

FEATURES

# Actress **Barbara Hale** dies at 94

**B**arbara Hale, a movie actress who found her most famous role on television as steadfast secretary Della Street in the long-running "Perry Mason" series, has died. She was 94. Hale was surrounded by family when she died Thursday at her Los Angeles area home, said Jaqueline Stander, an agent for Hale's son, actor William Katt ("The Greatest American Hero," "Carrie"). "She was gracious and kind and silly and always fun to be with," Katt posted on his Facebook page Thursday, calling Hale a wonderful actress and a "treasure as a friend and mother." Stander declined to provide the cause of death.

Hale appeared in "Perry Mason" on CBS from 1957 to 1966, winning an Emmy as best actress in 1959. When the show was revived in 1985 on NBC as an occasional TV movie, she again appeared in court at the side of the ever-victorious lawyer played by Raymond Burr. She continued her role after Burr died in 1993 and was replaced by Hal Holbrook for the movies that continued into 1995. "I guess I was just meant to be a secretary who doesn't take shorthand," she once quipped. "I'm a lousy typist, too - 33 words a minute."

Hale was born in DeKalb, Illinois, daughter of a landscape gardener and a homemaker. The family moved to Rockford when she was 4, and she later took part in a local theater. But her goals were to be a nurse or journalist. When her ambition turned to art she studied at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, where she was often sought as a model. Her work for a modeling agency prompted an offer for a routine contract at the RKO studio in Hollywood. When she reported to the casting director, he was speaking on the phone to someone who needed an immediate replacement for an actress who was sick.



**Women not working at home**

"It hit every paper the next day: the Cinderella story," she recalled in a 1993 Chicago Tribune interview. "Of course they said it was a starring role. I had one line, but you know about those things." The movie was a quickie, "Gildersleeve's Bad Day," but she went on to appear with Pat O'Brien in "The Iron Major," Frank Sinatra in "Higher and Higher" and Robert Young in "Lady Luck." Another co-star was a blond actor named Bill Williams (real name: William Katt), with whom she appeared in "West of the Pecos" and "A Likely Story." They had met over coffee in the studio commissary and married in Rockford in 1946. The couple had three children: Nita, William and Jody.

Williams, who died in 1992, later gained TV fame as star of "The Adventures of Kit Carson." Their son goes by his father's original name, William Katt. After her RKO contract ended, Hale worked at other studios, usually as the adoring wife of the leading man. She played opposite Larry Parks in "Jolson Sings Again," James Stewart in "Jackpot" and James Cagney in "A Lion Is in the Streets." In 1957, she joined the memorable cast of "Perry Mason" that included Burr as the defense attorney who solved his cases in the courtroom, William Hopper as investigator Paul Drake, William Talman as never-winning prosecutor Hamilton Burger and Ray Collins as police lieutenant Arthur Tragg.

"When we started, it was the beginning of women not working at home," Hale said in the 1993 interview. "I liked that she was not married. My husband, Bill, didn't have to see me married to another man, and our children didn't have to see me mothering other children." In the early 1970s, Hale took on another widely recognized role, touting Amana Radarange microwave ovens in TV commercials and print ads. Burr and Hale were the only original cast members when the show resumed on NBC in 1985 in the movie format. Her son, William Katt, appeared in nine of the two-hour shows, as the investigator son of Paul Drake. Hale's later films included the original "Airport," playing the husband of Dean Martin's pilot character; "The Giant Spider Invasion," and "Big Wednesday," in which she appeared with her son. — AP



## Kurdish filmmaker cancels planned US visit over Trump's actions

**C**iting President Donald Trump's visa crackdown, Kurdish filmmaker Hussein Hassan has scrapped plans to attend the US premiere of his critically acclaimed film on the Yazidi minority, it was announced Friday. Jaie Laplante, director of the Miami Film Festival, where the Kurdish-Iraqi movie "The Dark Wind" is to be screened in March, said Hassan had decided to withdraw his visa application in protest at Trump's forthcoming executive orders that are set to suspend the US refugee program and restrict visas to citizens of certain countries, including Iraq, Iran, and Syria.

"One of Miami Film Festival's core values is to bridge cultural understanding, to provoke thought and discussion, and 'The Dark Wind' is one of the most timely, moving and important films in this year's festival," Laplante said. "It is essential that roadblocks not be put in place that will prevent artists

from the free discussion of their work, and equally essential that the world's artists are made to feel welcome in the United States." Hassan's move comes days after the Iranian star of the Oscar-nominated film "The Salesman" said she would boycott the upcoming Academy Awards to protest what she calls Trump's racist policies.

