

## Hollywood: Her Story October 2021 ENewsletter Biopics

In 2021, biopics – movies that dramatize the stories of real people– were released for Aretha Franklin (*Respect*) and Billie Holiday (*The United States vs. Billie Holiday*). *Spencer*, based on the life of Princess Diana, is playing at film festivals in 2021 – including at the Denver Film Festival ([www.denverfilm.org](http://www.denverfilm.org)). As with other films, women fulfill many roles required for movie production. Let's learn how women who are featured in our book *Hollywood: Her Story*, have contributed to some of the biopics about women..

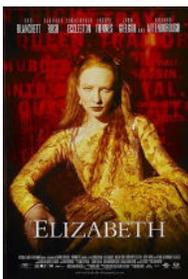


The 1963 eponymous epic movie *Cleopatra* starred **Elizabeth Taylor**, who has been named one of the greatest female screen legends by the American Film Institute. Fascinatingly, the writing credits for the film include Greek and Roman historians Plutarch, Seutonius and Appian. Legendary costume designers **Irene Sharaff** and **René** shared the Best Costume Design Oscar with a male colleague, one of the four Oscars that the movie won. René began her movie career as a set designer before moving into costume design. Over her career, she was nominated for five Oscars – from 1952 to 1979. She designed costumes for Disneyland and was a founder and president of the Costume Designers Guild. **Dorothy Spencer** received a nomination for best film editing for *Cleopatra*. Spencer began her career as a “cutter” in 1929 and received four editing Oscar nominations over her career. She said “Besides

patience, I think you have to be dedicated to become a film editor. That’s always been more important to me than anything else. I guess my whole life has been made up of wanting to do the best I could. I enjoy editing, and I think that’s necessary, because editing is not a watching-the-clock job. I’ve been on pictures where I never even knew it was lunchtime, or time to go home. You get so involved in what you’re doing, in the challenge of creating – because I think cutting is very creative.”



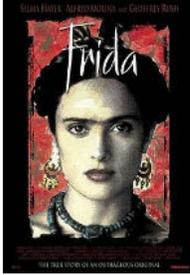
Fanny Brice is the subject of the 1968 movie *Funny Girl* starring **Barbra Streisand** in her film debut. Streisand won a Best Actress Oscar for her role as Brice in costumes designed by **Irene Sharaff**. **Isobel Lennart** wrote the stage play for the Broadway musical version of *Funny Girl* and then adapted that stage play for the movie version. She wrote her first screenplay in 1942 for the movie *The Affairs of Martha* and received two writing Oscar nominations over the course of her career – for *Love Me or Leave* (1956) and *The Sundowners* (1961). Actress and voice actress **Mae Questel** has a bit part in the movie, but is most well-known for voicing Betty Boop and Olive Oyl starting in 1931. *Funny Girl* has been preserved in the National Film Registry at the Library of Congress.



*Elizabeth* is a 1998 biopic of Queen Elizabeth I. **Cate Blanchett** was nominated for the Best Actress Oscar for playing the queen. Blanchett won acting Oscars for *The Aviator* and *Blue Jasmine*. Makeup artist **Jenny Shircore** secured her first Best Makeup Oscar nomination for the movie. Her subsequent nominations (both shared) are for *The Young Victoria* and *Mary Queen of Scots*. A costume designer for more than twenty-five years, **Alexandra Byrne** has received six Best Costume Designer nominations, including one for *Elizabeth*, and won in 2008 for *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*. For the past ten years, she has designed many of the costumes for Marvel movies including *Thor*, *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *The Avengers*. A member of the American Cinema Editors and considered one of the leading film editors in the world, **Jill Bilcock** did the film editing for *Elizabeth* and was nominated in 2002 for the Best

Film Editing Oscar for *Moulin Rouge!*

Director, producer and writer **Julie Taymor** was nominated for the 2003 Best Music,



Original Song Oscar for “Burn it Blue”, for which she wrote the lyrics, from the movie *Frida*, a biopic of Frida Kahlo. *Frida*, which Taymor directed, won two Oscars and had four additional Oscar nominations. Taymor has worked in theater, film and opera and is best known for her stage adaptation of *Lion King*. **Beatrice De Alba** shared the Best Makeup Oscar for her work on *Frida*. The film’s editor, **Françoise Bonnot**, began editing Taymor’s films in 1997. She won the Best Film Editing Oscar in 1970 for *Z*.



The 2016 movie *Hidden Figures* tells the stories of three African-American women who worked for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration as mathematicians and engineers and contributed to getting men into space. **Octavia Spencer** was nominated for Best Supporting Actress for her role in the movie. That nomination made her the first African-American actress to be nominated for an Academy Award after winning one (Best Supporting Actress, 2012, *The Help*). **Taraji P. Henson**, who had the leading role in *Hidden Figures*, was nominated for Best Supporting Actress in 2009 for *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Four-time nominated producer **Donna Gigliotti**, including the Best Picture nomination for *Hidden Figures*, won the 1999 Best Picture Oscar for *Shakespeare in Love*.



The 2021 Aretha Franklin biopic *Respect* stars **Jennifer Hudson** as Aretha Franklin at Ms. Franklin’s request. Hudson won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar in 2007 for *Dreamgirls*. **Callie Khouri** and **Tracey Scott Wilson** wrote the screenplay. Khouri is a writer, director and producer who won the Best Writing, Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen Oscar in 1992 for *Thelma & Louise* which she co-produced. Actress, singer and songwriter **Mary J. Blige** had a small role in *Respect*. Blige was nominated for two Oscars in 2018; one in acting and one for Best Music, Original Song, both for the movie *Mudbound*. She was the first woman to receive acting and music Oscar nominations in the same year. Blige’s acting nomination made **Dee Rees** the first African-American woman to direct a movie for which an actor or actress is nominated for an Academy Award.

A couple of other biopics that deserve a quick mention include the eponymous 2000 movie *Erin Brockovich* for which **Julia Roberts** won the Best Actress Oscar and **Susannah Grant** was nominated for Best Screenplay. *The Iron Lady* (2011), about Prime Minister of England Margaret Thatcher, garnered **Meryl Streep** the Best Actress Oscar, her third win..

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 moviemaking 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*.

Jill S. Tietjen and Barbara Bridges

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