

Introduction to Carla Berkowitz. 1:37 min. Interview: Raymond Elman.  
Post-Production: Jocelyne Menendez. Music: Sofia Rosenblatt.  
**Recorded via Zoom**, 3/18/2021, Miami.

# Carla Berkowitz Brings “Critical Thinking” to the Screen

By Elman + Menendez

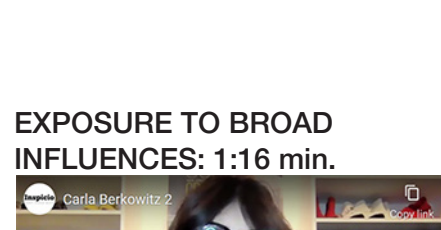
**CARLA BERKOWITZ** is the executive producer of the highly acclaimed independent feature film *Critical Thinking*. The film, directed by and starring Emmy-award winning actor John Leguizamo, tells the true story of the 1998 Miami Jackson Senior High School chess team, which was the first LatinX inner city team to win the U.S. National Chess Championship. Berkowitz spent more than 20 years developing the project from story to screenplay to film.

Berkowitz was born in Caracas, Venezuela, and moved to Miami, Florida, at the age of nine. She attended Miami Beach High School and became a thespian in her school's theater program. After high school, she moved back to Venezuela to study art and communications for two years. Berkowitz moved back to Miami and graduated from the University of Miami with a double major in Judaic Studies and Political Science.

Berkowitz also has a career in the fitness video industry, where she produced 15 internationally sold fitness videos. She's is the founder of Perfect Balance World, a yoga brand focused on introducing Physics-Based Yoga clothing engineered to improve performance on the mat. She started her city's first dark-candle-light yoga studio and pioneered the use of hip-hop, rap, and indie rock to replace traditional meditative music for yoga.

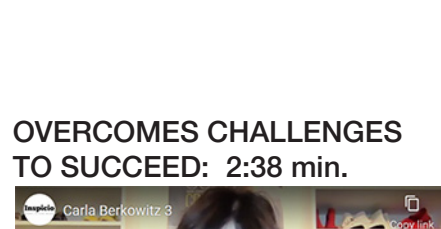
The videos below were **recorded via Zoom**, are organized by topic, and run between 30 seconds and 6 minutes. Click on any video. You must be connected to the Internet to view the videos.

**DEVELOP A VOICE: 1:32 min.**



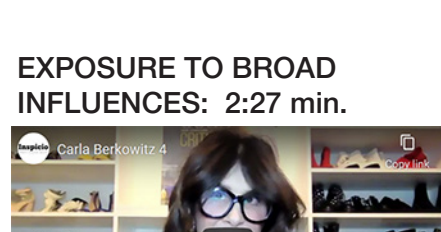
*Where did you grow up and what's your earliest memory of art of any discipline?*

**EXPOSURE TO BROAD INFLUENCES: 1:16 min.**



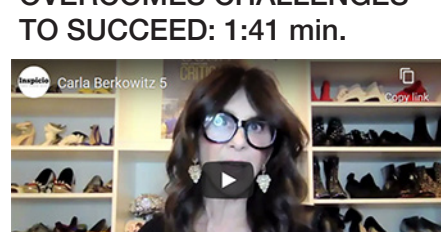
*You said you went back to Venezuela for your education — was that for high school or college?*

**OVERCOMES CHALLENGES TO SUCCEED: 2:38 min.**



*When your family moved from Venezuela to Miami, did you join the Venezuelan immigrant community?*

**EXPOSURE TO BROAD INFLUENCES: 2:27 min.**



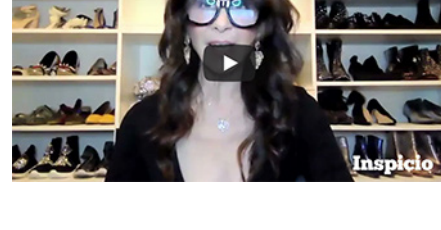
*Were your parents Holocaust survivors or your grandparents?*

