

The New York Times

Charlotte Zwerin, 72, Maker of Documentaries on Artists

by Douglas Martin

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Charlotte Zwerin, a documentary filmmaker known for insightful depictions of visual and performing artists like Christo, Willem de Kooning, Ella Fitzgerald and Thelonious Monk, died on Thursday at her home in Manhattan. She was 72.

The cause was lung cancer, her niece Lisa Tesone said.

Ms. Zwerin worked for many years with David and Albert Maysles, early practitioners of the documentary genre known as *cinéma vérité*, which uses a small camera to capture the drama of daily experience. Her editing for them was of such quality that they gave her credit as the third director of well-known films like "Gimme Shelter" (1970), an account of the Rolling Stones' 1969 tour of the United States.

It was her decision to include the band members' reactions to the killing of a fan on the stage of a concert at the Altamont Speedway in Livermore, Calif., the site of the tour's last concert.

"The real hero of the making of the film was Charlotte Zwerin, who edited it and got a directing credit," Stephen Lighthill, a cameraman, said in an interview with Salon.com. "I was stunned with what she got out of my footage. She compressed it and gave you a sense of a buildup of tragedy that you otherwise wouldn't have."

Other films she did with the Maysles included "Salesman" (1969), an account of four real-life sales representatives of the American Bible Company, and "Running Fence" (1978), a chronicle of the successful efforts of the artist Christo and his wife, Jeanne-Claude, to erect a 24-mile fabric fence in the California hills.

Her own films included "Thelonious Monk: Straight No Chaser" (1989), which contained rarely seen clips of the brilliant and eccentric jazz pianist; "Arshile Gorky" (1982), a profile of the abstract painter; "Sculpture of Spaces: Noguchi" (1995); "American Masters -- Ella Fitzgerald: Something to Live For" (1999), a biography narrated by Tony Bennett; and "Toru Takemitsu: Music for the Movies" (1994), an examination of the Japanese composer. The Museum of Modern Art had a retrospective of her works last year.

Charlotte Mitchell was born on Aug. 15, 1931, in Detroit and developed her affection for film and music as a child by attending an entertainment event in Detroit called "Big Band and a Movie." First came a live band, then the film, she said in an interview with The New York Times last year.

She attended Wayne State University, where she established a film society before moving to New York and finding work as a librarian at CBS for its documentary series "The 20th Century." She slowly worked her way up to editor, then joined Drew Associates, where Robert Drew was pioneering "direct cinema," as cinéma vérité was also called. She met the Maysleses at Drew.

She told The Times she stopped working with the Maysles because they would not let her produce. "They cast an awful long shadow, and it came time for me to get out of it," she said.

On her own films she became known for a personal signature characterized by innovative editing. Leonard Feather, a critic for The Los Angeles Times, said that her film on Monk provided "a closer glance behind the veil of this half-hidden, exotically gifted figure than could ever be observed during his sadly aborted career."

Ms. Zwerin was divorced from Michael Zwerin, a jazz critic. She is survived by her brother, Charles Mitchell, and sister, Margaret Tesone, both of Detroit.

***Correction:** January 31, 2004, Saturday An obituary of the documentary film maker Charlotte Zwerin on Tuesday misstated the location of the fatal stabbing of a fan at a 1969 Rolling Stones concert shown in "Gimme Shelter," a film she edited. It occurred in front of the stage, not onstage.*

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