"Trump's visa ban for Iranians is racist. Whether this will include a cultural event or not, I won't attend the #AcademyAwards 2017 in protest," tweeted Taraneh Ailidoosti, the film's 33-year-old lead actress. Trump's impending executive order on visas is expected to ban citizens of Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen from seeking entry into the United States for a month. He is also expected to suspend the US refugee program for four months as officials draw up a list of low risk countries. Hassan's film tells the tale

of a young Yazidi couple preparing for their wedding when fighters from the Islamic State group attack their village.

The movie was inspired by the true-life massacre of thousands of Yazidis after IS took over the Sinjar area in Iraq in August 2014. Thousands of Yazidi women were abducted and turned into sex slaves during the IS campaign. "The US are the closest and most important allies for Kurdistan," the film's producer Mehmet Aktas said in a statement. "Now it seems to be impossible for a Kurdish artist to visit the US to present his work. As an act of peaceful protest, Hussein Hassan decided to withdraw from his visa application. We as Kurdish filmmakers hope that Donald Trump will acknowledge the Kurdish people," Aktas said. — AFP



This file photo shows Sir John Hurt posing with his wife Anwen after being awarded a knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II during an investiture ceremony at Windsor Castle. — AFP

## Veteran British actor **John Hurt**, 77, dies

**O**scar-nominated British actor John Hurt, known for his roles in "Elephant Man" and "Harry Potter", has died aged 77 after a battle with pancreatic cancer, his wife said Saturday. The versatile actor, who played Mr Ollivander in "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone" and in two other films in the series, passed away in Norfolk, eastern England, on Wednesday, according to wife Anwen Rees Meyers. He starred in the movie adaptation of George Orwell's novel "1984" and played the role of Kane in "Alien", who dies when the creature dramatically bursts from his chest in one of the most memorable death scenes in movie history.

He was twice nominated for an Oscar, in the best supporting actor category for his performance in the 1978 film "Midnight Express" as Max, a British man imprisoned in Turkey, and for his starring role two years later in "Elephant Man" about a severely deformed man in 19th century London. He received a BAFTA award for "Midnight Express" as well as a Golden Globe in the best actor in a supporting role category. Hurt's death was confirmed by his widow Anwen. "It is with deep sadness that I have to confirm that my husband, John Vincent Hurt, died on Jan 25, 2017 at home in Norfolk," she said in a statement released by publicist Charles McDonald.

"John was the most sublime of actors and the most gentlemanly of gentlemen with the greatest of hearts and the most generosity of spirit. He touched all our lives with joy and magic and it will be a strange world without him," "Lord of the Rings" star Elijah Wood paid tribute to the actor, writing on Twitter: "Very sad to hear of John Hurt's passing. It was such an honor to have watched you work, sir." Among many other tributes to flood in, American actor Chris Evans described Hurt as "remarkable." "John Hurt was one of the most powerful, giving, and effortlessly real actors I've ever worked with. Remarkable human being. You will be missed," he wrote on Twitter.

### Cinematic immortality

Born on Jan 22, 1940 in Chesterfield, central England, Hurt first began his career as a teacher of drawing. But he quickly moved to a life on camera and, after entering the prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London, he began his career in British film in the 1960s. But it was at the end of the 1970s when his career definitively took off following back-to-back roles in "Midnight Express" and "Alien." Hurt, who appeared in some 140 films, often playing supporting roles, also maintained a strong television presence, making appearances in cult British series "Doctor Who" among others.

He also showed a lighter side, playing a parody of his Kane character in spoof sci-fi comedy "Spaceballs," directed by Mel Brooks. The veteran US comic posted on Twitter that he was "terribly sad today to learn of John Hurt's passing. 'No one could have played The Elephant Man more memorably,' he added. "He carried that film into cinematic immortality. He will be sorely missed." The actor, who received a total of four BAFTAs, was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2014. His cancer was diagnosed the following year but he did not give up his profession. For his final role, he played Father Richard McSorley in the biopic "Jackie," the story of the former American First Lady, which was released in December in the US. He was however forced to pull out of a play last July on the advice of his doctors. — AFP

## The challenges female filmmakers face post-Sundance

**G**ender equity in filmmaking must have looked pretty good to the women attending the Sundance Film Festival, which concludes this weekend in Park City, Utah. But for many female filmmakers, coming back down the mountain will mean a return to an industry where the opportunity divide remains far more glaring. The statistics speak for themselves. At the 2017 festival, 34 percent of films were directed by women. In the broader industry in 2016, however, women accounted for only seven percent of directors down a full two percent from 2015.