**OVERCOMES CHALLENGES TO SUCCEED: 1:41 min.**



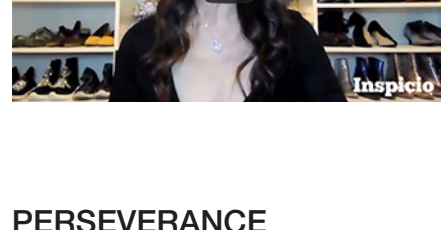
*Where did you go to school in the Miami area?*

**SERENDIPITY: 0:54 sec.**



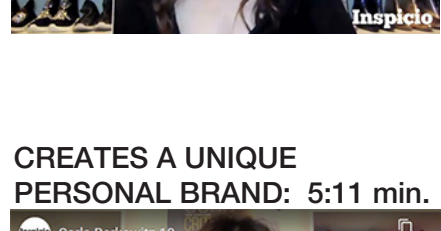
*Joseph Krutel, who was a co-producer with you on “Critical Thinking,” and Mitchell Kaplan, founder of Books & Books, the Miami Book Fair, and the Mazur Kaplan Company (film production), went to Miami Beach High. Did you know them in high school?*

**DEVELOP A VOICE: 4:19 min.**



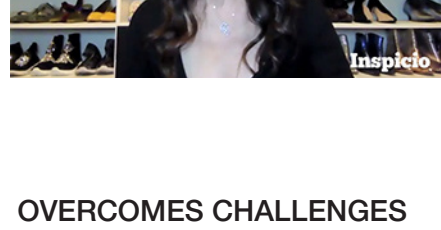
*Is there anything you learned in school that provided building blocks for being a film producer?*

**DEVELOP A VOICE: 2:04 min.**



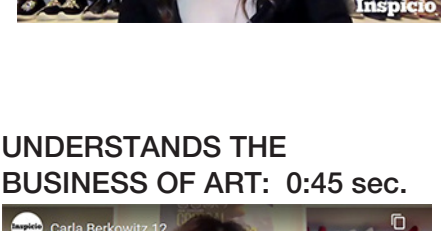
*Was “Critical Thinking” your introduction to the film industry?*

**PERSEVERANCE FURTHERS: 3:14 min.**



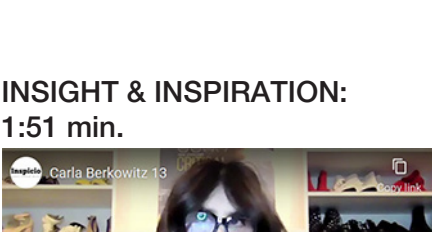
*Tell us the story of the evolution of making “Critical Thinking.”*

**CREATES A UNIQUE PERSONAL BRAND: 5:11 min.**



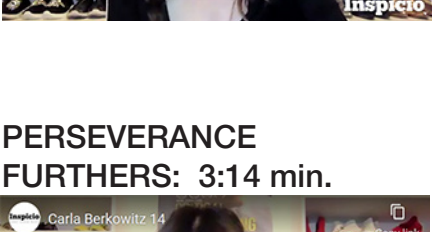
*The highly successful chess-based series, “The Queen’s Gambit,” was released around the same time as “Critical Thinking.” Was that a boost for your movie or a distraction?*

**OVERCOMES CHALLENGES TO SUCCEED: 3:45 min.**



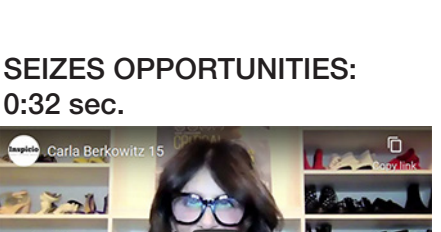
*While being a first-time film producer on “Critical Thinking,” you are a divorced mother of four battling health issues. Our admiration is bottomless.*

