

UNSTOPPABLE

AMY PASCAL HAS LIVED MULTIPLE INCARNATIONS IN A TOWERINGLY SUCCESSFUL CAREER, EACH ONE CHARACTERIZED BY VISION, STAMINA AND RELENTLESS DEVOTION TO STORY.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREN TAYLOR



Let's get this out of the way now: Amy Pascal has some cred.

Between 2006 and 2015, when Pascal served as chair of the Motion Pictures Group of Sony Pictures Entertainment (SPE) and cochair of SPE, she oversaw Bond titles *Casino Royale* and *Skyfall*, along with unforgettable features that included *Superbad*, *Moneyball*, *The Social Network*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Captain Phillips* and *American Hustle*.

After leaving Sony, she launched Pascal Pictures and produced three Spider-Man films for Marvel Studios, including *No Way Home*, the sixth-highest-grossing movie of all time. The latest in the franchise, *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*, will be released later this year. Through her company, Pascal also produced two Spider-Verse movies, the first of which won the 2019 Academy Award for Best Animated Feature; a third, *Spider-Man: Beyond the Spider-Verse*, is currently in production.

On the nonfranchise end of the spectrum, Pascal produced Luca Guadagnino's *Challengers*; Greta Gerwig's Academy Award Best Picture-nominated *Little Women*; Steven Spielberg's Academy Award-nominated *The Post*; Aaron Sorkin's Academy Award-nominated directorial debut, *Molly's Game*; and Noah Baumbach's *Jay Kelly*, which Pascal produced alongside David Heyman.

And that's not all. The unstoppable Pascal is hard at work on a slate that includes Gerwig's *Narnia*, based on C.S. Lewis's timeless novels, and an adaptation of the thrilling sci-fi novel *Project Hail Mary*. In March 2025—right before Amazon MGM announced its first-look narrative feature deal with Pascal Pictures—Pascal and Heyman were announced as producers of a new Bond film for the studio.

Pascal will be the first to tell you that she didn't amass this list of successes on her own. Throughout her career, mentors demonstrated over and over again what truly mattered, what was important to hold onto as she made her way through the industry. Her first boss, Tony Garnett, was a British producer who worked closely with director Ken Loach and had a long history of pushing the envelope while producing programming for the BBC.

"He taught me what mattered: writers, writers

and writers," Pascal says. She was eventually hired away from Garnett by Scott Rudin, another mentor who shared Pascal's love and admiration for writers. Another beloved paragon was John Calley, with whom Pascal worked closely when he was SPE's chairman and CEO and she was head of Columbia Pictures.

Upon Calley's passing in 2011, Pascal described their relationship as going beyond that of mentor and boss. "He was the most extraordinary and generous friend," she said. "He had a steely business mind and the soul of an artist."

Another inspiration was Dawn Steel, who fearlessly modeled the grace and tenacity it took to not only run a studio but also be the first woman ever to do so. "I loved her and wanted to be her," Pascal gushes. She also cherishes the memory of producer Laura Ziskin, with whom she worked closely during her time at Columbia, as a best friend and creative and business North Star.

Along with guidance gleaned from their unique experiences and skill sets, each of these trailblazers modeled a quality that Pascal herself has unapologetically embodied: passionate individuality. "They were really who they were, and they didn't bend to the wind," she says.

In particular, the women who came before her—who had to fight harder than their male peers at every step—fueled Pascal's mission not just to make movies, but to make movies about women.

"I was known as the chick-flick studio executive, which was a derogatory term at the time," Pascal recalls. "But I got to make *A League of Their Own*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Little Women*, *Single White Female* and a lot of other movies I love because I knew that's what I wanted to do. If other people didn't want to do it, that meant there was a lane for me. Picking a lane doesn't cut you off from things. It expands the world you're living in."

As a result, Pascal was able to champion creators who set a high bar for excellence in storytelling for the screen—voices and visionaries whom countless other filmmakers of any gender strive to emulate.

"I got to work with Nancy Meyers, Penny Marshall, Nora Ephron, Amy Heckerling and Greta Gerwig. All the greats. To me, they were everything."

Pascal's faith in these filmmakers meant everything to them in return. When Gerwig and Pascal began working together, Pascal told the writer-director that she ran Sony with the belief that everyone is as good as their best movie.

"She started from a place of faith in the talent, not the suspicion of risk. It is astonishing how rare that is, and it emboldens the directors she works with to strive for the grandest version of what they can do," says Gerwig.

