

JENNIFER WOLFE

GRANDE DAMES

Documenting Street Style for *Advanced Style*



Joyce Carpati is an 80 year old who embodies elegance with her signature braid and pearls, passing on her fashion secrets (and vintage Chanel bags) to her willing granddaughter.

Director and cinematographer Lina Plioplyte's documentary feature *Advanced Style The Movie* is the story behind the fashion blog of the same name that became an international phenomenon. Following a successful two-month theatrical run, the film was released on DVD in October. *Advanced Style The Movie* follows seven New Yorkers, aged 62 to 95, whose eclectic personal style and vital spirit have guided their approach to aging.

In 2008, newly arrived in New York City, street photographer Ari Seth Cohen began documenting the style of the city's fashionable older women. His blog received immediate attention, catapulting his subjects into the spotlight and even landing several of them lucrative modeling gigs. The *Advanced Style* blog also garnered a book deal for Cohen, who began to look for new ways to promote the brand.

Plioplyte found herself drawn to the project, initially planned as a series of web videos, because of her close relationship with her own grandmother. The Lithuanian-born, Brooklyn-based filmmaker shot more than 200 hours of footage of her subjects—ranging from a glamorous 81-year-old dancer from the legendary Apollo Theater and an 80-year-old owner of an Upper West Side boutique to a 93-year-old West Village artist known for her iconic red eyelashes crafted from her own hair—before finally acknowledging that she had embarked on creating a full-length feature documentary.

Footage was acquired over more than two years, first using a Panasonic AG-HVX200 DVCPRO HD camcorder Plioplyte had access to through her day job shooting videos for *Nylon* magazine, then with a Canon EOS 7D digital SLR camera that she purchased herself and outfitted with a set of Canon prime lenses.

"I liked the look at the time, that kind of shallow focus, but now it's so overdone," Plioplyte says about employing the 7D. "When I look back, I don't



Lynn Dell Cohen (at left, with Ilona Smithkin) is the 80-year-old self-proclaimed "Countess of Glamour" with a penchant for over-the-top accessories and owner of a storied boutique on the Upper West Side.



Ilona Royce Smithkin, a 93 year old recognized by her colorful ensembles and iconic red eyelashes, established an early career as an artist, painting the likes of Ayn Rand, only to fully embrace her potential in her 90s, when she understands the value of what she can offer to others.

know if I would do it [the same way] again because of the hours and hours of footage that needed to be synced. There's already so much to think about when you are shooting, and, as a one-woman band, it was very challenging to capture sound and video with separate tools."

At the same time, the DSLR camera's small size allowed an intimacy with the film's subjects that a larger camera wouldn't have. "I liked how small and intimate the camera felt," she relates. "It felt very personal, and I don't think we would have gotten away with shooting inside the hospital or other situations like that without it. You don't want to intrude too much upon the space."

During interviews, Plioplyte worked to help the

stylish seniors relax in front of the camera, warming them up with stories about her grandmother. "They're natural performers, so the hardest part was to make them forget the camera existed, that it was rolling," she says. "Having a really small camera helps to create that warmth and trust."

Editing and postproduction for *Advanced Style* took another two years. Plioplyte first executed a rough cut of the film in Apple Final Cut Pro, then launched a crowdfunding campaign that raised more than \$55,000 from 866 backers to help cover postproduction costs. With funding in place, she moved to an Adobe Premiere Pro workflow. "I'm really thankful for Premiere," she says. "The fact that we could export XML files from Final Cut Pro



PHOTOS BY ARI SEITH COHEN

The youngest of the ladies at 62, Tziporah Salamon rides around New York City on her Bianchi bicycle, parading her exquisite collection of vintage items collected over a lifetime, beginning the transition toward understanding what will truly bring her fulfillment.

and open the same footage in Premiere and begin working on it right away was incredible. It was great not to have to start from scratch, and using [Red Giant] PluralEyes, we were able to sync footage in the blink of an eye," she continues.

"This is probably one of the first docs to be cut entirely in Premiere," she adds. "After a weekend of working with it, I was showing friends. 'Look how easy it is, and you don't have to conform any footage.'"

A transatlantic effort, the film's sound was mixed by Tom Joyce at Factory Studios in London, while color correction was handled in Brooklyn under the expertise of Spanish-born Begonia Colomar. Colomar, whose credits as a colorist include *Minority Report* and *The Day After Tomorrow*, employed a Blackmagic DaVinci Resolve system for the job, seamlessly blending footage acquired over the course of nearly three years.

"Begonia Colomar was the one who made this film such a pleasure to watch," Plioplyte insists. "She blended literally three years of filming under different conditions, with different cameras—and spanning my own personal growth as a filmmaker—into very watchable sequences of color and texture and celebration of personal style. When you get to work with other people who understand your vision, magic really does happen, and I am extremely happy about that." **dv**