**UNDERSTANDS THE BUSINESS OF ART: 0:45 sec.**



*A Miami Herald article inspired you to produce “Critical Thinking.” Did you have to option anything?*

**INSIGHT & INSPIRATION: 1:51 min.**



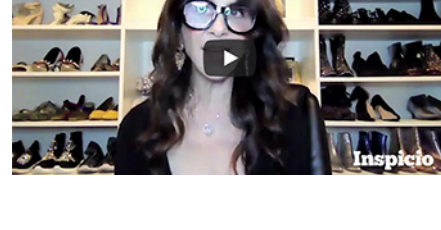
*I assume that one of your first steps was to find a screenwriter. Describe that process.*

**PERSEVERANCE FURTHERS: 3:14 min.**



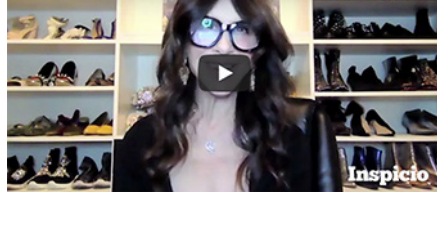
*Over the 22 years it took to create “Critical Thinking,” how many producers came on and off the project?*

**SEIZES OPPORTUNITIES: 0:32 sec.**



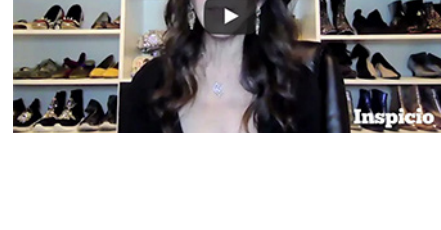
*It feels like your film was ready to be made when your universe and John Leguizamo’s universe intersected.*

**COLLABORATION: 3:48 min.**



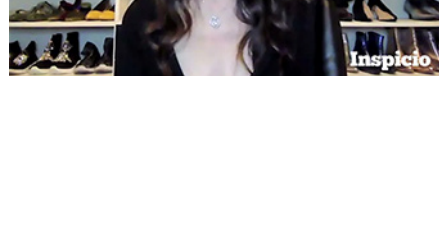
*What was the impact of Miami-based, Academy Award-winning “Moonlight” on your film?*

**COLLABORATION: 4:07 min.**



*There are filmmakers in Miami like Katja Esson, Ali Codina, Billy Corben, Jessica Huppert Berman, and more. Do the Miami-based filmmakers get together in a collegial way and collaborate to make filmmaking in Miami easier?*

**SERENDIPITY: 1:18 min.**



*On 3/8/2020, we watched the final preview of “A Wonderful World,” a musical about the life of Louis Armstrong, and later I interviewed the cast. The play has not opened as of 4/4/2021 because of Covid-19.*

**RESILIENCE: 1:41 min.**



*Robert Zuckerman: “Filmmaker Jerry Bruckheimer said to me, ‘I’ve been very lucky in my career, but I find that the harder I work, the luckier I get.’ “*

**BREAKS THE RULES: 1:22 min.**



*Now that you have spent 22 years making a film, and understand the pieces of filmmaking, do you think your next effort will be easier?*

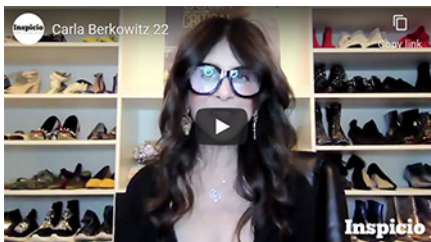


**CREATES A UNIQUE  
PERSONAL BRAND: 2:30 min.**



*What's on your drawing board?*

**UNDERSTANDS THE  
BUSINESS OF ART: 3:01 min.**



*How did you keep your investors  
engaged for 22 years?*

**PERSEVERANCE  
FURTHERS: 3:27 min.**



*Robert Zuckerman: I like to visit  
K-12 schools and talk with  
students. I tell them, "When  
someone tells you 'no,' often  
that is 'yes' with sunglasses on."*