



Presents

TEMPEST STORM:

A Documentary

Directed by Nimisha Mukerji
Produced by Nimisha Mukerji & Kaitlyn Regehr
Language: English

Distribution



1352 Dundas St. West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M6J 1Y2
Tel: 416-516-9775 Fax: 416-516-0651
E-mail: info@mongrelmedia.com
www.mongrelmedia.com



@MongrelMedia

Publicity

Bonne Smith
Star PR
Tel: 416-488-4436
Fax: 416-488-8438
E-mail: starpr@sympatico.ca



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ONE LINER:

Tempest Storm is a feature documentary that explores the controversial life story of America's most iconic exotic dancer, who at the age of 87 is trying to reconcile with the family she walked away from fifty years ago.

TEMPEST STORM: SYNOPSIS

Declared one of the sexiest women of all time by Hugh Hefner and iconized by cult filmmaker Russ Meyer, Tempest Storm was mistress to both Elvis and JFK, and became an international star on the stage and screen in the 1950s. Exploring her dramatic rise to fame as an exotic dancer and her swift fall from grace after pursuing an interracial marriage, "Tempest Storm" is a feature documentary that bares all to tell the controversial life story of America's oldest living sex icon. Following her at the age of 87 as she continues to perform and appear in Las Vegas, Tempest prepares for her final and most important act: to reconcile with her daughter Patricia, who she has been estranged from for fifty years.

Well into her 80s (although having been born on a leap year she'll point out that she's actually 21) Tempest maintains her fiery red hair and a figure that still slips into her showgirl costumes from decades gone by. Her ambition and talent enabled her to rise from a cotton picker in rural Georgia to becoming a front stage superstar in Hollywood. At the height of her fame she caused riots simply by taking off her coat. Sixty years (and four marriages) later, we follow this aging icon as she continues to live and perform in Las Vegas.

Tempest dated Elvis Presley in the 1950s, was offered contracts by MGM Studios, and had her name smeared across papers for having a relationship with President John F. Kennedy. Through a myriad of love affairs, complex interpersonal relationships have been a continuous theme throughout her life, resulting in both success and hardship. Growing up in Eastman, Georgia, she never knew her father, who left her family when she was an infant. As a teenager she survived a brutal gang rape, and by the age of 20 she had run away from two abusive marriages. Years later she fell in love with Duke Ellington's lead singer Herb Jeffries, but the big studios condemned the interracial couple and she was blacklisted for marrying outside her race. The two had a daughter, Patricia Ann, but when their marriage fell apart, Tempest abandoned her family to continue performing. Today, she has reached a crossroads. She remains estranged from Patti, who incidentally, is part of a lesbian burlesque community in Nashville. For the first time in her life, Tempest is trying to reconcile with her daughter and fight for some semblance of family.

In the spirit of notable documentaries like *Searching for Sugar Man* and *The Kid Stays in the Picture*, *Tempest Storm* will include never before seen photographs, archival footage and interviews, seamlessly merging her dramatic past with an emotional cinéma vérité story unfolding in the present. We will examine the life of a self-made career woman who remains a symbol of feminist power even today. We have exclusive access to Tempest, as well as her intimate circle of family and friends that includes acclaimed Hollywood director Garry Marshall (*Pretty Woman*, *Happy Days*) as well as famed drummer Jimmy Fox from *The James Gang*. We also have the support of Danielle Colby, star of A&E's *American Pickers*, who has been interviewed for the film and is also an executive producer. In addition, Jack White, of the

Grammy winning band White Stripes, featured Tempest on an album entitled *Interview With Tempest Storm*, released by his company Third Man Records. Last year we filmed an emotional reunion between Tempest and her ex-husband, legendary singer and actor Herb Jeffries, just weeks before he died at the age of 103. Tempest's surviving brothers and sisters in Georgia have also opened up their lives in order to give insight into Tempest's past.

Tempest's story reveals the limited options for women in a post-depression America, and raises issues of class, gender, and race, while also addressing the implications of a life in entertainment. Though on stage and screen she exposed herself physically, her personal life of controversy, betrayal, and loneliness has been, by contrast, very private. Tempest has now chosen to tell her story for the first time, and guarantees this film will be her most revealing performance yet.

