



Neal Miller

Writer-Producer-Director of “RAISING FLAG”

In 1976, long before “independent” films became a force at the box office, Neal Miller began his award-winning career as an “Indy” filmmaker. Unlike many of his peers, the then Chicago writer/producer ignored the prevailing wisdom that you have to live in Hollywood to make it, and it never hindered his ability to mount critically-acclaimed productions with major stars and directors – including **Alan Arkin, Susan Sarandon, Christopher Walken, Joanne Woodward, Virginia Madsen, Darryl Hannah, Fred Gwynn, Sean Young** and **Jonathan Demme**. But then, Neal Miller has always marched to his own drum-beat.

Instead of producing ‘edgy’ films for the 18- to 34-year-old demographic that Hollywood covets, Neal adapted what he regards as timeless stories written by great American authors. When financing for his projects was difficult to find, Neal and his wife and partner Nancy put up their own hard-earned assets – at times taking them perilously close to bankruptcy. Despite the challenges, Neal has produced an enduring body of work that has been hailed by many of the nation’s top critics and endorsed by major film festivals (including Sundance).

Among other industry “firsts”. Neal was responsible for casting **Darryl Hannah** and **Virginia Madsen** in their first film roles, pairing **Susan Sarandon** and **Christopher Walken** in one of their most celebrated performances, and giving **Joanne Woodward** the opportunity to direct her first feature-length project. He is also notably the only filmmaker to produce six films for the *American Playhouse series on PBS* – which continues to rank as a hallmark in television history. *The New York Times* called Neal’s

adaptation of an **F. Scott Fitzgerald** story an example of “what American Playhouse did best.”

History - Neal grew up in Chicago, the offspring of immigrant grandparents who were in the junk business. He excelled in basketball and won the city title for his high school with two free throws in the final seconds of the championship game. Neal went on to play basketball at the University of Illinois where he received a B.S degree in Mechanical Engineering.

For the next five years, Neal was an information systems consultant for Brunswick Corporation and Litton Industries while working nights on a master’s degree in computer science at Illinois Institute of Technology. In 1970, he became general manager of the venture capital fund, High Technology Investments, Inc., and served as president and chairman of the board of several corporations in the fund's portfolio. Three years later, Neal formed New Century Management, a real estate development company that acquired and renovated Victorian apartment buildings in Chicago.

Entering the Film Business - It was a chance meeting with Robert H. Greenberg, who had provided gap financing for several of producer Joe Levine’s films (“The Lion in Winter”, “The Producers”, “The Graduate”), that got Neal hooked on film. In 1976, he formed Rubicon Productions, Ltd, and his first project was a half-hour pilot titled “*The Temptation of Charles C. Charlie*,” adapted from a **Grace Paley** story. For the lead, Neal cast seventeen-year-old **Darryl Hannah** in her first dramatic role. The film eventually led to the mini-series “Sense of Humor,” which became the backbone of the PBS series *American Playhouse* in its first broadcast year.

American Playhouse Productions - The first film in the Sense of Humor min-series, “*Come Along With Me*,” was directed by **Joanne Woodward** and starred **Estelle Parsons**, drawing rave reviews for both. The second film, “*Who Am I This Time?*,” co-starred **Susan Sarandon** and **Christopher Walken** in an off-beat love story that was

directed by **Jonathan Demme** immediately after his sleeper success “Melvin & Howard.” One of the toughest critics in the nation, **Howard Rosenberg** of the *Los Angeles Times*, called “*Who Am I This Time?*” “a smashing adaptation of a **Kurt Vonnegut** story.” *Daily Variety* chimed in with praise for Demme (“directed with finesse”) and Neal (“coaxes his characters along with becoming humor”). And Pulitzer Prize-winning critic **Tom Shales** of the *Washington Post* called it “a ripe slice of honeydew, a really beguiling charmer.” “*Who Am I This Time?*” went on to win the “Best Television Production Award” at the *Setmana Internacional De Cinema de Barcelona*, invitational screenings in Russia (ACT I) and Italy (*Venice Film Festival*), and at the *San Francisco International Film Festival*.

Neal’s third production for American Playhouse was the critically-acclaimed “*Any Friend of Nicholas Nickleby is a Friend of Mine*,” based on a **Ray Bradbury** story. It was followed by another hit, “*A Matter of Principle*,” with **Alan Arkin**, **Barbara Dana**, and **Virginia Madsen**. *Daily Variety* wrote: “‘American Playhouse’ hits its stride with one of the finer Christmas specials of this or any recent past season. ‘*A Matter of Principle*’ reflects genuine truths in rural wrappings... the drama sings of the redeeming values of love, no matter what form it takes.” *TV Guide* noted that the film “deserves to become an annual TV tradition. Don’t miss one of the dramatic firecrackers of 1984.”

Neal’s next production, “*The Roommate*”, based on a **John Updike** story, was the buzz of the original *Sundance Film Festival*, but lost out to “Blood Simple.” However, it went on to win the Gran Prix at the *Los Angeles International Film Festival* as well as Special Jury Awards at the *San Francisco and USA Film (Dallas) Festivals*. “*The Roommate*” was also an official selection of the *Chicago and Munich Film Festivals* as well as the *American Independent Film Market* in New York. Among its accolades, **Sheila Benson** of the *Los Angeles Times* called it “a gem!” and the *Hollywood Reporter* wrote: “high grades are due Neal Miller, who has written a human and often subtle narrative.”

Neal’s last production for Playhouse was “*Under the Biltmore Clock*,” which also

marked his directorial debut. Starring **Sean Young**, the adaptation of an **F. Scott Fitzgerald** story was lauded by the *New York Times* as “one of the examples of what American Playhouse did best” and called “first class” by the *Chicago Tribune*.

After American Playhouse - In 1993, Neal wrote and directed the *ABC After-School Special*, “*Love Hurts*”, which won the *Golden Apple Award* from the National Educational Film Video Festival. In 1998, *Walt Disney Pictures* acquired Neal’s screenplay based on the **Isaac Asimov** story, “**Bicentennial Man**.” He served as a producer on the **Chris Columbus** production starring **Robin Williams**.

Neal’s most recent project is “*Raising Flagg*”, which renewed his collaboration with **Alan Arkin** and **Barbara Dana** and marks his feature film directorial debut.