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PRESTIGE

A DIVISION OF MIRAMAX FILMS

presents



PARIS IS BURNING

A DOCUMENTARY ON "VOGUING" AND THE DRAG BALLS OF HARLEM

WINNER:

1990 L.A. FILM CRITICS AWARD FOR BEST DOCUMENTARY

1991 SUNDANCE FESTIVAL GRAND JURY PRIZE FOR BEST DOCUMENTARY

Directed and Produced by Jennie Livingston

Co-produced by Barry Swimar

Edited by Jonathan Oppenheim

Cinematography by Paul Gibson

Opening Nationwide on August 9th, 1991

78 minutes - unrated

Press Contact: NY / JONATHAN MARDER & ASSOCIATES
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Starring

CARMEN AND BROOKE
ANDRE CHRISTIAN
DORIAN COREY
PARIS DUPREE
PEPPER LabeiJA
JUNIOR LabeiJA
WILLI NINJA
SANDY NINJA
KIM PENDAVIS
FREDDIE PENDAVIS
SOL PENDAVIS
AVIS PENDAVIS
OCTAVIA SAINT LAURENT
STEVIE SAINT LAURENT
ANGIE XTRAVAGANZA
BIANCA XTRAVAGANZA
DANNY XTRAVAGANZA
DAVID XTRAVAGANZA
DAVID IAN XTRAVAGANZA
DAVID, THE FATHER XTRAVAGANZA
VENUS XTRAVAGANZA

AND ALL OF THE LEGENDARY CHILDREN AND UPCOMING LEGENDS

Produced and Directed by.....JENNIE LIVINGSTON
Edited by.....JONATHAN OPPENHEIM
Cinematography by.....PAUL GIBSON
Co-Produced by.....BARRY SWIMAR
Associate Producers.....CLAIRE GOODMAN
MEG McLAGAN
Executive Producers.....DAVIS LACY
NIGEL FINCH
Sound Recordists.....CATHERINE CALDERON
JUDY KARP
Second Unit Camera.....MAYRSE ALBERTI
Additional Camerawork.....WILLIAM MEGALOS
FRANK PRINZI
ALYSON DENNY
BEN SPETH
Sound Editor.....STACIA THOMPSON

Additional Editing.....KATE DAVIS

Associate Editor.....CAROL HILLSON

Production Manager.....NATALIE HILL

Production Coordinator.....ELISE PETTUS

Additional Associate Producer.....RICHARD DOOLEY

Assistant Editors.....JACINTA ORLANDO
SPIKE LAMPROS
ELIZABETH BOUISS
MELISSA HACKER

Apprentice Editors.....PAUL VINCENT
JANINE ST. GERMAIN
PAUL JACQUES HULOT

Assistant Camera.....MICHAEL BON VILLAIN
THEO CRIMONA
LLOYD GOLDFINE

Additional Camera Assistants.....ZINKA BENTON
BONNIE BLAKE
JILL JOHNSON
HUGH WALSH

Production Assistants.....ROSALINDA ALVIRA
NICOLE BARNUM
SARA BLECHER
HARRY BIRCKMEYER
PENNY DOW
JAN HEISSINGER
DAVID IRRERA
KAREN KANDRAK
ARLENE KRIV
BENGT MATTSON
TRACY MORGAN
MYRA PACI
SYNDEY POKORNEY
ERIC ROSENBLATT
CAROLINA SALGUERO
KEVIN SKVORAK
PHOEBE YANTSIS

Graphic Designers.....JIM ROGULA
ANNE DUTLINGER

Still Photographers.....JENNIE LIVINGSTON
DORIAN COREY
HECTOR CRESPO
JOSEF ASTOR

Additional Sound Recording.....ETIENNE SAURET
GEORGE LEONG
J.T. TAKAGI
SCOTT BREINDEL
STANLEY NELSON
JAMES ADNER
MAYRSE ALBERTI
JENNIE LIVINGSTON