"Amy believed in us long before it made any sense. She just had a feeling and trusted it. That feeling is her superpower, and it will make your movie better," say writer-director-producers Phil Lord and Chris Miller, with whom Pascal has made eight features, including the Academy Award-winning *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* as well as the forthcoming streaming series *Spider-Noir*.

Lord, Miller and Pascal's collaboration began in 2009 with the animated feature *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. It wasn't as auspicious a start as they had hoped.

"We had a bad screening of our first movie. The audience hated the ending. Amy plopped down next to us—wearing a denim jumpsuit and Converse—and said, 'We're about to learn a lot about your movie,' and patted us on the back. In an instant, it reframed the whole experience and let us into the process," recall Lord and Miller. "We were not a liability she was managing. We were part of the solution."

Things went up from there. The trio's collaboration continued through a *Cloudy* sequel, two *21 Jump Street* films, and three feature explorations of Spider-Man's Spider-Verse.

"Amy has an intuitive sense of story and emotional storytelling more than possibly anyone in the business. If a scene isn't working, she knows why. If a scene is working, she is excited, and she gets you excited," Lord and Miller add.



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—GRETA GERWIG

"But more important than her belief in you is how she is able to convince you that you are the greatest filmmaker in the world and the only person who can make this work."

Noah Baumbach shares a similar sentiment. "Amy is able to read a script or watch a cut of a movie or a take of a scene on set and have an entirely pure reaction to it. She's able to cut right down to what is working or not working. Her observations are both emotional and incisive," he says. "She works on a movie the way she watches a movie. She sees it in an uncanny way and is someone you want standing next to you when you're trying to make sense of it all."

"Amy is by far one of the most passionate individuals I've ever met. She's a true force of nature gifted with energy that is incredibly contagious and everlasting," says Denis Villeneuve, who is directing the Bond film that Pascal and Heyman are producing. "I'm always impressed by her intelligence, patience and loyalty. She also possesses boundless curiosity and fully invests herself in her projects, researching and absorbing as much information as possible to support and guide filmmakers."

He adds, "When Amy believes in someone or in a specific project, nothing can hold her back."

"The first, last and only thing Amy cares about is the work," says Gerwig. "She loves the movies. She wants to make great ones. Not just for money or respect but for how they last, how they can shape lives, how they can keep people company, how they can give people dreams. I have never met anyone less comfortable at a party and more comfortable on a set, in a production meeting, or in an editing room. She lives for the work, not the shiny bits around it."

A FOREVER LOVE OF MOVIES

Pascal wholeheartedly believes that she is doing exactly what she was always meant to, even if she didn't know how



Lori Petty, Tom Hanks
and Geena Davis in *A
League Of Their Own.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALAMY

to name it while she was growing up in Los Angeles. Her father was an economist at the Rand Corporation, and her mother owned an artists' bookstore.

"We were not Hollywood people," Pascal recalls. "They didn't know anybody in the movie business."

But they did know film.

"Watching movies was a really big thing in our house," Pascal recalls. "On the weekends, my dad would take me to the Encore theater in Hollywood, where they would show Fred Astaire and Busby Berkeley movies and *Footlight Parade* and things like that. My dad loved movies, and I loved him, so I loved movies too."

She acquired a drive to tell stories about people she cared about. She believed in her understanding of human nature, coupled with a knack for combining the business side of things with the artistic side. And that meant producing.

"It just felt like the right fit. I wasn't an artist, I didn't run around with a camera, I didn't write anything, and I can't even spell, but I just had a sense that this is what I could do," Pascal recalls.

So upon completing college in 1981, Pascal took the first step that legions of other young hopefuls have taken to

get their foot in the door of the industry. She spent six years as a secretary for Garnett until Rudin hired her to become a vice president at Fox. In 1988, Pascal went to work for Steel at Columbia Pictures as vice president of production. There, she brought an array of classic films to life—*Awakenings*, *Groundhog Day*, *A League of Their Own*, *Little Women* and *Sense and Sensibility*, to name a few.

Pascal segued from Columbia to get Turner Pictures up and running. Her stint there was brief but impactful, making *Michael* with Nora Ephron and the *Wings of Desire* remake, *City of Angels*, as well as putting together Oliver Stone's *Any Given Sunday* and Ephron's *You've Got Mail*, which were eventually made at Warner Bros. after Ted Turner sold the company.

After this, Pascal returned to the Columbia-Sony family, where she continued to work her way up the ranks to become cochair of SPE in 2006.

Pascal's love for her job was apparent in the heartfelt way she steered the studio. Gerwig found this out when she went in to pitch her take on the Louisa May Alcott classic *Little Women*—a take that has become almost as beloved as the novel it's based on.

