



Barclay, Paris (b. 1956)

by Linda Rapp

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Paris Barclay in 2009.
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An award-winning television director, Paris Barclay is also an activist for glbtq rights, including marriage equality and the opportunity to adopt children as he and his husband have done.

Barclay began life far from the glamour of Hollywood. Born June 30, 1956 in Chicago Heights, Illinois, he grew up in the neighboring lower middle-class suburb of Harvey.

Existence for his family was not easy. Barclay's parents married young and had seven children, for whom, Barclay wrote, his father "worked virtually around the clock to provide." His parents' marriage was not a happy one, but the couple remained together for some two decades because divorce was not particularly well accepted socially in that day and in their community.

Despite the unpromising circumstances of his early life, Barclay excelled at both academics and sports at school. He was recruited to be a scholarship student at the La Lumiere School for Boys, an exclusive, all-male Catholic boarding school in northern Indiana that was seeking to increase the diversity of its student body by recruiting exceptionally well-qualified minority students.

As the first African American there, Barclay felt more conscious of his racial difference than of his sexual difference. As he told Randy Shulman of *Metro Weekly*, "I . . . spent a lot of time separated even more because of being black than because I may have potentially been gay. Eventually, I overachieved to make up for it and became the number one student in the class."

Barclay's accomplishments at La Lumiere went beyond the classroom: he took an interest in the performing arts and began writing music.

In the class ahead of Barclay's was future Chief Justice of the United States John Roberts, with whom Barclay worked on the football team, the student newspaper, and in productions of the drama club.

Both young men graduated first in their classes and went on to Harvard University, where, wrote Barclay in an open letter to Roberts in *The Advocate*, for which he was a columnist for several years, in September 2005, "we separated into worlds that rarely connected" despite the close connections of their high school years.

Noting that when Roberts had been nominated to the Supreme Court he had been "inundated by calls to comment on [Roberts's] character and [their] school days together," Barclay conceded that "none of us [from La Lumiere] has any idea who you are today . . . [or] what the crucible of the Supreme Court will make of you."

He expressed concern about Roberts's anti-choice positions; nevertheless, he saw reason for hope in Roberts's having done "pro bono work on a Supreme Court ruling that to this day helps protect gay people from discrimination," evidently a reference to Roberts's consultation with attorneys who argued the

landmark case, *Romer v. Evans*.

Barclay expressed the wish that Roberts would "turn his back on political pressure, embrace the true freedom of a lifetime appointment, and decide the cases before [him] with a deep sense of the equality of all the people that our Constitution uses as a touchstone," but he described himself as "hoping and praying" for rather than expecting such an outcome.

It was while Barclay was at Harvard that he recognized his homosexuality and "had [his] first real boyfriend." Unfortunately he also had his first experience of homophobic violence when he was badly beaten after leaving a gay bar in South Boston. A sympathetic taxi driver delivered him to Harvard Square without charging a fare.

Looking back, Barclay told Shulman, "the lesson is that there are horrible, negative, evil people in this world and then there are cab drivers who will get you safely to where you are going for nothing. That's the balance of the world. And I want to be on the cab driver side if I can."

At Harvard, Barclay majored in English literature. He also developed his own creative talents, writing over a dozen musicals, two of which were produced as part of the university's prestigious Hasty Pudding shows.

After his graduation in 1979 Barclay went to New York, where he worked as an ad copywriter while continuing to write musicals and studying with Stephen Sondheim to improve his craft.

Barclay's *On Hold with Music* was produced off Broadway in 1984. It was not a success, but, reflected Barclay, "the best thing that came of it was that Sondheim sat me down and just went through, in detail, what was wrong with it. He basically tore it apart—but in a very educational way."

The next year Barclay brought an adaptation of Richard Wright's short story "Almos' a Man" to the stage at SoHo Rep. The show was generally well received, but when Wright's widow read an unfavorable review in the *New York Times*, Barclay told Tom Russo of the *Boston Globe*, "she stopped us from ever doing the show again. We couldn't even extend the run."

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, Barclay worked as a director of music videos and commercials. He directed music videos of such artists as Janet Jackson, Bob Dylan, New Kids on the Block, and, most notably, LL Cool J.

Then Barclay moved to Los Angeles to pursue opportunities in film and television.

In 1996 he directed the movie *Don't Be a Menace to South Central While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood*, a largely forgettable comic vehicle for actors Shawn, Marlon, and Keenan Ivory Wayans.

Barclay continued his work in television, which generally consisted of directing single episodes of shows until 1997, when he joined the team of the Steven Bochco production *NYPD Blue*. Barclay won Emmy Awards for Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series in 1998 and 1999.

