

ABSOLUTELY *Fearless*





**FOR MORE THAN A DECADE,
PARTNERS GREG BERLANTI
AND SARAH SCHECHTER
HAVE BEEN FIGHTING GOOD
FIGHTS AND PUTTING THE
AUDIENCE FIRST. THE RESULT:
COUNTLESS BARRIERS
BROKEN, NEW CAREERS MADE,
AND ASTONISHING CROSS-
PLATFORM SUCCESS.**

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YOU NEVER KNOW

when that one thing you say will
end up making someone's day.

Sometimes that one thing lands at the perfect time in the perfect way to change someone's life.

Sarah Schechter and Greg Berlanti first worked together on the 2010 feature film *Life as We Know It*, with Berlanti directing and Schechter as a studio exec at Warner Bros. Already wildly successful in TV, *Life* was Berlanti's second foray into film, and Schechter became an invaluable ally.

"When I was talking to her about story, about casting, about production, about post, every iteration when we were in the foxhole together, I was getting incredible, honest feedback from a business perspective, but also from an audience perspective," says Berlanti. "I really enjoyed that, and I wanted more of it."

So he told her, "I really think you're a producer. Let me know if you're ever interested in working together."

Schechter has never forgotten that moment. "It was such a compliment, and it spoke to my soul because it felt like the truth," she says.

Schechter had been an exec at Warner Bros. for almost a decade in what she considered her version of grad school. "I was there to learn. I'd worked for a producer before that, and it always

felt like whatever the studio wanted or was thinking about was such a mystery and genuinely confusing," she says.

Schechter doesn't hesitate to express her gratitude for what the job gave her over all those years. But it often felt soul-crushing, and she was creatively frustrated. The upside? "I work really well with studio executives because I've walked in their shoes. I understand what they need," she says.

Berlanti—who received the PGA's 2022 Norman Lear Achievement Award in recognition of his extraordinary body of work in television—had had other business partners with a variety of backgrounds. He hadn't been looking for a new partner per se. And he and certainly wouldn't have extended such a weighty offer to collaborate with just anybody.

When the two began seriously discussing Schechter's move to Berlanti Productions, she was honest about her limitations. Although she had a notable track record overseeing films from Spike Jonze's *Her* to Clint Eastwood's *Gran Torino*, she didn't know anything about making TV, other than she loved watching it. Berlanti allayed her uncertainty by promising to teach her all she needed to know. She would be using

all the same skills. She was a quick learner.

It'll take three weeks, he told her.

"It took more like a year," recalls Schechter, who first arrived at Berlanti Productions in 2014 as president and was promoted to partner and chair in 2020. "But he always had so much belief in me. Part of the success of this company is that we'll be warriors for the people that we believe in."

Berlanti's words have had undeniable power since his first job as a staff writer on The WB's *Dawson's Creek*, helping him ascend to showrunner within a year. Over 40-plus series across a variety of genres, his voice and vision have evolved the TV landscape, smashed ratings records, and transformed on-screen storytelling through positive LGBTQ+ representation and more.

But it's Schechter's dexterity, drive, and savvy that have supercharged his vision while making Berlanti Productions all but unstoppable. The company's series pickups include a live-action *Scooby Doo* for Netflix, and *Stillwater*, based on the Skybound comic book series. Also cooking on its development slate are an adaptation of the 2023 novel *Foster Dade Explores the Cosmos*; *Dilettante*, inspired by former *Vanity Fair* deputy editor Dana Brown's memoir; *The Grays*,

a contemporary take on Oscar Wilde's classic tale; and another live-action reimagining, this time of the *Captain Planet* animated series.

A string of original and impactful features—including *Unpregnant*, *Free Guy*, *Rock Hudson: All That Heaven Allows*, *Atlas*, and *Red, White & Royal Blue*—under the newer Berlanti Schechter Films banner proves that the partners' magic extends beyond the traditional TV format. The shingle is busy developing *Sasha* for Amazon MGM (with Scarlett Johansson's These Pictures producing alongside), an adaptation of Delia Ephron's best-selling memoir *Left on Tenth*, and a trio of features for Netflix: *The House Across the Lake*, *Hurt People* and *An Innocent Girl*, which is one in a series of thrillers being developed with *Eli Stone* and *Arrow* cocreator Marc Guggenheim.

A SIMPLE FORMULA

The partners insist there's no secret formula, no complicated calculus behind how they choose what to produce, what it takes to bring those projects to fruition, and why those projects end up resonating with so many. They simply ask themselves: What's not on TV right now? What movies are not being made that people could love? And where is there an audience that is not being served?

"One of our litmus tests for each other is imagining ourselves in the audience. Do we want to see that show or film? That's a reason to fight for it," says Berlanti.