"I had loved the book when I was a child," Gerwig recalls, "but when I reread it as an adult woman, I was struck that even from the very first line, money is at the forefront. Then I read about how much of Louisa May Alcott's writing was an economic endeavor to save her family from dire poverty. That intersection of artistic expression and financial need was at the heart of what I understood the project to be.

"When I said that, Amy almost jumped out of her chair. I did not know how much that was at the heart of her journey as a studio head turned producer, but it was one of those brilliant moments where the song in my heart exactly matched the song in hers."

Pascal is one of the few producers to receive two of the PGA's highest honors: the Milestone Award, which she earned in 2010 as cochair of Sony Pictures Entertainment, and the David O. Selznick Achievement Award, which she will receive on February 28 for her body of work as an independent producer. Taken together, these awards recognize her depth of expertise and celebrate the value she has contributed to the industry as both a storied studio head and fierce entrepreneur, the path to which began upon her departure from Sony in 2015.

GETTING IT DONE

Looking back, Pascal is grateful for change.

"I was lucky. Not the way it happened, but that it happened. I got to embark on a whole new career. And although it was really scary at the time, I think in my heart of hearts, it was the job I was always meant to have," she recalls.

Pascal could have simply stepped back, but instead she embraced a new role and immersed herself in every aspect of it.

"The way Amy has transitioned from executive to one of the most accomplished, nuts-and-bolts producers in the industry is nothing short of remarkable," says Kevin Feige, producer and president of Marvel Studios. "She brings a singular, inspiring creative energy to every project she touches, balanced by a shrewd ability to make the hard calls and ask the tough questions.

"Simply put, she is the ultimate producer and the best producing partner I could ask for," Feige adds. "And we've always bonded over a deep, shared love of Spider-Man."

Pascal entered independent producing with advantages few newcomers have: powerful industry allies and a highly favorable Sony exit deal. But those advantages



Writer and director
Greta Gerwig with
Meryl Streep on the set
of *Little Women*.

brought challenges, too.

"I think in the beginning, because of the way the deal was structured, I'm sure some people were like, 'What the heck is she doing here? We don't need her,'" Pascal says. "That was hard, but I also understood it, because the thing about being on a movie set is, if you don't know what you're doing or what the requirements are, you are completely useless."

The transition from studio head to boots-on-the-ground-producer enrolled Pascal in an entirely different school of hard knocks from the one that got her to the top of Sony.

She quickly realized that her former job had involved almost none of what independent producers do every day.

With characteristic candor, Pascal recalls a story about the first film Sony gave her to produce, 2016's *Ghostbusters*.

"Really early on, I went up to (director) Paul Feig to give him a note, and he replied, 'Amy, I'm shooting the master.' And I'm like, 'Oh, my God.' I had no idea what I was doing.

"When you run a studio, you think that you're doing everything," she adds. "You think you're omnipresent and brilliant and that all your ideas and all the movies are yours. I thought I was producing. I found out that none of that was true. I had to learn a whole other language, which is what producing a movie is."

Now, from story development to casting to production design, Pascal immerses herself in every facet of production.

"I've always had close relationships with writers, directors and actors, whether I was a studio executive or a producer. I believe in those people. We wouldn't be here without them. They're magic, and they have to be protected and pushed," Pascal says.

"Those people are everything, but so are the people who do visual effects, the people who shoot the movie, the



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production designers, and the wardrobe, costume and makeup people," she adds. "I've gotten to work more closely with

all those people as a producer than I ever did as a studio executive."

Meryl Streep, who starred in *Little Women* and *The Post*, says Pascal's producing style stands out for two things: her tender, unwavering support for a director's vision and her relentless energy.

"She has run at top speed, full throttle, since I have known her," says Streep. "I am in awe of her stamina and voracious appetite for engagement: with ideas, people, problems, snags and dreams. She is a dreamer and a doer, but she defers in the doing to the dreams of her director."

"The producer's job is to help the director remember why they wanted to make the movie in the first place," Pascal says. "Over the course of a day, it's really hard to remember that, because it's getting dark out, people are late, things aren't working, you didn't get the shot that you wanted, and all you're worrying about is getting that day done. I think it's my job to inspire people to remember why they are doing what they're doing—to make people feel safe to do what they do best."

It's difficult for Pascal to acknowledge the impact she has made through her leadership and commitment, and the good her work has brought to so many. She's still trying to take it all in.

"When I ran the studio, I would have to take a walk around the campus to remind myself that I ran it. I never took anything for granted. Ever."

