

Stuntwomen film is 'Double' the fun

By PAUL SHERMAN

Youth and experience share "Double Dare," director Amanda Micheli's appealing PBS-bound documentary about stuntwomen. It focuses on Jeannie Epper, a trailblazer approaching the end of her career, and Zoe Bell, an indefatigable bundle of Kiwi energy crashing the gates of Hollywood.

Movie Review

The two women are strikingly similar and different. Each has a famous guise: Epper was stunt double for Lynda Carter on "Wonder Woman," while Bell held the same role for Lucy Lawless on "Xena: Warrior Princess." Each star heartily testifies

"Double Dare."

Not rated. At the Coolidge Corner Theatre.

★★★ (out of four)

to the contributions of her double.

Epper's family is a stunt dynasty, with her brother and daughter among the many relatives in the business. In one amusing interview clip, Steven Spielberg says the big brawl in his "1941" was little more than the Eppers clan flying all over the screen.

But Bell, who did her "Xena" work in her native New Zealand, had to start all over in Hollywood. Loathe to leave her home behind, she makes one stab at Hollywood. After one job falls through, she heads back to Auckland.

Micheli uses Epper, the survivor who is still working hard, to examine issues facing stuntwomen — and, to a certain extent, all women.

There's the Hollywood glass ceiling that lets aging stuntmen move on to stunt coordinator jobs but has kept qualified women from such progression. Then there are image issues, and "Double Dare" follows Epper and another middle-aged colleague to a liposuction doctor to check out procedures.

Meanwhile, charismatic, attractive and fit, Bell seemingly is a sure thing to succeed, and when she returns to Hollywood for a second time, she gains a choice ally: Epper. (The most awkward thing about "Double Dare" is that it seems to set up a meeting between its two



'DARE'-ING: Lucy Lawless and her stunt double Zoe Bell, who is depicted in 'Double Dare.'

subjects, but when Bell goes to Epper's house, it appears they already know each other.)

Gracious Epper, who doesn't

have an ounce of resentment for Bell or anyone else, nudges Bell to make herself known in Hollywood. Soon Bell lands the choicest female stunt job in years: doubling Uma Thurman in Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill" movies.

But Epper hangs in there and is last seen stunt-driving in "2 Fast 2 Furious." Bell's energy and Epper's perseverance give "Double Dare" an unstoppable one-two punch.

("Double Dare" includes profanities and many don't-try-this-at-home stunts.)