

Elaine Stritch, That Brassy Showbiz Legend, Dies

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The bright lights on Broadway—and showbiz, for that matter—will dim today. And they may never shine as bright. Elaine Stritch, that sharp-tongued, brassy Broadway actress/singer/legend has died.



Shoot Me

Stritch, a Tony and Emmy winner, passed away Thursday at her Birmingham, Mich., home. She was 89.

Few Broadway actresses have been able to secure career longevity with quite the spunk Stritch had. Her longevity, durability, savage banter on aging, and much more, never tired. Most people may recall her recent stint in NBC's long-running *30 Rock*—she played Alec Baldwin's mother. However, a recent documentary revolving around her indelible career, [Elaine Stritch: Shoot Me](#), generated terrific buzz and featured the legend during some of her most vulnerable if not haunting times—professionally and emotionally. It remains one of the more provocative "celebrity" documentaries of the last decade.

Stritch's career began its fascinating trajectory in the 1940s. By the early 1950s, she turned more heads in the revival of "Pal Joey," that delicious Rodgers and Hart/John O'Hara musical, in which she morphed

into a sharp-witted reporter. Other memorable roles followed, including 1955's "Bus Stop," for which she nabbed a Tony nom.

Few people may know this: Stritch was the first Trixie on *The Honeymooners*—she was let go before the first show aired.

When Noël Coward came knocking, Stritch's career seemed destined to go places few stage actresses have travelled. Coward's 1961 musical, for instance, "Sail Away," revolved around Stritch's character, a plucky hostess of a cruise ship. The show didn't sail off into the sunset, but it did earn Stritch another Tony nod. And for those that actually saw her perform as beleaguered Martha in Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" they may still be haunted by her resilient performance.

Stritch's celebrity went nuclear after Stephen Sondheim's "Company" (1970)—let's face it, as a cynical society gal, her vodka-drenched anthem, "The Ladies Who Lunch," brought down the house and went on to become her signature number. Another Tony nom followed and she was part of the Sondheim playbook, emanating an embraceable mystique of both guts and "survival." Her rendition of "I'm Still Here" remains cherished—it actually became the focal point of her well-received 2001 one-woman show, "Elaine Stritch at Liberty."

But Stritch did well off the stage, too. With numerous appearances in high-profile films—Woody Allen's *September* (1987) and *Small Time Crooks* (2000), to note but two—and [TV's 30 Rock](#), of course.

Last year, with her health failing—she had diabetes and had quit drinking several times—she vacated her precious Carlyle Hotel residence in New York City and returned to her Michigan home to be closer to relatives.

Stritch may have made her final bow in the here and now, but her immense talent and boisterous spirit seems destined to live on.



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