AWARDS & GRANTS:

Shaw Media - Hot Docs Completion Fund Recipient 2014
Shaw Media - Hot Docs Development Fund Recipient 2014
Shaw Media - Hot Docs Pitch Prize: Hot Docs Forum 2014
Westdoc LA's Pitchfest 2013 Winner
Super Channel Development Fund Recipient 2013
Toronto International Film Festival 2013 Pitch This! Finalist

DIRECTOR'S NOTES: TEMPEST STORM

Contradictions fascinate me, and one of the most compelling and heartbreaking questions we encountered while making this film is why did Tempest abandon her daughter, Patricia, and refuse to speak to her for ten years? Patricia was only 10 years old when Tempest dropped her off at her father's home and disappeared from her life. In many ways it defied conventional notions of what it means to be a woman and a mother. Tempest chose to completely cut herself off from her child, and yet she cannot offer any explanation for why she did this.

In order to understand Tempest's decision to walk away from her family and remain alone for much of her adult life, we realized we first needed to understand her family background and the environment in which she grew up. To visually bring the past to life, we spent over two years researching for archival footage and photographs of Tempest's past. We knew we needed to reawaken memories from her childhood and adolescence and the collection of images we were able to secure creates a remarkable sense of her history.

Early in the film we establish that Tempest Storm was one of the biggest sex icons of her time but her fame came at a great personal cost. Tempest has always had a complicated relationship with her family and was on her own from a young age. Growing up during the Depression in Southern Georgia Tempest's family of eight lived on different farms while trying to survive. At school she was the victim of bullying and by the age of 12 she dropped out. Without an education she began working in the cotton fields to help support her family. Her mother kept the identity of her biological father a secret, and she grew up not knowing who her real father was. She feels that many of her dysfunctional relationships with men are connected to the absence of her own father from her life.

At home in Georgia, her stepfather repeatedly tried to molest her, and she felt she had no one to turn to for help. After surviving a brutal gang rape at the age of 14 she finally left for good. Taking her future into her own hands, she used her looks and charms to catch a ride to Los Angeles, where she dreamed of becoming an actress in Hollywood. She was ambitious, smart, and determined, and quickly rose to becoming a headliner on the stage.

A visual motif that we have incorporated into the film is a dream-like dramatization of Tempest in the 50s dancing on stage with a little girl. The image is one that Tempest has had from the beginning of her career. When she performs she always sees a version of herself from her past, as a child. The “little girl” represents innocence; a time when Tempest felt the world was safe and had the love and support of family. She returns back to that place every time she goes on stage.

While Tempest had relationships with some of the most sought after men in the world, including Elvis and JFK, when she met and fell in love with African American jazz singer Herb Jeffries, she risked it all to be with him. As a result of their relationship she lost her chance to act in Hollywood (all the major studios that she was working with, including MGM, dropped her contracts). This did not stop her from performing, however, and she proved that she could still draw in crowds as a dancer while having Herb as a husband. But his jealousy of her career, which often meant traveling and being away from home for weeks at a time, eventually took a toll. Herb told her it was either her career or her family. She chose her career.

Today, Tempest is single and living independently in Las Vegas. She was still performing at the age of 83 when a devastating fall on stage ended her six-decade career as the queen of exotic dancers. We managed to find and secure this dramatic footage of her last performance. Despite her injuries, Tempest continues to make appearances throughout the world and surrounds herself with a cast of interesting and eccentric people, including her current manager, Harvey Robbins. He is her best friend and sole confidant. Their friendship, as well as the love of her fans is essentially what keeps Tempest going.

Half of Tempest’s story takes place in the past, but we felt an urgency to start filming with her immediately because there was a dramatic, cinema verite story unfolding in the present. This comprises more than fifty percent of the film, as we drift back and forth between her life then and now. At 87 years old Tempest is trying to rebuild a relationship with her family for the first time. After nearly two decades of silence, she went to Los Angeles to visit Herb. The meeting was emotional for both of them, as Herb welcomed Tempest back into his life.

After eighteen years of staying away from Georgia, Tempest finally made the trip back home to see her surviving siblings. She has always had mixed feelings about Eastman, the town where she grew up, and where much of her family still resides. The trip was life-changing for Tempest, and motivated her to visit her daughter, Patti, for the first time in several years. The trip leads to a surprising and heartbreaking conclusion, as we see that unlike her own father, Tempest will never stop trying to have a relationship with her daughter.