The pair is experienced and pragmatic enough to know that global tastes always change. But a consistent investment in key elements almost always ensures that a show or a film will find its audience and resonate deeply. Those elements: a high-quality showrunner or director, along with the best writing they can find, executed at the highest level of craftsmanship.

They've also been around the block often enough to know that they won't always hit the target. "We've now had a few shows that bombed when they

came out, then became retroactive hits later. It makes us double down on all our instincts," Berlanti says.

"What makes Greg and Sarah extraordinary producers," says Donald De Line, "is not only that they steadfastly remain calm and focused in the face of headwinds, but that they also stay ahead of the curve. They let their instincts and passion guide them and pursue only what they truly care about."

Berlanti Productions has twice held the record for the most shows on the air simultaneously: first with 18 and later with 20. But the partners emphasize that the company has never been driven by quantity.

"The volume existed because we were so focused on the quality," says Berlanti. The essence of that quality is the brand of originality embodied by series like *The Flight Attendant* (a 12-time Emmy nominee with one win), *You* (a Netflix #1 spot holder), beloved DC Comics adaptation *The Flash* (which drew the largest audience for any CW telecast since the network's launch in 2006), *Found* (NBC's most successful series launch on Peacock), and *All American*, which together with its spinoff *All American: Homecoming*, spent more than 15 weeks on Netflix's top 10 list.

"So many people want to make something that appeals to everyone alive. But I think it's more important to make something that's going to be someone's favorite show or movie—something that's going to mean a lot to them," says Schechter.

Of course, this can't be done without the passion of a committed producer. For Schechter, the role involves persistent advocating, problem-solving, and creating guardrails.

In other words, "It's about being a responsible person who can help keep the circus going," she says.

For Berlanti, good producing involves mastering all elements of the trade to be able to fill in the gaps wherever and whenever other members of the creative team need help. "I try to be the

person that I always felt like I needed and then found in Sarah," he says. "For us as a company, it's very much about trying to be that for everybody else."

Berlanti is the first to admit that writing is what brings him the greatest joy, and that everything else he does—producing included—he does to be able to keep crafting stories. While he's focused on writing, he can rest assured, knowing that his partner has most everything else covered.

This goes not only for Berlanti, but also for the other writers and showrunners under the company's wings.

"Those writers all come back to me saying, 'I need a Sarah!' They all see her value," Berlanti says. "There are a million calls with executives, and we all know it's a sticky wicket of trying to manage everything because you want to hear the best notes and navigate that process. But if I were in those conversations or debates every day, I wouldn't have the wherewithal to go back and generate the stories or the material."

"Greg's creativity is the eternal flame. We have to protect it," Schechter explains. "Too much of this dumb person or this dumb thing can make the flame smaller. The flame being bigger is better. It keeps us all warm."

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

In 2023, Berlanti Productions and Warner Bros. agreed to an exclusive, four-year overall deal, keeping the company's television production at the studio through 2027, developing and running programming for platforms that include streaming, cable, and broadcast.

"Greg and Sarah are two of the most passionate, talented, and incredibly kind individuals in the business," says Channing Dungey, chairman and CEO of Warner Bros. Television Group and Warner Bros. Discovery's US Networks. "In many ways, they are the pivotal voice of this generation's TV creatives. Their bold, inclusive, and genre-defying storytelling continues to move the medium forward in

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Sarah Schechter
and Greg Berlanti
on the set of *Fly
Me to the Moon*.

unprecedented ways.”

Dungey first worked with Berlanti and Schechter while she was running ABC Studios, and continued to do so when she moved to Netflix. The trio developed a number of series, including *Deception* and *The Girls on the Bus*.

Berlanti and Schechter work hard to ensure their company’s value to a studio partner. Integrity is fundamental. “They put in the work” is something you will hear repeatedly from those who have collaborated with them on any type of project.

“When we work with a studio, or we’re trying to come through for an artist, we really want to come through for them,” says Berlanti. “If we promise a network or studio that we’re going to have this many scripts, and we’re going to be on this budget, or we’re going to have this kind of show and it’s going to keep the quality of its pilot, it really lives with us.”

“We want to make all of our partners

happy. We like having really smart executives that we get to work with every day, and we want to keep doing good work with them,” Schechter says. “But the thing that’s hard about producing is you’re not the only person in the vehicle. There’s a lot of people. You have to keep pointing in the right direction and keep rowing them all.”

The two typically divide and conquer to achieve this, and the divvying up of responsibilities may change from day to day depending on whose skills will best solve a specific problem.

“If I’m not there and Sarah’s making the decision, or she’s not here and I’m making the decision, we both trust that the decision is coming from the right creative place and a place of values—not just for what we want to achieve creatively, but for the process of how we want to achieve it,” Berlanti explains.

