

# 'Double Dare' you to meet women behind the stunts

Hasn't every little boy dreamed of being a movie stunt man?

Apparently so do quite a few little girls.

Some grow up to be the daredevil subjects of "Double Dare," a documentary about Hollywood stunt women that screens at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Tivoli theater as this month's Indy Film Showcase feature.

It's a terrific film, providing a great backstage look at how stunts are created for the screen. It's a commentary on gender politics and a wonderfully rendered portrait of two stunt women—one a pioneer in the industry, the other a personable up-and-comer.

"Double Dare," which recently played at the Toronto International Film Festival, was directed by Amanda Micheli. It was produced by

## ON SCREEN



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Karen Johnson, a native of Gladstone who will participate in a Q&A after the Thursday screening.

Johnson said the documentary was inspired by a 1996 article she read in *LA Weekly*. She became interested in Jeannie Epper, Lynda Carter's double on TV's "Wonder Woman."

Epper's career as a female daredevil seemed inevitable. Her father and brothers were in the business. Steven Spielberg described the Epper family as "the Flying Wallendas" of Hollywood stunts.

But Epper also entered the industry at a time when stunts were an all-boys club, with smaller men working as doubles for actresses.

"We knew stunt women suffered under the good-old-boy system, but we didn't realize the progression of

their career tracks and how different they were from men," she said. "Stunt men don't continue to do stunts until they're 60, but Jeannie Epper is still at it. The men become planners and stunt coordinators.



Epper

Jeannie has done a little of that, but certainly nothing on the level that her resume would warrant."

Johnson said she envisioned a film that would examine the personalities of women stunt performers against the background of their work. But there was a problem.

Epper was such an overwhelming screen presence that "despite working with all these stunt women, we couldn't find anyone with Jeannie's kind of charisma," Johnson said.

Fears that "Double Dare" might

## BUTLER'S TOP FIVE

The best five movies now showing, according to me:

1. "Before Sunset"
2. "Hero"
3. "Oscar Nominated Short Films"
4. "Mean Creek"
5. "Criminal"

become "The Jeannie Epper Story" were allayed when the filmmaking team heard about Zoe Bell, a young New Zealander who was Lucy Lawless' stunt double on the "Xena: Warrior Princess" TV show.

"Finding Zoe was the key," Johnson said. "Here in the States we'd been having an awful time trying to get our camera on TV and movie sets so that we could get behind-the-scenes footage on how stunt people work. But the 'Xena' people were

happy to let us watch. Amanda and our sound guy were in New Zealand for the filming of most of the show's last season."

"Double Dare" follows Bell from New Zealand to Los Angeles, where she is befriended by Epper, who helps her to break into the stunt business there.

The growing friendship depicted on the screen wasn't there just for the camera, Epper said.

"Oh, no, our friendship is real. When she's visiting, Zoe will crawl into my lap to watch TV," she said. "She jumps in my bed and falls asleep. She's like one of my own kids."

Epper's recent credits include "2 Fast 2 Furious," "The Italian Job," "Catch Me If You Can" and "Minority Report."

"Keeping a career alive in this business is partly physical, but it's mostly mental," Epper said. "I still think of myself as 20. Sure, there are days when my back hurts. But I've learned about my body and I listen to it."