The fact that Tempest is still alive and able to tell us her own story is remarkable; we couldn’t have asked for a better subject. She is beautiful, articulate, funny, and able to recall details from some of the best (and worst) moments of her life. Over the course of three years of filming we gained her trust, and she shared some of her most private stories with us. Stylistically we have staged sit down interviews against a black backdrop for when she is talking about events from the past. This approach serves to eliminate a sense of time and place, as Tempest draws the audience into her memories. For interviews that are dealing with her present-day

circumstances, we interview Tempest in her home. These are a combination of sit down interviews as well as more intimate on-the-fly's. Blurring the past and the present are interviews with her friends and family, who are providing outside perspectives on the events that took place. The primary voice of this film is Tempest's, it was important to us that she was able to tell her story in her own words.

My reasons for taking on this project were very simple: I couldn't believe no one had made this film before. Documentaries often come down to access and timing. Tempest gave us exclusive access to her story, and throughout her life she has never been afraid to tell the truth. When I met her I knew we needed to start filming immediately if we were going to capture the present-day drama that was unfolding in her personal life. The contradictions, beauty, humor, and tragedy of Tempest's story make for a documentary that is better than fiction. We want the world to finally meet the real Tempest Storm.

THE TEAM:

PRODUCER/DIRECTOR: NIMISHA MUKERJI

An award-winning director of film and television, Nimisha Mukerji's work has been featured on National Geographic and VICE. Her debut feature *65_RedRoses* was one of the first official selections by Oprah Winfrey for her Documentary Club on OWN. Distributed by PBS International, Ro*co and Hellocoolworld, *65_RedRoses* was commissioned by the CBC and acquired by Netflix and Hulu. Mukerji's second feature *Blood Relative* was produced for Knowledge Network and screened in competition at Hot Docs '13, winning Audience Awards in Vancouver, New York and Paris before receiving 3 Canadian Screen Award nominations (Canada's version of the Emmy's) including Best Direction in a Documentary Program (Mukerji's second nomination in this category). Her short narrative works include *The Arrival Hour*, *In The Deep* and *Beauty Mark* (Official Selection Telefilm Canada's Not Short on Talent Program Cannes '13), which she co-wrote and produced. Mukerji is an alumnus of TIFF's Talent Lab and sits on the boards of DOC National and POV Magazine. She was the recipient of the 2015 Director's Guild of Canada's Mentorship Award and the 2014 Women In Film & Television Artistic Achievement Award (Vancouver). Her latest feature *Tempest Storm* will be releasing in 2016 and is being produced with Super Channel, ARTE and SWR for distribution by Mongrel Media. www.shotglassproductions.com

PRODUCER: KAITLYN REGEHR

Dr. Kaitlyn Regehr is an ethnographer, filmmaker and broadcaster. Her current projects include a forthcoming book with photographer Matilda Temperley published by Oxford University Press (2016). Regehr's work has been published internationally across academic and popular print media outlets including the BBC, Variety Magazine and the LA Times. Regehr presented and choreographed Entertainment One's documentary series *ReVamped*. As a result of the success of this series, Regehr went on to direct and choreograph a series of large performance

art installations, which fuse dance and film for institutions such as the Canadian Stage Company and Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). Regehr is an alumna of Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) and King's College London, where she wrote her doctoral thesis in performance ethnography and received a PhD in 2016.

CINEMATOGRAPHER: LINDSAY GEORGE

Lindsay George is an award-winning cinematographer whose work focuses on fictional films, documentaries and music videos. After a career as a professional modern dancer, George completed a degree in film production at UBC, where she met collaborators with whom she has continued to work with on a verity of award winning projects. Shortly after graduation, George received a Leo Award for her work on the short film, *The Porcelain Man* and began her career as a professional cinematographer. She has since been recognized as one of "10 to Watch in Canadian Film" by Playback Magazine, and has received the Kodak Image Award for her work in cinematography. Her films have been official selections at a multitude of film festivals, including TIFF, SXSW, VIFF, Whistler Film Festival, Fantasia, Telefilm's Not Short on Talent at Cannes Court Merture, and Austin Film Festival. More recently, she is preparing to shoot the upcoming narrative features *Prodigals* and *Us in 9 Months*, slated for production in 2016. Currently, George has begun focusing on verite documentary work. She was the 2nd unit DOP on the SXSW feature *The Sandwich Nazi* and is DOP on *Tempest Storm*, which is being produced with ARTE (France), SWR (Germany) and Super Channel (Canada).