For Dungey, it’s a no-brainer why Warner Bros. has continually invested in its relationship with Berlanti

Productions. “Just looking at the last 15 years should tell you everything you need to know. Year after year, Greg and Sarah have delivered some of the most compelling and iconic shows in television history, with no signs of slowing down,” she says. “They are a powerhouse creative team, and we are honored to be their production home.”

THRIVING ACROSS PLATFORMS

In 2021, Berlanti Schechter Films signed an exclusive first-look feature film deal with Netflix. It was a score for the studio in a variety of ways, both personal and professional, especially for Kira Goldberg, VP of film at Netflix. She worked with Schechter years ago when both were coming up as young execs, and credits her with a deeper knowledge of film than anyone she knows.

Schechter and Berlanti’s breadth of experience (and wins) across platforms and genres has been a boon



Schechter, Berlanti and showrunner Nkechi Okoro Carroll celebrating the 100th episode of *All American*.



The partners share a hug at Berlanti's Walk of Fame ceremony (left). Schechter, Uma Thurman and Mike McGrath on the set of *Red, White & Royal Blue* (right).

for the studio's film division, which thrives on variety.

"There are very few producers who have made everything from genre fare to YA to emotional heartfelt dramedy and sci-fi action," Goldberg adds.

"Because of their enormous success in series, which is a huge advantage for them in the film space, they know writers who work in every imaginable lane, and they are excellent at discovering young writers and helping them develop excellent scripts."

Berlanti and Schechter thrive off this cross-pollination. "There are a number of writers, directors, and actors we've now worked with across both (platforms). At its best, those things are all feeding each other," Berlanti says. "Whether it's at any studio or production company, you want your team of folks that you like across every aspect of the business."

"One of the things I love about Greg, Sarah, and everyone that works at their company is they are always exploring

how to do something new that we haven't seen before," Goldberg adds. "And they always do the work."

THE GOOD FIGHT

Berlanti and Schechter are not only successful at the business side of things, they also truly care about people, whether those they work with behind the scenes or those who are watching the end result onscreen.

This becomes abundantly clear when speaking with creators who have worked with the pair.

"Greg and Sarah bring such a human element to every project they develop. No matter the genre, there is a great sense of relatability and emotional connection in every story they tell," Dungey says. "And let's be real—Greg and Sarah are absolutely fearless. They are not afraid to break barriers and deliver TV firsts. They have a proud legacy of developing diverse stories and characters that allow audiences to see themselves

represented onscreen for the first time."

For showrunner and creator Nkechi Okoro Carroll (*All American*, *All American: Homecoming*, *Found*), Berlanti was the type of creator she aspired to be back when she was an economist at the Federal Reserve, writing on the side with the goal of someday breaking into the industry.

Cut to a few years later. Okoro Carroll had worked her way through writers rooms and signed an overall deal with Warner Bros. in 2018. One of her priorities upon arriving at the studio was to meet Berlanti, hoping with all her heart that the clichéd caution about never meeting one's heroes wouldn't prove true.

As soon as Okoro Carroll walked into Berlanti's office, she exhaled with relief. "I could feel his spirit as soon as he smiled. He's an amazing human being."

She met Schechter shortly after, signed on to *All American*, and became part of the Berlanti Productions family.

The Industry to Come

Greg Berlanti and Sarah Schechter share their perspectives on what's ahead for the industry.

General Forecast

Berlanti: In terms of the temperature of the business—and this is anecdotal more than anything—it does feel like things are picking up again. To get through all that to where we are now, it's been a nice reprieve to be able to focus 80% on new stories as opposed to survival. It does feel now like we're going into rooms where people want to buy again. That usually means that more production is behind that.

Taking Film and TV Forward

Berlanti: I don't think this is spoken about enough: Because TV episodes are fewer and cost more for each, whether it's streaming or even broadcast, it's such a big bet for some of these places. Maybe for a streamer, a \$50 million to \$60 million bet on that movie is less than a \$90 million bet on a first-year series. In terms of people who like to make things, that's very appealing. In that regard, our volume has also gone up in terms of stuff that's on the runway because they've become slightly smaller bets.

Schechter: I think the idea that movies have to be theatrical to be meaningful is reductive. A lot of data can be manipulated to support whatever argument you want to make. When we say that, what we remember are all the movies that were big theatrical hits. When I was a studio executive, I worked on a lot of theatrical movies that came and went and didn't have a huge cultural impact.

It's on us as producers and on streamers to keep pushing interesting streaming films as well as theatrical films so there's more opportunity to tell stories. It would've been a lot harder to get *Red, White & Royal Blue* made if it were entirely predicated

on a theatrical opening and required a theatrical marketing budget. That's a movie that is really important to some people, and I'm grateful for it.

A Future With AI

Berlanti: My instinct is that the business is going to look radically different in another five years. There have to be a lot of legal conversations about what's being repurposed. My hope is that, from both the guilds and the studios, there's more of a sense of the ownership of what material is being used to generate new material. There needs to be greater and faster sensitivity to that.

