

Drama

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heroine, Katie. He decided Barbra Streisand was the only one who could play her.

Streisand agreed.

"I want this to be my next movie," she informed producer Ray Stark.

Stark read the story on a plane. When he landed, he called Laurents and bought it.

Stark had a four-picture deal with Streisand, whom he first put in the stage version of "Funny Girl." As Fanny Brice's son-in-law, Stark controlled casting. Streisand then starred in the film adaptation for him and in "The Owl and the Pussycat."

Both movies were hits, and Stark was convinced this would be the third. He brought on director Sydney Pollack, who loved that much of the story occurred during Hollywood's communist witch hunt.

"This is dynamite," he told Laurents. "This will be the first-ever blacklist movie."

But Pollack said he would only do the film if his friend Robert Redford costarred.

"Barbra had never really worked with a really strong leading man," Pollack argued. "She has a tendency to take over a picture, just by the size of her talent ... Redford makes you come to him as a performer. He holds his ground."

The only problem was, Redford hated the part, calling hero Hubbell Gardiner "a Ken doll." And he wasn't that crazy about Streisand.

"Her reputation is as a very controlling person," he said. "She will direct herself. It'll never work." He had another worry, too.

"She's not going to sing, is she?" Redford asked. "I don't want her to sing in the middle of the movie."

Pollack, who had already directed Redford in "This Property is Condemned" and "Jeremiah Johnson," spent months assuaging the actor's doubts.

The part would be fleshed out, he promised. Streisand would be managed. And this was not a musical. This was a serious movie about right-wing paranoia and political persecution. It was important.

Finally, Redford agreed to do it.

It was a casting coup, a first-time teaming of two of the era's biggest box-office stars. But it also brought new problems. Making Redford's part bigger resulted in Streisand's part becoming smaller.

Also, signing a star the size of Redford — his agent negotiated \$1.2 million, \$200,000 more than Streisand — meant the budget had to increase. That meant the romantic element had to grow, too.

A big movie about the McCarthy era was risky. However, a film about whether the nice Jewish woman and the gorgeous blond man will connect was a safer bet.

And so the political themes were trimmed (and with those cuts went an angry Laurents, who, as the writer, couldn't protect his screenplay from other people's rewrites). As Redford's part was pumped up, so was his ego. A line of dialogue where his character apologizes for being a bad lover was deleted.

Additional cuts came after filming. Still, the shoot went well.

Of course, Pollack and Stark continued to fight over the budget. Both unsure of herself and endlessly controlling, Streisand micromanaged everything. Redford coped by remaining stubbornly cavalier, often strolling onto set at the last minute.

STREISAND 'MESMERIZED'

But onscreen, the chemistry between the stars was obvious. And, later, Laurents suggested why. "She was simply mesmerized by him," he said. "She found him so beautiful. She was infatuated with Robert Redford, who handled it well."

Redford — happily married to his first wife at the time, and raising four kids — was particularly careful. When he met Streisand before the shoot for a get-to-know-you dinner at her home, he brought Pollack for protection.

He was even more careful when it came time to shoot the big love scene. Before he climbed into bed with Streisand, he put on two jockstraps.

As besotted as she was with her costar, Streisand soon felt differently about the movie. After the picture was finished, Stark ordered the film be kept to a tight two hours. First on the cutting-room floor was anything that slowed the pace, which meant even more political material was excised.

So were two of Streisand's best scenes — which could have been two of the biggest scenes in the movie.

In the first sequence, Katie is driving through 1940s Los Angeles when she sees a campus radical giving a speech — just as she once had a decade before. In the second, she convinces Hubbell they have to split up — because she had been named as a communist, and if they stay married, it'll ruin his burgeoning career as a screenwriter.

Streisand fought hard to keep both scenes. The first, she argued, showed what Katie lost by going to Hollywood. The second showed what Katie was willing to sacrifice to protect her beloved husband.