EDITOR: MARK RATZLAFF

Mark is an award-winning filmmaker and alumni of the Director's Lab at Norman Jewison's Canadian Film Centre. His film *Beauty Mark* was selected by Telefilm Canada to screen in their 'Not Short on Talent' program at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. It received critical acclaim on the festival circuit, and was among Vogue's top films at the 43rd Giffoni International Film Festival (the largest children's film festival in the world). In addition to his narrative projects, Mark was a producer, editor and cinematographer on the award-winning feature documentary *Blood Relative*. The film was commissioned by Knowledge Network and premiered at Hot Docs in 2013. For his editing work on the film he received a Canadian Screen Award nomination and won the 2014 CCE Award for Best Editing in a Feature Documentary.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: CHUCK BRAVERMAN

Chuck Braverman has run his own successful production company for more than 30 years, was a senior studio executive at Sony, the Chair of the Film Department at Brooks Institute as well as the director of many television dramatic hour episodes and several MOW's in addition to an indie feature film.

Recently Chuck was the executive producer show runner of a new multi hour series on the Discovery Channel and the co-founder and managing director of the annual Westdoc

Conference for documentary and reality producers. His two new two-hour documentaries on OJ Simpson premiered on the A&E networks worldwide in over 100 territories. He has a degree in Cinema from the University of Southern California, has won the DGA Best Feature Documentary award, is an Academy Award nominee for another documentary, and is the Executive Producer of *The Immortalists*, which premiered at SXSW in 2013.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: DANIELLE COLBY

Danielle Colby is the female co-host of the hit television series *American Pickers*, which takes it's viewers on an antiquing adventure through the back roads of America. Her work reflects her real life passion for history and theatre in all it's forms including the Art of the Peel. One of Danielle's greatest passion projects has been closely studying the burlesque dance and vaudeville era costume design over the past 10 years. From this love of dance springs a loyal love for the artists of old, such as the provocative and controversial dancer Tempest Storm.

In addition to executive producing the *Tempest Storm* film, Danielle has worked with and been personally trained by some of the most prolific burlesque performers of our time such as Lou Lou D'vil (Finland), Athena (NOLA), The Maine Attraction (New York), Michelle L'amour (Chicago), Miss Dolly (NOLA), Russell Bruner (NOLA), and many more. Along with this Danielle has judged the most sought after awards for burlesque performers including "The Queen of Burlesque" at The Burlesque Hall of Fame in Las Vegas Nevada 2014 and she has produced many successful Burlesque Reviews of her own under the name "Dannie Diesel", "Burlesque le'Moustache" and "The Iowa Burlesque Festival". Currently Danielle is excited to be wrapping up production, with the rest of this incredible crew, on the documentary *Tempest Storm*.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: PATTI POSKITT

For the past 30 years, Patti Poskitt has facilitated many award winning productions as an Executive Producer, Supervising Producer and a Production Manager. Her work in these capacities spans three decades of international children's television and animation, series and long form documentaries and high profile music specials. Patti and her team of industry professionals continue to support creative producers and directors. Navigating the ever-changing financing landscape, Patti oversees and administrates funding, accounting and business affairs to reach the ultimate common goal of delivering quality properties to all stakeholders.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: ASHLEY GARIB

Ashley Garib has extensive experience in the real estate industry and has operated his own successful development company for over 22 years. His lifelong love of film triggered his involvement in film making which started in 1998, when he signed on as Associate Producer of the indie film *Looking for Leonard*. In 2001 he was Associate Producer of the documentary *Lilith*

on Top, which captured the final year of the ground breaking, all-female travelling music festival - Lilith Fair. Ashley is currently in development as Associate Producer on the feature film - The Third Order, based on the cult-classic graphic comic book; Warrior Nun Areala.