With *NYPD Blue* ending its run, Barclay worked with Bochco to create a new drama series with a hospital setting, *City of Angels*, which, atypically, featured a cast of actors who were mostly not white. It starred Blair Underwood and Vivica Fox.

Barclay stated to Tom Feran of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* that *City of Angels* "was conceived and designed as a black drama with its primary lead characters black" but one that reflected American diversity with the inclusion of Latinos, Asian Americans, and older people as characters. Its writing staff was half African-

American and its production crew was over seventy percent minority and women.

Despite a promising start with the series, Barclay quit *City of Angels* after only four episodes, citing creative differences with Bochco as the reason for his early departure. For his work as co-creator, writer, and director of *City of Angels*, he received an NAACP Image Award. He later received another NAACP Image Award for his direction of an episode of *Cold Case*.

Barclay has remained much in demand as a director. "I'm famous for doing a lot of episode number two's," he told Renee Montagne of NPR's *Morning Edition*. "After someone has spent, like millions on the pilot, I'm the person that they call and say, 'Okay, we're doing this second episode, and we only have \$2.95. But we want it to look exactly like the 10 to 20 million dollar pilot.'"

Barclay has directed well over 100 episodes of series television. Among the series to which he has lent his talents are such prominent shows as *The West Wing*, *Law & Order*, *ER*, *Lost*, *Weeds*, *Monk*, *Cold Case*, *House*, *M.D.*, *CSI*, *Glee*, and *NCIS: Los Angeles*. He is the executive producer as well as the principal director of the HBO series *In Treatment*.

He was honored with Emmy Award nominations for his work on *The West Wing* in 2002 and *Glee* in 2010. He has also been nominated for numerous Directors Guild of America Awards, and is the only person to have been nominated for DGA Awards for both a comedy and a drama series two years in a row.

At the same time that he was pursuing his directorial career, Barclay returned to his roots with the musical *One Red Flower: Letters from 'Nam*, based on Bernard Edelman's book *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (1985). He eventually chose seven letters that the characters representing actual soldiers present both in reading and in song. The show, which has been described as a rock opera, was written in 2001 and premiered in Washington, D. C. in 2004.

"It's a little like *West Wing*," Barclay stated to Russo, "in that even though it's all very messy and intricate and problematic, there's an underlying spirit of patriotism and a belief and faith in our country that elevates it all."

In the 1990s, Barclay read a script by a young UCLA graduate named Dustin Lance Black and encouraged him to continue writing. Black credits him for serving as his mentor when he was attempting to break into the film and television industry.

In 2003, Barclay and Black teamed up to develop a story about Pedro Zamora, the HIV-positive, openly gay man who appeared in the 1994 season of MTV's reality show *The Real World*. In 2009, the story was finally brought to television as *Pedro*, a 90-minute MTV movie produced by Barclay and directed by Nick Oceano, with a screenplay by Black.

In 2001 Barclay won the GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) Stephen F. Kolzak Award for his work in combating homophobia. He has also supported the Human Rights Campaign, the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, and Project Angel Food, among other causes.

Barclay is the long-time partner of Christopher Mason, an executive in the food industry. The couple had airline tickets for a flight on September 11, 2001 but opted to fly to California a day earlier; otherwise, they would have been on one of the planes that were crashed into the World Trade Center.

"After that, Paris and I came to the conclusion that we needed to make a difference in the world," Mason told Anne Stockwell of *The Advocate*. "For us, that meant adopting some kids."

Mindful of the fact that African-American boys are the least likely children to be adopted, Barclay and Mason chose to add two such sons to their family.

On September 14, 2008, Barclay and Mason were married in a ceremony that was at once personal and political. Their sons, William and Cyrus, served as ring-bearers. Barclay and Mason also used their nuptials as an event to raise funds for the election of Barack Obama and for Equality California's campaign against Proposition 8.

When asked by Shulman about his views on the comparison of the movement for glbtq rights and the movement for civil rights for African Americans in the 1960s, Barclay stated, "I feel that if we really believe in civil rights, just as Jesse Jackson was always saying with the Rainbow Coalition, we believe in them for everybody, and that's that. End of story. It actually irritates me when people are upset about the parallel as if, in some way, it cheapens the black civil rights movement. To have true equality for all men and women in the United States means everybody. It doesn't mean you get to pick your constituency."

In response to a further question from Shulman, Barclay expressed his support for the transgender community, declaring that "if they are people who are discriminated against, people we have a relationship with, then we should put them on our list of people that we're going to go down with."

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About the Author

Linda Rapp teaches French and Spanish at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. She freelances as a writer, tutor, and translator. She is Assistant to the General Editor of www.glbtq.com.