

# Lesley Ann Warren



Lesley Ann Warren started gearing towards a life in show business right off the bat as a child ballerina; little did she know that Hollywood stardom would arrive on her doorstep in the form of a "Cinderella" story -- literally! Warren's mother gave up her own entertainment career for marriage and family. Lesley attended New York's Professional Children's School and eventually studied under Lee Strasberg at his Actors Studio, the youngest student to be accepted at the time (age 17). The freckled, talented hopeful gathered musical stage experience in such shows as "*Bye Bye Birdie*" playing swooning teen Kim McAfee. She made her illustrious Broadway debut in "*110 in the Shade*", the 1963 musical version of "*The Rainmaker*," and won the "Most Promising Newcomer" Award. She subsequently received the Theatre World Award for her work in the 1965 tunefest "*Dra! The Cat!*"

The attention she received immediately led to her capturing the beguiling title role in the Rodgers and Hammerstein TV musical production of *Cinderella* (1965). Although sweet-voiced stardom was certainly hers on a silver platter, she didn't necessarily carry the sweet tooth for it. Her impact as Cinderella led to her signing with the Walt Disney Studio as their principal ingénue. Co-starring in the rather blah musical showcases *The Happiest Millionaire* (1967) and *The One and Only, Genuine, Original Family Band* (1968) further convinced her that she needed to nip the saccharine stereotype in the bud if she was to grow as an actress and sustain some type of career longevity.

Rebelling against her studio-imposed image, she left Disney determined to pursue roles with more depth, drama and character. Changing her name temporarily to "Lesley Warren" to reinforce her goal, she replaced Barbara Bain in the long-running espionage series *Mission: Impossible* (1966) in 1970, but the audiences were quite cool in their reception to the "new and improved" Lesley and didn't buy her as a femme-fatale replacement for the cool and aloof Ms. Bain. After only one season, she left the show and sought greener pastures in the TV mini-movie market playing a wide range of vulnerable neurotics as well as sexy, worldly ladies.

She made her mark in such sudsy 1970s material as *Love Hate Love* (1971) co-starring 'Ryan O'Neal (I)'; *The Legend of Valentino* (1975); the rags-to-riches story *Harold Robbins' 79 Park Avenue* (1977), for which she won a Golden Globe award; the epic WWII story *Pearl* (1978); *Betrayal* (1978); and *Portrait of a Stripper* (1979).

In the early 1980s, Lesley's movie career resurrected itself with a priceless performance as kingpin James Garner's whiny-voiced, peroxide-blond spitfire Norma Cassady in the musical film slapstick *Victor Victoria* (1982). The role won her nominations for an Academy Award and a Golden Globe, as well as winning a New York Film Critics Award and a People's Choice Award. This scene-stealing turn led to a couple of other quality offbeat films: *Choose Me* (1984) and *Songwriter* (1984), along with the usual quota of TV projects. Warren received nominations for a Golden Globe for *Songwriter*, and a People's Choice Award for *Choose Me*.

She also matured into a steamy, sexier "older woman" type and earned some worldly roles opposite various gorgeous young guns, including Christopher Atkins in the critically-drubbed *A Night in Heaven* (1983). Her riotous "dumb blonde" act had Hollywood discovering her potential as a scatter-brained comedienne, an image she has reinforced over the years with recurring TV guest parts on such popular shows as *Will & Grace* (1998) and *Desperate Housewives* (2004).

Warren's television credits also include a Golden Globe Award performance for Best Actress in the miniseries *79 Park Avenue*. She also was nominated for a Golden Globe and an Emmy for her role in the CBS miniseries *Family of Spies*. Warren received a Cable Ace nomination for her work in *Tennessee Williams' 27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. She also received Cable Ace and Golden Globe nominations for her work in HBO Pictures' *Baja Oklahoma*. Further television credits include leading roles in the NBC telefilm *Evergreen*, and the Emmy winning TNT miniseries *Joseph* (opposite Ben Kingsley). Warren appeared on five seasons of the USA Network drama *In Plain Sight*, as well as the 100th episode of *Psych*, a tribute to the movie *Clue*. Warren recently appeared in three films: *Babysitter*, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, and *Michael* co-starring James Franco and Zachary Quinto.

From Cinderella to sexy mamas, the effervescent Lesley is still going strong in a career now hitting four-and-a-half decades.