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AMANDA MICHELI DOUBLE DARES YOU

by Eric Campos
(2005-04-21)

Hollywood stuntwomen get their due in Amanda Micheli's action-packed documentary [Double Dare](#) as she takes us into the professional and personal lives of two of the industry's hardest working, hardest hitting ladies, each from a completely different generation.

Now a grandmother, Jeannie Epper began her career as a stuntwoman in the 50s (doubling for Lynda Carter in the "Wonder Woman" television series) and continues to work in the industry today, but finds it more difficult to stay fit and employed as she gets older. Zoe Bell, on the other hand, is a hot, new stuntwoman (doubling for Lucy Lawless in the "Xena" television series) who is still struggling with the ins and outs of the competitive industry. Finally, the two meet and, taking her under her wing, Jeannie uses her years of experience to help Zoe navigate her blossoming career in Hollywood.

We spoke with filmmaker Amanda Micheli as "Double Dare" begins its theatrical run.

What brought about the making of "Double Dare"?

My first film, "Just for the Ride", was about women's pro-rodeo, and there's a lot of crossover historically between the rodeo world and the stunt world. In the early Westerns, men often doubled for women, but as audiences became more savvy, the studios needed to find women that were willing to hit the ground—so they hired a bunch of cowgirls. Jeannie Epper's family is a rodeo family. Karen Johnson, one of the producers of "Double Dare," had found Jeannie, who was then the president of the Stuntwomen's Association in Hollywood. Karen introduced me to Jeannie, and I was instantly smitten. That was in 1997, that's when it all began. That's how long it took us to get this film out into the world!

Did you always plan on having this documentary focus on two stuntwomen from two totally different generations, or was this something that came up as you developed the project? Yeah, I know it's called "Double Dare", but maybe at the time it was called..."Dare"...or something.

Actually, the first working title was WOMEN WHO DARE: HOLLYWOOD STUNTWOMEN, which always sounded a little dry and TV-ish to me. But we didn't know exactly what direction the film would take, and we were, after all, going after TV money. I knew Jeannie was great, but I knew we needed to balance out her experience with someone younger, or maybe several different women. We wanted an up-an-comer--we just didn't know who that would be.

So there were other stuntwomen you were looking at as potential subjects?

We did many interviews with other women. There were three other women that we specifically followed, and they were all great, but the stories just didn't gel together as a whole. We were also having an extremely hard time getting on sets, so even if we really liked someone, it was very difficult to film their working life. So the film lay fallow for a while--I worked on other projects, and to be honest, we weren't sure if it would ever pick up again. Then, out of the blue, a friend of mine asked me if I would ever consider going overseas to shoot on "Xena," because she had a friend who was a producer on the show. At the beginning of the project, going to New Zealand would have been unthinkable, because we thought we should focus on Hollywood, and our meager budget didn't exactly allow for international travel.



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By this point, three years into the process, I was willing to take a gamble, so I used some frequent flyer miles, met Zoë, and then it all clicked.

Did you see any of yourself in your two subjects?

We certainly share some common experiences. My other life, when I'm not making films, is that I'm a rugby player, or I should say, I was. After fourteen years and my third knee surgery, I just retired, which was really hard for me. Working as a freelance camerawoman is also a really physical job, and I'm often the only chick surrounded by a bunch of guys. Sports and filmmaking are both very male-dominated pursuits, and I think as a woman you face a lot of challenges—about your body, your sexuality, your femininity, your self-esteem....people make all kinds of assumptions, and you're constantly challenged to create your own identity and not allow people to put you in a box.

Knowing what you know now from making the film, would you ever want to be a stuntwoman yourself?

I'm afraid of heights and I'm not cut out for Hollywood. The boob jobs would kill me. No.

What was the biggest lesson you learned while making this film?

Patience.

What's up next for you?

That's always kind of a weird question, because the timeline of filmmaking is not linear at all—some of what's "next" for me is already in the past. I have been shooting with a woman who's sixty-year old, five-foot-tall bounty hunter. I've shot a film for HBO for another director (photographer Lauren Greenfield) in an eating disorder clinic. I just shot an episode of Morgan Spurlock's new series "30 Days." After finishing this release and broadcast of "Double Dare," and hopefully paying my bills, I'm hoping what's next is a vacation—but I know as a passionate filmmaker, I'm not supposed to admit that. But I just did.

Find out when "Double Dare" is coming to your city at the film's [official website](#).



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