

Film News: ‘Sleepless in Seattle’ Director Nora Ephron Dies at Age 71

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CHICAGO – Six years after her diagnosis of preleukemia, filmmaker Nora Ephron died Tuesday, June 26, in a New York hospital at age 71. She leaves behind a legacy that began with her work as a celebrated essayist and continued through a successful film career that earned her three Academy Award nominations for Best Original Screenplay. Her films provided especially memorable showcases for the talents of actresses Meg Ryan and Meryl Streep.

Ephron received her first Oscar nod for “Silkwood,” Mike Nichols’ 1984 drama inspired by the life of whistleblower Karen Silkwood (played by an Oscar-nominated Streep), who died under suspicious circumstances. Ephron’s other two Oscar nominations honored the ace screenwriter for two of her greatest crowd-pleasers, Rob Reiner’s 1989 comedy, “When Harry Met Sally,” and Ephron’s own wildly popular 1994 romance, “Sleepless in Seattle.” Both films featured splendid collaborations between Ephron and Meg Ryan, whose feigned restaurant orgasm in “Sally” has become one of the most classic scenes in the rom-com genre.

Ryan and Ephron would later re-team for the 1998 hit, “You’ve Got Mail,” and the 2000 dud, “Hanging Up.” 23 years after their last collaboration, 1986’s “Heartburn,” Ephron helped Streep score her 16th Oscar nomination for “Julie & Julia,” a lighthearted look at infamous chef Julia Child through the eyes of an adoring blogger (Amy Adams). Ephron’s other directorial credits include “This Is My Life” (1992), “Mixed Nuts” (1994), “Michael” (1996), “Lucky Numbers” (2000) and “Bewitched” (2005). Additional screenwriting credits include “Cookie” (1989) and “My Blue Heaven” (1990).

At the time of her death, Ephron had two film projects in development: a Peggy Lee biopic starring Reese Witherspoon and an adaptation of the 2008 British TV series, “Lost in Austen.” Ephron had recently championed the work of “Girls” creator Lena Dunham, and conducted an interview with the promising young filmmaker on the Criterion edition of her feature debut, “Tiny Furniture.”

Our condolences go out to Ephron’s husband, Nicholas Pileggi, her two sons, and her two sisters.



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