



**WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA
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Girlfriends

One of the key unsung films of ‘second wave’ 70s feminism, Claudia Weill’s spare, funny and vividly authentic study of Manhattan best friends severed by a sudden marriage, was a breath of indie fresh air in a decade of backslapping buddy movies. As struggling photographer Susan (a thin-skinned Melanie Mayron) tries to swap bar mitzvah portraits for a Soho art show, and her BFF Anne (Anita Skinner) finds herself mired in motherhood, Weill tracks them with the cool, Cassavetian realism she acquired as a documentary maker.

Despite its sharp, lightly satirical snapshot of a scruffy, smoky, broke-ass artists’ New York subculture that’s now extinct, *Girlfriends*’ rueful examination of the competing tugs of art and family life feels fresh and undated. Like Agnès Varda’s contemporary *One Sings, the Other Doesn’t* (1977), it takes female friendship as seriously as a love affair, charting its joys, betrayals and sudden jealousies scrupulously, a theme revived by Nicole Holofcener’s *Walking and Talking* (1996) and Noah Baumbach’s *Frances Ha* (2012). Mayron’s mobile face makes every conflicting emotion immediate, whether she’s wrestling congratulations out of shock at a pregnancy announcement, or smiling fixedly through that 70s staple, the smug honeymoon slideshow.

Kate Stables, *Sight & Sound*, December 2020

Stanley Kubrick: I think one of the most interesting Hollywood films, well not Hollywood – American films – that I’ve seen in a long time is Claudia Weill’s *Girlfriends*. That film, I thought, was one of the very rare American films that I would compare with the serious, intelligent, sensitive writing and filmmaking that you find in the best directors in Europe. It wasn’t a success, I don’t know why; it should have been. Certainly I thought it was a wonderful film. It seemed to make no compromise to the inner truth of the story, you know, the theme and everything else.

The great problem is that the films cost so much now; in America it’s almost impossible to make a good film – which means you have to spend a certain amount of time on it, and have good technicians and good actors – that aren’t very, very expensive. This film that Claudia Weill did, I think she did on an amateur basis; she shot it for about a year, two or three days a week. Of course she had a great advantage, because she had all the time she needed to think about it, to see what she had done. I thought she made the film extremely well.

Extract from interview by Vicente Molina Foix in 1980, compiled by Nick Wrigley, bfi.org.uk, October 2013

Allison Anders: I'll never forget seeing Claudia's timeless, incredible movie in the theatres in 1978. It was the first time I had ever seen a female friendship presented in all its complexity: warmth, humour, sisterhood, competition, jealousy, longing, rage and absolute acceptance and trust. The fact that a woman had written and directed it was not lost on me: Claudia became a role model. A beacon.

Melanie Mayron and Anita Skinner are so beautifully cast as roommates Susan (a photographer) and Anne (a writer) who drift down different paths. When Anne gets married, Susan is left behind to create her life in the apartment they briefly shared. The journey of each woman is so unexpected and gorgeously real. Sexuality is treated so beautifully matter of fact. One scene with Christopher Guest and Mayron running playfully, naked in her apartment, and hugging each other nude, is one of the most romantic sex scenes I'd ever seen. So authentic. Weill's framing and long takes, use of hallways and offscreen space was incredibly inspiring to me. I also love how the film doesn't need to trash the male characters to justify complicated choices made by Susan and Anne. Looking at it today, Claudia's work was so ahead of its time. And this film is deeply timeless.

Greta Gerwig: When I saw *Girlfriends*, it felt like the film had been made just for me. I can't write about it in any analytical way, so here are just some pieces that I love. I use character names because that's how I think of them: Susan's face, when she smiles, is filled with such sheer joy it makes me actually smile back.

Painting the red wall by herself. The way time jumps and then stalls. When Susan goes to see the rabbi for what she thinks is an afternoon fling, she takes off her glasses. Then when he can't do it because his family is there, she hustles out of his office. Crying, she re-puts on her glasses.

How success doesn't come all at once, it's in fits and starts: 'I'll never do another bar mitzvah or wedding!' Susan says. Later, of course, she photographs another wedding.

Even though she lies to get in to see the fancy art guy, he helps her out anyway. Her: 'I really appreciate it.' Him: 'I know.'

The two gallerists both wearing never-explained neck braces. When you're young, you don't know what in your life will turn out to be a lark and what will become something solid.

The amount of time we get to be alone with our heroine.

The last shot, when Anne's husband comes home. Even though she's sitting there making fun of him with her old friend, she still gets up and leaves Susan alone when he calls her name.

Sight & Sound, October 2015

GIRLFRIENDS

Director: Claudia Weill
Production Companies: Claudia Weill, New York State Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, Creative Artist Programs Service, American Film Institute
Producers: Claudia Weill, Jan Saunders
Associate Producers: Pat Churchill, Lilly Kilvert
Unit Manager: Monty Diamond
Production Manager: Jan Saunders
Production Co-ordinator: Shelley Houis
Production Assistants: Gaila Abedon, Artie Agin, Carl Baldasso, Doug Block, Howard Gladstone, Susan Hathaway, Andrea Kirsch, Chi Lee, Barbara Lewis, Chris Rodin, Carol Ritter, Barry Strugatz, Tina Valensky, Cat Walker, Patricia Weill
Assistant Director: David Streit
Written by: Vicki Polon
Original Story: Claudia Weill, Vicki Polon
Director of Photography: Fred Murphy
Editor: Suzanne Pettit
Associate Editor: Katherine Wenning
Art Director: Patrizia von Brandenstein
Costumes: Bonnie Daziel, Jody Coy-Cooper, Susan Becker
Title Design: Dan Perri
Music: Michael Small
Sound Recording: Maryte Kavaliauskas
Sound Re-recording: Lee Dichter
Sound Editors: Ed Rothkowitz, Hanna Wajshonig, Emily Paine

Cast

Melanie Mayron (Susan Weinblatt)
Anita Skinner (Anne Munroe)
Eli Wallach (Rabbi Gold)
Christopher Guest (Eric)
Bob Balaban (Martin)
Gina Rogak (Julie)
Amy Wright (Ceil)
Viveca Lindfors (Beatrice)
Mike Kellin (Abe)
Adam Cohen (bar mitzvah boy)
Jean De Baer (Terry)
Nancy Mette (Denise)
Kenneth McMillan (cabbie)
Albert Rogers (hairdresser)
Jane Anderson (Omega receptionist)
Russell Horton (photo editor)
Regina David (Rabbi’s receptionist)
Ted Lambert (Rabbi’s son)
Tanya Berezin (Rabbi’s wife)
Kathryn Walker (Carpel’s receptionist)
Roderick Cook (Carpel)
Kristoffer Tabori (Charlie)
Stacey Lomoe-Smith (Rebecca)
Norma Mayron (Mrs Weinblatt)

USA 1978
88 mins

A Park Circus release



Woman with a Movie Camera is powered by Jaguar and generously supported by Jane Stanton

Woman with a Movie Camera Summit:
Q&A with Claudia Weill, director of *Girlfriends*
Available online from 10:00 Saturday 17 July

Director Claudia Weill joins us to discuss her landmark 1978 *Girlfriends*, one of the first (and still one of the best) films to authentically portray the complexities of female friendship and life in your early 20s. The underrated classic is a true ‘godmother’ to *Girls*, *Frances Ha*, *Broad City* and many other film and TV shows about young women trying to find their way.
Host: Anna Smith

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