Alongside her professional achievements, she built a solid marriage, raised a remarkable son and stayed close to her family—an accomplishment that deserves recognition, says Bryan Lourd, CEO and cochairman of CAA and Pascal's longtime agent.

"I think that's something people forget about, and don't think about that consideration with men. For women, it is doubly hard. When you succeed, it's something to be noted."



Benedict
Cumberbatch
and Tom
Holland in
*Spider-Man:
No Way
Home.*

PHOTO BY MATT KENNEDY. © 2021 CTMG.

'I KNOW WHAT I LIKE'

Pascal's formula for success isn't complicated: "I work really hard."

Years of leadership have taught Pascal to know and respect both her abilities and her limits. She's as unafraid of being pragmatic as she is unafraid to dream, and that enables her to surmount difficulties in ingenious ways—as long as she puts in the work.

She describes how learning disorders have made fundamental tasks like reading script coverage nearly impossible. Instead of looking for shortcuts, she goes the opposite direction, throwing herself into reading the full script, book or other source material on which a screenplay might be based. It takes more time, but it allows her to spot details others might miss if they skipped over the entirety of a story.

"I've always read a lot and have always been interested in storytelling, writers and characters, so I think I have a pretty good sense of how a story should work. I can be kind of a canary in the coal mine," Pascal explains. "My strength is that I'm not afraid to say what I think. I believe in telling the truth, because it gets you in trouble if you don't."

Gerwig values the way that Pascal has removed from their collaborations formalities, industryspeak and hedging. "I am looking for someone with whom I can get into it so I can sharpen the movie as much as possible, who never placates an ego but always protects the movie above all else," Gerwig says.

Ultimately, what grounds Pascal is her devotion to the story.

"I know what I like, whether or not it's in fashion," Pascal says. "I can't do something because I think it's going to be commercial, or because I think it's going to make money, or because that's what the people want. I would die if that was what I had to do."

"Being a producer is really hard work. Over the last year and a half, I produced four movies in London, and that was really hard on me. It was hard on the filmmakers, too, because if you say you're going to be there, then people rely on you to be there."

But Pascal is grateful even for this challenge. It speaks to the formula she uses to characterize this business: luck and stamina. Sometimes things come together all at once, and you have to be ready.

"What makes her one of the all-time great producers,

executives and creative forces in our community is that she has a true love for stories and never loses sight of the business,” Lourd says. “She knows that it’s a privilege to get anyone to finance a story, to help an artist express themselves, and hopefully reach a global audience.”

After talking through the stories that move her and the filmmakers who shape them, the conversation naturally turns to what she seeks in the producers standing beside her.

“Hard work. People who work the way that I do. I have partners on a lot of movies now, and I really rely on those people to care as much as I do. I think people should do their homework, study, read and be prepared.”

Two colleagues who fit this bill are Rachel O’Connor, who has worked with Pascal for over 30 years and helped launch Pascal Pictures, and Isabel Siskin, who has been with the company for almost a decade. Thanks to them, Pascal’s development slate is rich and promising while also remaining keenly curated and well managed.

“We don’t need to have a million projects,” Pascal says. “It’s a very small company. We buy and get involved in the things that we really want to make.”

FACING THE FUTURE

Pascal is no stranger to being knocked down and getting up again, to facing change with tenacity and courage. How does she think the industry will get through the frightening

challenges it finds itself in, and how will she do so herself?

“I believe that the kind of movies that I used to be able to make at the studio and loved, like *Moneyball*, can’t *not* get made, right? And they can’t only be made for television. We have to figure out how to make those kinds of movies at a price where putting them in a movie theater makes sense. A movie doesn’t have to be a blockbuster to be a good business proposition.

“I think the financial structure of movies has gotten out of hand. We’ll only be making big, huge movies, and I don’t think that will be satisfying to anyone,” she adds. “The way movies are being put together will kill itself. When first-dollar gross disappeared, everything changed. We’re at a time where we have to figure it out again.”

Pascal has no intention of stopping anytime soon. The future, with all its uncertainty, holds too much inspiration, hope and excitement for her. Too many remarkable filmmakers to work with. Too many powerful stories still to be told. And as she continues to do what she believes she was always meant to do, she’ll do it using the same simple, tried-and-true formula, while helping others to do the same.

“All we have to do is make great movies. Then other great movies will happen. Don’t go around worrying about the structure of the deal. Worry about whether there’s a story there, if you’re the one to tell it, and who you want to tell it with.” ■



Mike Faist, Zendaya,
and Josh O’Connor
in *Challengers*.