

American MASTERS

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press information



AMERICAN MASTERS
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Producer/Filmmaker's Q&A

THE BROTHERS WARNER An *AMERICAN MASTERS* Presentation

Cass Warner founded Warner Sisters to forward the legacy of her grandfather, Harry Warner, founder and president of Warner Bros. studio. The filmmaker discusses her latest project based on her book of the same title, **THE BROTHERS WARNER**. This *AMERICAN MASTERS* presentation premieres Thursday, September 25 on PBS (check local listings).

Q: What motivated you to make this film?

A: Courage and caring. Being willing to cause something and going ahead to achieve what one has decided to do against any and all odds to me is “courage.” The close connection and admiration I had for my grandfather motivated me to study these qualities he greatly demonstrated. Other driving forces had to do with understanding the depth of the promise I made the last time I saw him; my fascination with our family business and Hollywood history – the brothers’ chutzpah, their relationship, their strengths and weaknesses and my wish to heal old family wounds. Maybe most importantly, the realization that along with power or good fortune comes responsibility, which to me is “caring.” Plus it’s a tremendous pleasure to be carrying forward the idea that film and media can educate, and enlighten while entertaining. (The brothers’ original motto for Warner Bros. films.)

Q: What would your grandfather have thought of today's Hollywood?

A: He would be thrilled at the number of people reached with this medium as well as the new technologies that moving images are being used for, but I’m sure he’s turning in his grave at the cost of making studio pictures today.

Q: What in your mind makes *THE BROTHERS WARNERS* an *AMERICAN MASTERS*?

A: There’s no doubt in my mind that the best television biographies have been done by Susan Lacy and *AMERICAN MASTERS*. To be able to celebrate my family’s role in the shaping of America’s and the world’s culture as well as their bravery in gambling everything on the new sound technology and their artistic integrity in making the first socially conscious films is a huge honor.

Q: Any unexpected revelations as you were making this film?

A: I didn’t know what to expect when I began my journey of discovery thirty years ago. To understand the qualities and characteristics that drive pioneers and big dreamers and how power is used or misused was truly revelatory. Never giving up on one’s goal despite the challenges but rather using barriers as an incentive to take the next step toward one’s objective is something that I will carry with me forever and would like to inspire in others with my creative endeavors.

Q: Does the Warner name help or hinder you in your filmmaking career?

A: Good question. As far as raising money as an independent producer, I’d have to say it’s been a

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hindrance as people think I'm an heiress and should have my own funds to make my films. On the other hand, people take my calls because of the name. Ultimately, it's being able to show what I can do as a filmmaker that will make my career. I feel I've earned my "Warner" stripes with **THE BROTHERS WARNER**.

Q: What do you want viewers to take away from this film?

A: I'd like viewers to be glad they took an hour off to be entertained and inspired by the brothers' story. It'd be great if it acted as encouragement to make their dreams a reality despite all odds – or as Norman Lear said, "*Tuchis offen tish*" – put your ass on the table. I'd like to think that there are enough universals in the film that remind others that family is important as is one's daily actions creating a better world.

Q: Were you involved in *You Must Remember This: The Warner Bros. Story*?

A: Yes. I am delighted that Brian Jamieson, the former head of Warner Home Video, and Brad Ball, the head of marketing at Warner Bros., liked the idea of doing something for the studio's 85th anniversary year and that it turned into a series which shows the history of the studio and their films. Fittingly, Warner Sisters earned our first company credit on this and I have a Consulting Producer credit.

Q: What do you think about all of the attention being given to the studio?

A: I think it's wonderful! I have tremendous respect for Barry Meyer, the Chairman and CEO of the company, and greatly appreciated him acknowledging my film with the following endorsement:

"THE BROTHERS WARNER is a well-made, fascinating documentary. Cass has not only honored her grandfather's legacy with this work, she's also paid homage to one of the guiding principles of the four Warner brothers who founded the studio by producing a film that will educate, entertain and enlighten audiences."

I'm delighted that I could assist in bringing attention to Warner Bros. studio and the heritage we share.

Q: What is your favorite Warner Bros. film?

A: Oh dear, choosing is difficult for me as there are many, but *Meet John Doe*, made in 1941 and directed by Frank Capra with Gary Cooper, is right at the top of the list along with my friend Howard Koch's *Casablanca*. (I've had the great fortune of studying screenwriting with Howard and the tremendous honor of currently creating a library of all Howard's unproduced screenplays, novels and plays.)

Q: What is your fondest memory of being on the Warner Bros. lot?

A: Eating in the Green Room (the private dining room) with my father, writer/producer Milton Sperling (Academy Award nominee for *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*), and visiting my grandfather at work as well as watching the magic of movie-making and the creative cooperation and teamwork it takes. Specifically, I'd have to say the time Clint Walker of the *Cheyenne* TV show picked me up and gave me a hug for my 12th birthday.

Q: Do you keep in contact with Jack Warner's side of the family?

A: Absolutely. One of the purposes of the film is to bring us all closer together as a family and forgive things that happened in the past.

Q: Among the films your grandfather made, which are your favorites and why?

A: I'm sure you're not referring to what's on IMDB: *The Lost City* (1920) (producer) ... a.k.a. *The Lost City of the African Jungle*; and *My Four Years in Germany* (1918) (producer). Although *My Four Years in Germany* launched them.

The Classics of the Screen should be added to this list. Being that he had to work to help put food on the table rather than go to school, he took great pleasure in having the studio produce films from classic books and plays and using film as an educational tool and a way to understand our fellow man better.

The films the studio made were often chosen by great producers like Darryl F. Zanuck, Hal Wallis, great uncle Jack and those in the story department who chose human interest stories.

Q: What stories would've you liked to share about your grandfather but aren't included in the film?

A: I suppose more personal details and anecdotes about him and his activities. I'm putting together a picture book with his quotes and speeches so I get to cover a lot of what I had to leave out.

Q: What kind of films do you think your grandfather would be making today if he were alive?

A: The films that Participant Media are making – films that entertain but also raise awareness about important social issues, educating audiences and inspiring them to take action.

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