



Hollywood: Her Story September 2023 ENewsletter \$1 Billion at the Box Office

It happened again in 2023—a U.S. feature film directed by a woman reached one billion dollars in box office sales. That film was *Barbie* and its director was Greta Gerwig. The first time was in 2013; the movie was *Frozen* and the co-director was Jennifer Lee. The path to these accomplishments was paved by many others including Penny Marshall, Penelope Spheeris, and Patty Jenkins. Do you know what the previous blockbusters were? Never fear, we will tell you.



In 1988, **Penny Marshall** became the first woman to direct a film that earned more than \$100 million. That movie was *Big*. She did it again in 1992 with *aLeague of Their Own*. An actress, director, and producer, Marshall was known for her role as Laverne on the television series *Laverne & Shirley* before her filmmaking successes. The first official guest on *The Simpsons*, Marshall was encouraged by her brother Garry Marshall to think about directing. She did that for four episodes of *Laverne & Shirley* and other television shows before working on films as a director and sometimes as the executive producer as well. The 1990 movie *Awakenings* which she directed was nominated for three Academy Awards, including Best Picture.



Penelope Spheeris also scored more than \$100 million in box office sales in 1992. Her movie was *Wayne's World*. A screenwriter, director, and producer, Spheeris began her film career by producing shorts for comedian Albert Brooks. She produced documentaries as well, several about the music scene. The music video work for Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*, which she directed and which appeared in *Wayne's World*, was nominated for a Grammy. Several of her films are preserved in the Academy Film Archive.



Jennifer Lee, a screenwriter and film director, became the first female whose feature film earned more than \$1 billion in gross box office revenue with the release of *Frozen* in 2013. Lee, co-director of the film, won an Oscar for Best Animated Feature. She was also the writer and co-director of *Frozen II*. Lee has an undergraduate degree in English and an MFA from Columbia University. She worked as a graphic artist before being asked by a former Columbia classmate to work at Disney Animation on *Wreck-It Ralph*. That eight-week gig turned into a permanent job—Lee currently serves as chief creative officer of Walt Disney Animation Studios. Other films in which she has been involved include *Moana*, *Zootopia*, and *A Wrinkle in Time*.

In 2017, **Patty Jenkins** directed *Wonder Woman* which became the top-grossing superhero origin movie of all time. Her budget for the movie was \$149 million about which she said, "I still have 20% too little money and 20% too little time to do what I'm trying to do." Addressing the disparity in studios funding movies by and about women, Jenkins said, "Women's movies have been more financially sound and



bigger moneymakers across the board. That's the conundrum in this business – are you guys about money, or are you not?" Jenkins has received an Emmy nomination for her work, as well as a Directors Guild of America award for Best Directing in a Drama Series. *Monster* (2003) was the first feature film she directed.



And now **Greta Gerwig** has more than \$1 billion in box office sales with *Barbie* in 2023. She is the first solo female director to reach the \$1 billion mark. A screenwriter, director, and producer, her 2017 movie *Lady Bird* was nominated for five Oscars, including two nominations for Gerwig: Best Director and Best Original Screenplay. *Little Women*, her 2019 movie, won the Oscar for Best Costume Design and was nominated for four additional Oscars, including a Best Adapted Screenplay nomination for Gerwig. She said, "In terms of my own future, I definitely want the skill set to be able to tell stories of different sizes. I want to be able to make tiny movies, big movies, and everything in between. It just takes so long to make any given one. That's the only thing I feel limited by. You only get to make so many."

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*.

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