Conversely, I was a writer before the internet, and I remember what Google did for me in terms of research and how much more I could get done in a day. So I think the usefulness of AI and how it will help the economics of the business will be incredibly helpful. Technologically, it will certainly help to reduce costs on everything from visual effects to storyboarding to scheduling.

We as storytellers and producers have to adapt to the technology while the community is hopefully coming together to figure out something that's healthy for all of us.

Schechter: You could give 10 people the same AI resources, and they're all going to make something different, and one of them is going to make something that's better than everybody else's. So who is that person? How do you help support them? How do you help drive that and push them to make something that's truly great?

That's how it's always been, in a way—there will be 100 screenplays and 10 of them will be good and two of them will be amazing. There will always be that.

Okoro Carroll's first experience as a showrunner was a thrilling leap, but also a trial by fire that no amount of shadowing could have prepared her for. Yet she felt fully supported through the minefield of first-time challenges.

"Greg and Sarah were by my side every step of that season," Okoro Carroll recalls. "When I was figuring out how

to talk to our editors, Greg would put breaks in his schedule to sit with me and help me figure out my language to shape the show the way I wanted. When I needed to figure out how to bring the budget down, I'd call Sarah and she would roll up her sleeves and come sit in my office.

"Making sure that I felt supported

to figure out my voice and style as a showrunner will forever be an invaluable lesson from them," she adds. "It's how I mentor the showrunners that I work with now."

This capacity for mentorship has Okoro Carroll referring to Berlanti and Schechter as "the dream makers," noting that during her time with the production

company, she's witnessed them tirelessly empower the next generation with real-world help. If an editor aims to be a director, a writer wants to jump to showrunner, or a PA wants to become a producer, the partners find a way to make that happen.

Making things happen sometimes takes a lot longer. Prior to producing the film *Atlas* for Netflix alongside Berlanti and Schechter, Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas had been hard at work with the partners for more than a decade in a Sisyphean effort to produce a passion project called *Replay*.

"Sarah was my executive at Warner Bros., and she suggested that we go to Greg, who not only took it on, he rewrote it and transformed it," Goldsmith-Thomas recalls. "The three of us became comrades in this. It's a beautiful, beautiful story. We're still pushing it up the hill."

After that camaraderie began, Schechter left Warner Bros. for Berlanti Productions and Goldsmith-Thomas became a producing partner with Jennifer Lopez at Nuyorican Productions. The trio came together again to produce *Atlas* under the Berlanti Schechter Films banner.

One aspect of working with Berlanti and Schechter that Goldsmith-Thomas values most is what she calls "a lack of proprietaryness." Collaborations feel egalitarian. Everyone's ideas are given the same level of consideration. What wins out is not one's ego or seniority, but what best serves the team and the project.

An industry veteran like Goldsmith-Thomas—who has enjoyed success as a top talent agent as well as a producer—knows that flexibility is not only an asset but a means of survival. In Berlanti and Schechter, she found allies who were open, accessible, and ready to pivot. "They understand that it's not really about the destination. It's about how you get there.

"And they don't just stop," she adds. "From script to production to post to marketing, I never felt alone."

Knowing you're not alone makes it possible to do what's right, especially when high-powered doers and decision-makers like Berlanti and Schechter are leading by example.

"They've taught me that fighting for the right thing is never the wrong thing to do," Okoro Carroll says. "It's not about fighting for luxurious things. It's about fighting for a budget that allows our actors to get paid what they should be getting paid or for things that make our crew's life better."

SOLDIERING ON

Neither Berlanti nor Schechter can imagine doing anything else with their professional lives. Despite the roadblocks and rejections that all producers face—even those with a golden track record—they persist, inspiring countless other creatives with their example. Not necessarily because they aim to, but because they aren't

wired any other way.

When asked to describe a low point, Schechter says, "The greatest heartbreak is when something you believe in doesn't connect with as broad an audience as you hoped and expected. We made a show recently that I really loved, and it just didn't click."

But, she adds, "Failure is a great teacher."

"It's not human to have faith every day about everything. There are plenty of days when I might be down about something, and Sarah's not," says Berlanti. "You have to fight for stuff a lot, and fight until you're exhausted, but then the other person carries the torch for you."

"That's a great gift of partnership," Schechter adds. "I have a friend who's a very successful actor, and she once said, 'Nobody wants to hear that I'm tired.' But it's nice to have someone you can be tired with." ■



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Far left: Schechter with *Flight Attendant* star Kaley Cuoco. This page, left: Schechter and Berlanti at the 2022 PGA Awards, where he received the Norman Lear Achievement Award. Below: Berlanti accepting his Governors Award at the 2024 Emmys.



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