



JANUS FILMS *presents*

WANDA

Written and directed by
BARBARA LODEN



With her first and only feature film—a hard-luck drama she wrote, directed, and starred in—Barbara Loden turned in a groundbreaking work of American independent cinema, bringing to life a kind of character seldom seen on-screen. Set amid a soot-choked Pennsylvania landscape, and shot in an intensely intimate vérité style, the film takes up with distant and soft-spoken Wanda (Loden), who has left her husband, lost custody of her children, and now finds herself alone, drifting between dingy bars and motels, and callously mistreated by a series of men—including a bank robber who ropes her into his next criminal scheme. A rarely seen masterpiece that has nonetheless exerted an outsize influence on generations of artists and filmmakers, *Wanda* is a compassionate and wrenching portrait of a woman stranded on society's margins.

CAST AND CREW

Wanda Goronski Barbara Loden
Norman Dennis Michael Higgins

Written and directed by Barbara Loden
Photographed and edited by Nicholas T. Proferes
Lighting and sound Lars Hedman
Assistant Christopher Cronyn
Sound editor Harvey Greenstein
Sound mix Dick Vorisek

United States | 1970 | 103 minutes | Color | Stereo | 1.37:1 aspect ratio | Screening format: DCP

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BARBARA LODEN

EARLY LIFE

Barbara Loden was born to a poor family in Marion, North Carolina, in 1932. After her parents divorced, she was sent to live with her maternal grandparents, who raised her until she ran away to New York City at the age of sixteen.

In New York, she made her way as a model for romance and pulp magazine covers, and was asked to join the dance line at the famous Copacabana nightclub. In the mid-1950s, her then-husband, Larry Joachim, a television producer and film distributor, recommended her for the role of a “sidekick” on *The Ernie Kovacs Show*.

Loden soon began to land more serious work in the theater, playing alongside Robert Redford in *The Highest Tree* and Ben Gazzara in *Night Circus*. In 1964, she won a Tony for her performance in Arthur Miller’s *After the Fall*.

In her first film roles, Loden was directed by future husband Elia Kazan, whom she had met in 1957, as he was finishing *A Face in the Crowd*. Soon after that, the two began an affair, and Kazan eventually cast Loden in a small part in *Wild River* (1960), and then a larger one in *Splendor in the Grass* (1961). The two married in 1967, and would remain together until her death in 1980.

WANDA

The inspiration for *Wanda* came from a newspaper article. Loden was struck by a story about a woman who was convicted of being an accomplice in a bank robbery; when the judge sentenced her to twenty years in prison, the woman thanked him.

Wanda was funded by attorney Harry Shuster, who offered Loden \$100,000 to make a film in 1966. She ultimately decided to both direct and star in the project herself, and to make it in collaboration with cinematographer and editor Nicholas T. Proferes.

Loden shot *Wanda* over the course of ten weeks in Connecticut and Pennsylvania, on a budget of \$115,000, using 16 mm

reversal film that was later blown up to 35 mm for the movie’s theatrical release. The film had a crew of four: Loden and Proferes, who took over most of the main jobs (including costumes); lighting and sound technician Lars Hedman; and assistant Christopher Cronyn.

LEGACY

Wanda was chosen as the only American entry in the 1970 Venice Film Festival, where it won the International Critics’ Prize for best film. It then went on to further acclaim at the London and San Francisco film festivals, and to show at Cannes in 1971.

Initial reviews upon the film’s commercial release were mixed. The *New York Times* claimed that “it would be hard to imagine better or more tactful or more decently difficult work for a first film.” Pauline Kael of the *New Yorker* wrote, “The movie is very touching—but its truths—Wanda’s small voice, her helplessness, are too minor and muted for a full-length film.”

A company was specifically set up to distribute *Wanda*, but the film failed to connect with audiences. The initial run in New York City was unsuccessful, and the film only received a limited run. For years after that, screenings across the rest of the country were scarce.

Loden collaborated with Proferes on several more screenplays that Kazan described as “devoted to the neglected side of American life,” and she prepared an adaptation of Kate Chopin’s 1899 novel *The Awakening*. But she was unable to make another feature film before her premature death.

In the years since, Loden and her film have continued to gain in recognition. Isabelle Huppert, John Waters, and Barry Jenkins are just a few of the film artists who have paid homage to *Wanda*. As for the critics, the *New Yorker*’s Richard Brody has lauded Loden as a “female counterpart to John Cassavetes,” while Melissa Anderson, writing in the *Village Voice* in 2010, hailed *Wanda* as “a singular vision.” In 2017, the movie was added to the National Film Registry.

LODEN ON WANDA

“I’ve been like [Wanda] myself. I came from a rural region where people have a hard time. They don’t have time for wittily observing the things around them. They’re not concerned about anything more than existing from day to day. They’re not stupid. They’re ignorant. Everything is ugly around them—the architecture, the town, the clothing they wear. Everything they see is ugly.”

“I tried not to explain things too much in the film, not to be too explicit, not to be too verbal. My subject matter is of people who are not too verbal and not aware of their condition.”

“I really hate slick pictures. They’re too perfect to be believable. I don’t mean just in the look. I mean in the rhythm, in the cutting, the music—everything. The slicker the technique is, the slicker the content becomes, until everything turns into Formica, including the people.”

“It’s not a new wave. It’s the old wave. That’s what they used to do. They took a camera, and they went out and shot. Around that act, this whole fantastic apparatus grew up—the Hollywood albatross. They made a ship out of lead. It won’t float anymore.”

Quotes from a March 11, 1971, New York Times profile

RESTORATION INFORMATION

Wanda was restored by the UCLA Film & Television Archive. Funding was provided by The Film Foundation and Gucci. The film was preserved in cooperation with Televentures Corp. and Parlour Pictures from the original 16 mm A/B rolls, a 35 mm print, and the original 35 mm and 16 mm optical tracks. Laboratory services were provided by Cinetech, Ascent Media, Audio Mechanics, and NT Picture and Sound.