors and helped me make relationships with some wonderful people at the company."

**LIFETIME IS WORKING WITH A RANGE OF OTHER ENTITIES.** IT PROVIDES DISTRIBUTION FOR THE BENTONVILLE FILM FESTIVAL, IN ARKANSAS, WHICH PRESENTS WORK BY WOMEN AND DIVERSE VOICES. WHILE WALMART HANDLES THE DVD COMPONENT, AMC DOES THEATRICAL, AND LIFETIME AND STARZ ARE BFF'S TELEVISION OUTLETS.

Broad Focus recently shined its light on TEDWomen, too. Lifetime partnered with Chicken & Egg Pictures, a nonprofit that funds female documentarians, to create short films to introduce each theme during San Francisco's TEDWomen conference last October.

"The reason that was so innovative was that we put the money in the

hands of these filmmakers," Carrig says. "Nobody else would have done it. Corporations would just sponsor TED and get their logos on it. Again, what's important to me is that we put women to work." (See "When Baby Calls the Shots," page 35, for another example of Lifetime's support for a woman behind the camera.)

Carrig also finds inspiration in the commitment of female series creators who are putting women to work on other networks and outlets. Ava DuVernay has hired women directors exclusively for her OWN show *Queen Sugar*, while Jill Soloway employs women and LGBTQ directors for her Amazon series *Transparent*. Melissa Rosenberg, showrunner of Netflix's *Jessica Jones*, recently announced an all-female slate of directors for the show's second season. Meanwhile, at 20th Century Fox, Ryan Murphy has launched a foundation dubbed *Half*, with the goal of filling 50 percent of the director slots on his shows with women, people of color and members of the LGBTQ community.

"My dream would be to have a scripted series that's completely female-directed," Carrig says. In fact, Lifetime does have one coming up, the series *Mary Kills People*, but it's a bit of a cheat: Holly Dale directed all six episodes.

A veteran Canadian director, Dale has worked with Lifetime before, and she's always found supportive collaborators there. "Sometimes you go in and you're a shot collector. Here they want you to actually bring your creative stamp to the table," she says.

On *Mary Kills People*, she adds, "I had wonderful producers and creators — Amy Cameron, Tara Armstrong and Tassie Cameron were my collaborative partners, and all the execs were women. I guess it's because we all have a shorthand, and we understand each other as women, so it was a very joyful experience."

It might sound corny, Dale adds, "But it is a sisterhood. It's a different experience with a man — not that it's a bad one. He'll bring his sensibilities to interpreting something, and you'll bring yours. But there seems to be more of a coherent vision in terms of perspective when it's all women."

Tanya Lopez agrees. "We shot *Love by the 10th Date*, about a friendship between four women. It was written and directed by a woman, it was executive-produced by two women, it was line-produced by another woman. And I have to say, when I walked on the set in L.A., it was so cool. The set was very calm, very congenial. I'm not saying that can't happen on any other set. But there was a moment when we went, 'That is fantastic.'"

The recent *Beaches* remake was similarly assembled: written by a woman, executive-produced by two women and directed by a woman, it centers on two women and their intense friendship. "It leads to some great conversations on set," Lopez says.

*Beaches* director Allison Anders speaks just as highly about Lopez and the other execs she's worked with at Lifetime — who are all women. "My vision is empowered by Lifetime," she says. "That's an incredible thing. Even though I'm a director for hire, my vision is expected every step of the way."

Much has improved for women filmmakers since 1987, when Anders directed her first indie film, *Border Radio*, but some areas still lag. "We probably had women outnumbering men in every department, even the camera

# A FEW FOCUSED WOMEN

First-timers and veteran filmmakers are among those benefiting from Broad Focus.

AMONG HER MANY CREDITS, **NZINGHA STEWART** has directed two movies for Lifetime, including *With This Ring* (one of the top five cable movies of 2015) and the upcoming *Love by the 10th Date*, which she also wrote. "Broad Focus not only allowed me to direct two feature-length films, but to write them as well," at a time when almost no women are directing Hollywood features, Stewart explains. "This has opened the door to numerous opportunities and has created two strong calling cards in the industry by allowing me to show that I can direct feature-length films." She was also hired to direct an episode of *UnREAL*, "helping me to build my résumé in episodic television — in which the percentage of women directors to men is only slightly better than in features."

ACTRESS **NATASHA BASSETT**, who stars as Britney Spears in *Britney Ever After*, found working with the movie's all-female production team inspiring. "It was a really exciting environment on this film and so enjoyable to be around that much female energy," she notes. "As we embarked on the journey of telling a modern feminist story about such an incredible woman's rise to success, it was encouraging to feel as if that success was emulated through the team I was surrounded by." She adds that the experience has motivated her to create her own female-driven projects.

