

# Women offer their point of view for Showtime anthology



Elisa Rothstein

**S**tarting in August, the Showtime Network will air "**Women: Stories of Passion**", a new, late night anthology series featuring content of an erotic nature. That's nothing new for cable TV. What's unusual about this series is that every one of the 26 episodes was written, produced and directed by women, with many of the episodes photographed by female cinematographers.

One of the creative forces behind the series is Writer/Producer Elisa Rothstein, who wrote a screen adaptation of the Anais Nin story collection, **Delta of Venus**. That New Line feature film release, directed by Zalman King, led to **Women** with Rothstein serving as Creator and Executive Producer.

"This is the first time on television that this genre has been tackled from a woman's perspective," said Rothstein. "That was the primary reason I wanted to do it. You look around in film and on TV and you see so much of this stuff done from the male point of view. I think most of it misses the boat, both visually and in terms of content. I was intrigued by the idea of finally being able to give women a voice in this arena. That was how it started."

Rothstein had three weeks to generate all the scripts. Some were skeptical about the notion of pulling together enough female directors, writers, and producers in so short a time frame. But Rothstein had an ace in the hole - six years ago she started an organization

dedicated to developing the number and range of opportunities available to women in film and television, *Cinewomen*, which now has more than 300 members. Through the organization's activities and its annual Screening Series, sponsored by Panavision, Rothstein had made contact with plenty of talented women filmmakers.

One of those women is Linda Brown, a Cinematographer who is Vice-President of *Behind the Lens*, another organization of camera women. Brown

and Rothstein met at the Cinewomen screening of the film **The Poet's Wife**. Brown shot three episodes of the **Women** anthology: **City of Men** directed by Adele Bertei-Cecchi, **As Always, Madeleine**, and **Woman on a Train**, both directed by Sharyn Blumenthal.

"I really enjoyed every one of them," Brown recalled. "There were different directors and production designers, so I wanted to make them all look unique. It was a great experience to work with such an assortment of people over a short period of time."

"We had five shooting days for each episode. Initially I wanted to use all 7293 film stock because I love the low grain. But for the train episode, about 75 percent of the shots were inside a train set. As we started to talk about light levels and creating the effect of movement, it just seemed that it might be wiser to use the 7298 500-speed film. I saw the transfer and I think it was the right way to go. It was a challenge to use something I wouldn't normally have tried, but the '98 allowed us to move faster and maintain a certain lighting style."

Other cinematographers on the project included Denise Brassard, Anne Misawa, Mark Perry, Phil Parmet, Theo Van de Sande, ASC, and Giselle Chamma. Chamma, a Brazilian Cinematographer living in New York, found the project to be a pleasure. "It was great to work with such professional people," she says. "It was very short, but the whole set-up was very well-organized and smoothly done. That made the project a lot of fun for me."

Upon reviewing the finished episodes, Rothstein concluded: "I think that the way women approach the subject is very different," she says. "It's really about the totality of the experience - the light, the mood, the temperature, the scent, the words - all of the stimuli that you can think of are part of the erotic experience. These are strong characters and strong stories. Each of the episodes stands on its own."

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