"I keep wanting to believe that things have gotten better but according to this latest report it's gotten worse," said director Karyn Kusama, who first came to Sundance in 2000 with "Girlfight" and is back as a part of the anthology horror film "XX." "It's definitely worth reminding people that despite incredibly more difficult odds than even their male

counterparts. Gillian Robespierre made a splash with her feature debut "Obvious Child" in 2014, which eventually led to a production deal that gave her the freedom to be able to quit her day job and focus full time on writing and directing. Her newest film, "Landline" was acquired by Amazon at this year's Festival shortly after it premiered.

For someone like Eliza Hittman, the trajectory has been a little different. Her first feature "It Felt Like Love" debuted at Sundance in 2013. With each new effort, she tries to push herself to move up another step on the ladder. She came first with a short, then "It Felt Like Love" played in the discovery section, NEXT, and now, with "Beach Rats" she's in the official US Dramatic Competition. She continues to hold down a job as a professor to allow herself more freedom, but she'd also like to move up in budget and cast. She's also seen some of her male peers progress faster,

writer, director and producer Zoe Lister-Jones for her film "Band-Aid" hired an all-female production crew. "I felt that they only way to really affect change was to completely subvert the system, especially in departments where you just very, very rarely see women - in camera and grip and electric especially," Lister-Jones said.

Lister-Jones sees herself as being incredibly fortunate, but also notices men getting more and bigger jobs after the festival than women. Colin Trevorrow's ascent from the Sundance indie "Safety Not Guaranteed" to "Jurassic World" and now "Star Wars: Episode IX" is always cited as the primary example. "You just don't see women having the same opportunities or having the same amount of risk put on them," Lister-Jones said. The indie and studio divide might be the essential point. Director and producer Roxanne Benjamin ("XX") said that she's always felt very supported in the indie world, but that when it comes to making that "leap" to studio films or television, suddenly women start hearing things like, "if only you had more experience."

"It's like, 'I've only been making films for 10 years, no big,'" Benjamin said. "You see more of that leap of faith given to male directors." She resents, too, when studios respond with "training programs" for female directors just out of film school, which neglects the "latchkey generation of filmmakers" who have been making it on their own for a decade. Writer, actress and director Michelle Morgan in directing her first feature "LA Times" was most surprised to find a lack of support from other women. "The thing that it highlighted for me is not that the industry needs to embrace women, it's that women need to embrace other women. It seemed like the people who had the easiest time letting me down were the women and it really stuck with me ... My financiers were all men and at one point two-thirds of them were women," Morgan said.

While all are happy to talk about the issues women face as filmmakers, most have a complicated relationship with the media's coverage of the disparity. Simply, there's a lot of chatter and not much change. "There are more articles written about women in film and television than there are women in film and television. And that's the bummer of it all," said Robespierre. "We thought there would be more progress because there's so much attention. But that attention hasn't really equaled actual jobs." — AP



Directors Roxanne Benjamin, from left, Annie Clark, Jovanka Vuckovic and Sofia Carillo pose for a portrait to promote the film, 'XX', at the Music Lodge during the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.

counterparts have in this business, women repeatedly and routinely face consistent gender bias. I don't want to believe that it's true but if you look at the numbers, it is shamefully true." In talking to some of the women at the Festival, no one's experience has been exactly the same. For some, getting their first, second or third film made has been nothing but positive.

For others, biases have revealed themselves in unexpected ways. But all wonder about that next step and whether the same faith will be placed in them as their male

like her "It Felt Like Love" cinematographer Sean Porter.

### Complicated relationship with media

People often call her to ask about hiring Porter, who recently shot "20th Century Women." "It's funny that people responded to the sensibility of that movie enough to hire him but nobody would in a way circle back to me," Hittman, who is only happy for Porter, said. A few first-time directors premiering films at the festival took it upon themselves to try to help be part of the change. Actress,



Co-writer/producer Elisabeth Holm, left, poses with director/co-writer Gillian Robespierre at the premiere of the film 'Landline' at the Eccles Theatre during the 2017 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.



Renee Willett, a cast member in 'The Yellow Birds,' poses at the premiere of the film at Eccles Theatre during the 2017 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.



Director/writer/producer/actress Zoe Lister-Jones poses at the premiere of the film 'Band Aid' at the Eccles Theatre during the 2017 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. — AP photos