"With that [second] cut, you've lost the reason why Katie makes the selfless decision to let Hubbell go, which means you've also lost the climax of the story and the essence of her character," Streisand argued later. "And dramatically, you've lost the moment when the politics and the love story come together."

But Pollack stood firm. The scenes remained cut.

In the end, the movie wasn't what those making it had hoped it would be. Pollack felt he had to compromise a lot. Laurents complained this wasn't the story he wanted to tell. Streisand wondered if those final edits might have cost her an Oscar.

Redford? He drove himself to the Times Square premiere — and didn't stop. "I just drove right past it, and kept going and it felt so great," he said. It was just another job, and it was over.

But producer Stark — and the audience — got exactly what they wanted: A Hollywood hit, with movie stars making out, Streisand singing (albeit only over the credits), and a bittersweet ending guaranteed to make everyone reach for the Kleenex.

It may be hard to imagine a time when movie audiences flocked to a period piece boasting nothing but two stars and a couple of kisses. It was a grown-up story with no superheroes. But back then, that was the way we were.



PHOTO PROVIDED

OC Ski Club members get together at Crested Butte, Colorado, in 2018.



Left: An Albany Ski Club summer outing at Grafton Lake in 2021. Right: Club members at a racing event in 2021 at Pico Mountain Ski Resort in Vermont.



Clubs

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adult one-day ticket often costs over \$100 — a price that is exorbitant for many, especially families.

"Skiing has become very expensive, it's always been expensive," said Tim Jansen, the president of the Albany Ski Club. "If you're taking four or six people or so, some of these areas are \$200 a ticket. If you have a family of six times \$200, that's \$1,200 for a day of tickets plus food and the Mercedes to get the skis in to get there."

As a result, several of the local ski clubs have joined the New York Capital District Ski Council, a coalition of ski and snowboarding clubs from the Capital Region, Adirondacks and Central New York. With this membership, the clubs are able to enjoy Council Ski Days, which includes discounted tickets on specific days at various mountains and resorts in the Northeast, such as Maple Ski Ridge, Stratton Mountain Resort and Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort.

"The price can come down to \$30 to \$80 per lift ticket," said NYCDCSC treasurer Sally Vanderzee, also noting that season passes also help to bring costs down.

Additionally, many of the clubs offer discounted trips to both domestic and international ski areas. The Out of Control Ski Club in Albany, most notably, books week-long ski trips to destinations in the United States, Canada and even Europe, as well as extended weekend trips to Northeast mountains like Stowe, Jay Peak and Sunday River.

COUPLE OF ROUGH YEARS

And then came a bump in the road: COVID-19.

During the pandemic, both the ski clubs and mountain resorts found themselves struggling. Several mountains, such as Okemo, Pico and Sugarbush, were forced to suspend operations indefinitely.

Consequently, the NYCDCSC had difficulty offering their usual discounted prices.

"Mountains were closed for a while, and really weren't willing to negotiate 'deals' with us because they were losing money at the time," Vanderzee said.

To make matters even

worse, the ski clubs found their memberships slipping. Prior to the pandemic, OC Ski Club had approximately 1,500 members, according to the vice president of organized skiing, Cynthia Ward. Now, the club is trying to make its way back up to 1,000 members.

"Obviously during COVID we lost some members — people did not renew and we didn't get new members. We couldn't really recruit new members; we didn't have much to offer," said Ward.

Similarly, ASC lost a good chunk of its membership. "Probably a good 30% of our members did not renew after COVID," said Jansen. "But we remain strong."

A couple of clubs, such as SWC, did manage to pull through the worst of the pandemic with little injury, but not without plenty of effort and adaptation. The club abided by all state and federal restrictions with thorough cleaning, masking and vaccination requirements, and even allowed families to rent out the club's entire property for a week at a time.

"We were able to offer to our membership 90% of the same opportunities they would have had pre-COVID," said John Bidell, the president of SWC.

OPPORTUNITIES TO BOND

Even with these struggles and shifts, one thing has remained constant in every ski club: camaraderie.

