



## Hollywood: Her Story August 2019 ENewsletter Techniques Developed by Early Female Movie Directors

Early women directors Alice Guy-Blaché, Lois Weber and Dorothy Arzner developed significant techniques that are used in filmmaking today. Let's learn about these remarkable women in this month's ENewsletter and their contributions to the movies.



The first female movie director, **Alice Guy-Blaché** made her first film, *The Cabbage Fairy (The Birth of Infants)* in 1896. She developed narrative filmmaking, experimented with sound and employed the first special effects. Her innovations included running films in reverse, films slowed down or accelerated, stops, double exposures, and fadeouts. She became the first woman to run her own studio in 1910 – Solax Studios. She is believed to have made more than 1,000 films, the longest of which was 30 minutes. Guy-Blaché also served as producer, writer and cinematographer. A documentary about her life and accomplishments was released in 2019 titled *Be Natural*. She said, "There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man, and there is no reason why she cannot completely master every technicality of the art."



The most important female director of silent films, as well as the first American female director, was **Lois Weber**. She was the second person, the first being Alice Guy-Blaché, to experiment with synching sound to film action. Like Guy-Blaché, Weber had her own production company and was the first woman to direct a full-length feature film in the U.S. In 1916, she was the highest-paid director in the world. Weber was the first and only woman asked to become a member of the Motion Picture Directors Association (the precursor to the Directors Guild of America). She pioneered the use of the split-screen technique in her 1913 film *Suspense*. For *The Blot*, Weber used a special lighting rig and extreme close-ups.



One of the few female directors working during the 1930s in Hollywood, **Dorothy Arzner** was also a producer and editor. She was the first woman given a screen credit as an editor and the first woman to join the Directors Guild of America. Arzner invented the boom microphone when she had her crew attach a microphone to a fishing rod, although she did not file for a patent. When asked about the lack of women directors in Hollywood, she said "I don't honestly know. Maybe producers felt safe with men; they could go to a bar and exchange ideas more freely . . . Today, of course, even the stars are all men. When men do put women in pictures, they make them so darned sappy, weeping all over the place, that it's disgusting."

Women in front of and behind the camera make the movies that we all welcome into our hearts and homes. Women across all the areas of movie-making from actress to animator, editor to stuntwoman, costume designer to screenwriter, producer to director have contributed to the success of the movie industry since its founding in the 1890s. Help us celebrate these women who are written into movie history in *Hollywood: Her Story*.

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