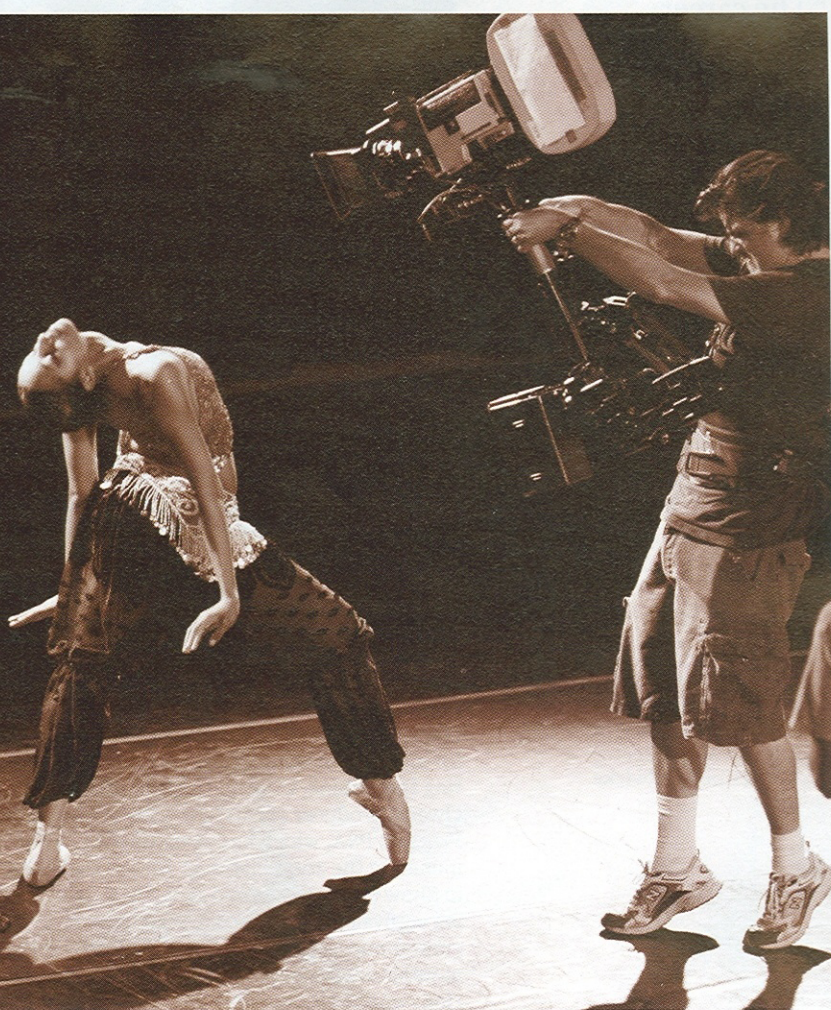


# Girls Just Wanna Have Funds

PHOTO CREDIT: MICHELE K. SHORT



Women in Film is shifting its focus to support the creative community as well as executives

By Denise Abbott

Directed by WIF alumna Romell Foster-Owens, prima ballerina Perris McCracken moves for the camera during the 2008 shoot for the City Ballet of Los Angeles PSA, co-produced by Women in Film and the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs.

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**If it were not for** Women in Film, Lonnie Lardner would still be maxing out her credit cards and scrounging for funds to finish her documentary "Angel in the Hood." Instead, her film about two Latina gangsters who share a mutual obsession with Disney's Tinker Bell is touring the festival circuit and recently won the best domestic documentary prize at the Foursite Festival in Utah. Lardner credits WIF with cheering her on to the finish line.

"I'd been working on the film for three years and had reached the point where music was the critical finishing touch," says the former TV news reporter who considers this story the "personal assignment of a lifetime. I couldn't afford to hire a composer and the temp score wasn't providing the mood or the emotional underpinning I needed to convey the impact of this fairy on their lives."

Lardner, along with four others, received \$5,000 in 2008 to complete her project from the WIF Foundation's Film Finishing Fund. While the WIF and its Crystal + Lucy Awards (which honor those who've helped expand the role of women in the entertainment industry) is a well-publicized and glamorous event, the non-profit also works behind the scenes to nurture women on their way up by providing numerous types of assistance — from networking, employment opportunities

and educational programs to mentoring and WIF's PSA Production Program.

With 40 chapters and 12,000 members worldwide, WIF's mandate has evolved since it was founded in 1972. "Our main goal has always been to support women in the industry and help them rise," says Jane Fleming, who has served as WIF president for the past three years. "Today we see women at the highest levels of power, running studios, law firms and public relations companies. When it comes to the creative arts, however, women haven't gained much ground. Moving forward, we've got to lean into supporting the creative side. We don't want to lose ground in the executive ranks but we want full equality and diversity of expression on the creative side."

Fleming calls the latest statistics "tragic." In 2008, women working in film as directors, writers, cinematographers and editors comprised a mere 16% of the Hollywood work force, according to San Diego State University professor Martha Lauzen, who publishes an annual study on women's contributions to film and television. Her latest study analyzed behind-the-scenes employment of 2,706 individuals working on the top 250 domestic grossing films of 2008.

