## San Francisco Chronicle

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'**Double Dare**' Documentary. Directed by Amanda Micheli. With Jeannie Epper and Zoe Bell. (Not rated. 81 minutes. At the Roxie.).

For our entertainment, they jump off tall buildings, set themselves on fire and crash their cars at high speeds. When they're not hustling for work, they need to train at the pace of athletes. They get hurt. And the jobs grow scarce as they age.

They are movie stunt performers, and "**Double Dare**" tells the story of two who face all these obstacles and more, because they happen to be women in a traditionally male occupation.

Jeannie Epper is the veteran with extensive credits, best known as the stunt **double** for Lynda Carter in the "Wonder Woman" TV series of the late '70s. She's a grandmother; her daughter's a stuntwoman; and she comes from a family of stunt performers (they're the Flying Wallendas of the stunt world, we're informed by no less than Steven Spielberg).

At the other end of the age spectrum is Zoe Bell, a young New Zealander who doubled for Lucy Lawless in the "Xena: Warrior Princess" show and who wears a lip ring when not on camera. She travels to Hollywood to scout for work and winds up auditioning for Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill."

These two performers of different generations appeared in shows that offer intriguing contrasts as fantasies about powerful females. Still, the women have much in common. They sail through the air in extremely uncomfortable harnesses. They tumble down stairs and smash through walls, and the revealing costumes they wear also prevent them from using the kind of padding that often protects male stunt performers. All this, and most audiences never know their names.

Director Amanda Micheli makes it clear that injuries are a constant reality -- Epper's daughter needs surgery to deal with the chronic pain she suffers from a work accident. The stuntwomen are also subject to the unbreakable law of Hollywood, that the advantage is always to the young and beautiful.

We see Epper and another old-timer talking with a specialist about liposuction.

Micheli, based in San Francisco, has an obvious affinity for women in physically demanding roles -- a rugby player, she also directed "Just for the Ride," a documentary about female rodeo champions that screened in the PBS series "POV."

(Note: "**Double Dare**" won an audience award for best documentary feature at the 2004 San Francisco International Film Festival.)

-- Walter Addiego