With numerous ski trips, friendly competitions, and event nights, club members have countless opportunities to bond with their fellow skiers and snowboarders. And that is exactly what happens.

"We're a group of friends that are like family," Jansen said, also noting that the family-friendly element of the club helps to bond even those of wildly different ages. "What I've noticed is where the young kids and the old people — they mingle right together and you wouldn't even know that they were 50 years apart."

To build the community even further, some of the clubs are year-round, offering activities and events during the spring, summer and fall in addition to their usual winter operations. The OC Ski Club, for example, holds a yearly volleyball tournament that attracts teams from across the Northeast,

according to Ward. SWC also enjoys golfing, kayaking and cycling.

"The clubs are not just skiing," Matt Quackenbush, the vice president of NYCDCSC, said in an email. "I have also partied with club members, played golf, volleyball, football — back in the day — hiked, biked, kayaked, canoed, camped and many other group events planned by the clubs I have belonged to."

Ward also experienced this sense of community and friendship-building 25 years ago when she moved to Albany.

"I had no friends and no family, and most of my friends and family now come from the ski club," Ward said. "I've made very long-lasting friendships and most of my social activities, if they don't involve the ski club, they certainly involve friends that I've met in the ski club. It's definitely a wonderful place to make social connections."

But this camaraderie is not limited to each individual club. With the NYCDCSC, friendships often blossom between clubs as members from each unite for council-wide events and trips. Plus, since each club offers different activities; some people even hold memberships to multiple clubs in order to fulfill all of their interests and goals.

"It's a very multifaceted menu you could choose from," Bidell said. "If you're interested in traveling out west, you join MetroLand or Albany Ski Club and look at what their offerings are. OC does international trips and trips out west."

A NEW CONCERN

However, as the issues of the pandemic shift to the sidelines, the local ski clubs face a new problem: succession.

In order to maintain business and continue building the camaraderie that has remained so prevalent through even the toughest of times, clubs are having to think about how to encourage younger generations to join.

"Succession planning is very important," Bidell said. "We need to be relevant to families now — especially young families — we need to be relevant to millennials."

Both the NYCDCSC and SWC admit to struggling with the issue.

"Lately, we have fallen short in promoting younger

racers to the sport/clubs," said Vanderzee in an email.

"I try to engage in conversations with young people ... and I say, 'hey, does this thing make sense, does this club make sense, this whole format? And would you be interested in coming up there?'" Bidell said. "I get a lot of feedback that it's, to some of the more adventurous of people — the hikers, the skiers, the more hardcore skiers — it's a deal and a half and they love it, but we need to have more utilization of the property than that."

Others, however, see hope when looking at the trends of younger generations on the slopes.

"If you look at the ski racing around Willard Mountain and West Mountain, over the years, it kind of dropped off with the young people, and now their programs are full... so the younger ones are getting more involved in different areas and hopefully it will continue in the clubs the same way," said Jansen.

Not only would the participation of younger generations benefit the ski clubs, but it would also benefit the young people themselves as they delve into the outdoors and experience that trademark camaraderie.

"It's an individual sport but it's still a team sport and the socialization is so critical, especially for young kids to be able to participate," said Jansen.

When Streed is out on the slopes now, he says that he sees "so many kids, so many people, so many adults, just buried on their cellphones," a stark contrast to the togetherness he felt at the dinner table in Vermont decades ago.

"Especially when you're riding a gondola at a resort where you're enclosed in this little capsule, the first thing so many people do is pull out their cell phone — they don't converse with the people they're riding with," said Streed. "I usually break that silence."

Recently at Gore Mountain, Streed struck up a conversation with the two young men he sat next to on the ski lift. Turns out, those two men knew his niece's family.

"It's a small world," said Streed. A small world — a community — that can be found even during a pandemic, even during generational change, on a ski lift.



PETER HINES



The fireplace room inside the Schenectady Winter Sports Club's house in Waterbury Center, Vt.