Ninety percent of the films had no female directors; 82% of the films had no female writers; 96% had no

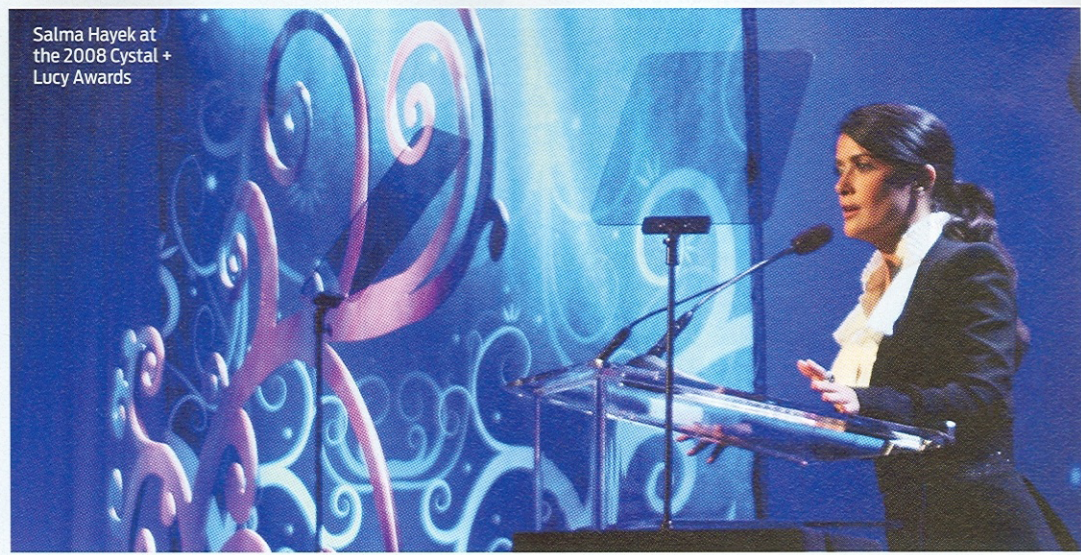
THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER 13

Women in Film

special report

"The career advice I've received has been invaluable. I've got a standing invitation to use her office for writing any time. She's been pivotal to my development. In addition to being my mentor, she's someone I feel I can call a friend."

— Writer Nia Malika Dixon on her Women in Film mentor, director Catherine Hardwicke



Salma Hayek at the 2008 Crystal + Lucy Awards

female cinematographers; 79% lacked female editors; 65% had no female-executive producers while 43% had no female producers.

The void of women being afforded opportunities in mainstream Hollywood has made the Women in Film PSA Production Program an important vehicle for identifying talented female filmmakers and letting them shine. Case in point: Romell Foster-Owens, producer of this year's Gang Alternatives Program PSA, which has won numerous awards including the 2008 Platinum Aurora Award for Best in Show (an international award that's the advertising equivalent of an Oscar). Starting with \$7,500 in grant money, Foster-Owens spent the next six months soliciting in-kind donations from the Hollywood community. "Women in Film really opens doors. The support from the industry is mind boggling," says Foster-Owens, who cites Kodak, Panasonic and Technicolor as regular contributors, as well as Encore Hollywood (online editing) and Todd-AD (sound design). With a budget of \$300,000, the PSA was shot during a weekend in just one day — and came in under budget. Foster-Owens followed up by directing a City Ballet of Los Angeles PSA (while simultaneously mentoring two newbies) that will be distributed in the summer.

WIF's PSAs are the high-gloss equivalent of what one might expect from a big advertising agency. "What I'm most proud of is that, before the PSA, the GAP Web site was getting less than 100 hits a month. Now it's getting 20,000 hits a month along with increased enrollment in GAP," Foster-Owens says. "That's proof that the PSA is helping children make the right choice by staying gang free. In this case, the choice to be gang free is sure to save hundreds of lives."

Because the results are so powerful, WIF receives about 30 solicitations from nonprofits each year. "Even if nonprofits have resources, they usually don't have media resources," says Fleming, who holds an annual pitch night at the Kodak building in Santa Monica. "We select five charities that deal with issues that are important to women. We just greenlit one for Cedars Sinai Heart Health because heart disease is the biggest killer of women and it's frequently undiagnosed."

Another initiative that gives hopefuls a leg up is the mentoring program, which matches up and comers with established professionals. Writer Nia Malika Dixon joined Women in Film after relocating from Baltimore to Los Angeles 3½ years ago.

"They're a very supportive organization and I saw opportunities for growth," says Dixon, whose primary influences are Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola. She submitted her work for review to the mentoring committee along with her mentor wish list topped by "Twilight" director Catherine Hardwicke. "It was on my birthday that I learned I'd been accepted and that I would be working with Catherine. It was the best birthday present ever."

"I came on board when she was editing sound for 'Twilight.' I sat in on sound mixing sessions and generally get to spend time with her during her professional hours," she says. "The career advice I've received has been invaluable. I've got a standing invitation to use her office for writing anytime. She's been pivotal to my development. In addition to being my mentor, she's someone I feel I can call a friend."

Moving forward, plans are under way for the organization to expand its TV and new media presence with programs and events specifically for those mediums. "Because of our name many assume we focus only on film but that's not so," says Fleming, who adds that a first-ever Emmy party will honor female nominees this year. Also in the works: An expanded PSA Production Program, thanks to increased funds from the Department of Cultural Affairs; and partnering with Netflix on the Film Finishing Fund means WIF will be able to help more women in more substantial ways.

"Times are tough," Fleming concedes, "but that makes entertainment and our organization more important than ever." **THR**



Catherine Hardwicke, left, and Nia Malika Dixon

Director Lonnie Lardner