OSCAR-NOMINATED FILMMAKER **DIANNE HOUSTON** spent most of the last decade "unemployed and recovering from an unruly lap dance with cancer that hit me just as my two kids took their first steps," as she so eloquently puts it. "Nine years later — stronger, broke and cancer-free — coming back into the workforce was mercilessly hard as a writer, and nearly impossible as a director. I was a triple threat: female, black and over forty. Past credits and accomplishments were virtually useless in a recession-fueled industry that unapologetically gave preference to young, white and male."

Thanks to Broad Focus, she notes, "We are deemed desirable hires because of — rather than in spite of — who we are and what we bring to storytelling, to filmmaking, to the world." Houston is a 2016 Writers Guild Award nominee for Lifetime's *Surviving Compton: Dre, Suge & Michel'le*, and she's now directing the network's film *Searching for Neverland*.

ACTRESS **KYRA SEDGWICK** went to Lifetime to pitch a project as a producer. "As I sat in the meeting with Tanya [Lopez], she discussed Lifetime's commitment to hire female directors," Sedgwick recalls. "I had a project that I've been trying to get made for ten years, and in that very moment I realized I wanted to direct it myself!"

With Lifetime's encouragement, women had key jobs on Sedgwick's crew, including two coproducers, the screenwriter, first AD, costume designer and prop-master. "I gave a woman who had twenty-five years' experience as an art director, working exclusively for men, her first production designer job," she adds. "The movie is called *Story of a Girl*, so I felt compelled to hire people that connected to that experience and know how challenging it is to be a girl." —L.R.



department," she says, but it was still hard to find a female DP. "And then you go in to do your final mix, and it's all men. Why are there no women? Do women not have ears?" When coming in to shoot an existing show, she finds Los Angeles crews have more women, while New York and Vancouver are often fairly macho bastions, both in numbers and attitude.

**ANDERS'S EXPERIENCE POINTS TO YET ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE INITIATIVE. BROAD FOCUS ALSO AIMS TO IMPROVE THE NUMBER OF WOMEN IN BELOW-THE-LINE JOBS, LOPEZ SAYS.**

"What we've found is there needs to be a lot more growth in the DP and the second AD [jobs]. We're making headway in production designers. We hire female editors — that's getting easier, although it would be nice if there were more. The sound editors, we need to give more chances. It means taking a deep breath: okay, they've never done it before. Let's do it. Let's make sure they have ample time to prep. Let's make sure they're not being second-guessed in any way. That's when failure happens, because people have the idea that you're going to fail before you even start."

Carrig adds: "There's never going to be that perfect someone — at a certain point you have to take a chance." And then surround them with experienced crewmembers.

One way to guarantee that is not just to hire women, but to hire them again. "We used director Nzingha Stewart on a movie called *With This Ring*. Then she directed an episode of *UnREAL*, then she directed the movie *Love by the 10th Date*," Lopez says. "An opportunity for which I'm eternally grateful," Stewart replies. (See "A Few Focused Women," left, for more on Stewart and other Broad Focus participants.)

Cooke, the director Barrett shadowed, has been directing since 2000, "which wasn't that long ago, but it sure was a different climate," she says. "It's amazing to see where we're going now." She adds that, thanks to Lifetime's support, she's getting pitched superior shows. Her first TV

movie, the 2016 hit *Surviving Compton: Dre, Suge & Michel'le*, came about thanks to Broad Focus. Since then, she's been working nonstop. "This has helped my career tremendously. It's totally put me on a different level."

Broad Focus also reflects a change in the kind of programming Lifetime offers. Long known for its women-in-jeopardy scenarios, the network still offers everything from *Stalked by My Doctor* to *Stalked by My Mother*. But with scripted shows like *UnREAL*, the damsels in distress have started rescuing themselves. And with movies like *Deadly Adoption*, they're making fun of themselves as well.

It's not a coincidence that women created those titles. "This is what the research is saying more and more, too: hire women and diverse voices to make that content, and all of a sudden you get those shifts in what you're seeing on screen," Carrig says.

The mandate isn't limited to Lifetime. Dubuc is committed to transformation across all of A+E's channels. "For us, it became, okay — how can we continue to support these directors in multiple areas?" Lopez says. "That's what Broad Focus did: it made us much more hyper-focused and aware of what else we needed to get done."

The industry is in a state of upheaval, and everyone's looking for fresh voices. Lifetime is finding them. "I see it as the most rewarding and important thing, in terms of a legacy of what I can do in this industry," Carrig says. "To put the seeds out there, and see it's working." ☺