Legal Consultants.....PEGGY BRADY
Silverstein, Langer, Lipner & Newburgh

JANET JACOBSON
Frankfurt, Garbus, Klein & Selz

Music Clearances.....Barry Swimar
Lynn Geller

Sound Mix, London.....MATT SKILTON
Colour Services

Sound Mix, New York.....RICK DIOR
Todd AO

Sound Transfers.....SOUND ONE

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In Memory of

DAVID BAER
KEVIN SUTTON
LEE MARKS
RICHARD ROLAND LIVINGSTON

ABOUT "VOGUING" AND THE BALLS

VOGUING is a dance invented by Black and Latino gay men; a voguer combines the poses struck by fashion models with acrobatic spins and dips. There are voguing moves inspired by Egyptian hieroglyphics, and a whole style of voguing called pantomime voguing, where the voguer enacts a little drama or story with his hands and feet.

Voguing began in New York's nightclubs and parks and on the street; rival voguers joined clubs or gangs called HOUSES. House names are taken from fashion designers or media images. The House of Chanel, the House of Saint Laurent and the House of Ninja are among the many Houses that formed in the mid-seventies. House members compete against one another, but unlike gang members who fight out of lust for drugs or money, they compete for trophies.

New York balls take place every month or two. When "Paris is Burning" was shot, most balls took place in Harlem, but with their increased popularity, many have moved downtown. At the balls, House members compete in CATEGORIES, which resemble the divisions of a fashion show (Swimwear, Eveningwear, Sportswear). There are as many categories as there are types of clothing or styles of performing, but some of the more popular categories are Voguing, Town and Country, Executive Realness, Schoolboy/Schoolgirl Realness, Upcoming Pretty Girl, Face, Body (Luscious or Model-type or Muscular) and Model's Effect.

REALNESS is perhaps the most startling concept of the Ball world. In Femme Queen Realness, men attempt to pass for women; in Executive Realness, competitors wear the clothes of an executive (when all attending know there are few prospects for such employment). In BANGEE Realness, competitors impersonate a "Bangee Boy" or "Bangee Girl" --neighborhood thugs known for drug-dealing, robbery or just plain swagger. In the Realness categories, ballgoers impersonate straights, the middle class, the upper class; whatever the House members are not, they become for that evening.

ABOUT "PARIS IS BURNING"

For its national release, "Paris is Burning", with full credits, will be available for the first time in 35 millimeter.

A fifty-eight minute video version of the film (without titles or credits) was screened at The New Festival (New York's annual Gay and Lesbian Film Festival) in June of 1990. There it became a legendary success. That summer it went on to acclaim at the San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh Gay Film Festivals.

That Fall the film also began screening in 16 millimeter at mainstream festivals including The Margaret Mead Festival and at The Museum of Modern Art for the Leo Dratfield Foundation. The Toronto Film Festival was its first showing in its completed 16 millimeter form, with credits.

After winning the Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary at The Sundance Film Festival, the producers Barry Swimar and Jennie Livingston opened the film opened theatrically on March 13, 1991 in New York City at Film Forum where it ran for a record-breaking seventeen weeks. It grossed over half a million dollars and received extraordinary critical acclaim.

Awards and citations for "Paris is Burning" include:

- 1990 LA Film Critics Award for Best Documentary
- 1991 Sundance Festival Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary
- 1990 International Documentary Achievement Award
- 1991 Jury Prize at The Torino Gay Film Festival
- 1991 Seattle Film Festival Best Documentary Prize
- 1990 New Festival Audience Award
- 1990 San Francisco Gay Festival Audience Award
- 1991 Berlin Film Festival Teddy Bear Award

"Paris is Burning" was financed through television co-productions, as well as through loans and private sources and grants from The National Endowment for the Arts (a \$25,000 Media Arts Grant), The Jerome Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, The New York Foundation for the Arts, The Paul Robeson Fund, The Edelman Fund, and a grant from Art Matters, Inc.

The producers are grateful to everyone who funded the film and hope that the film will be a blow to racism and homophobia everywhere it is shown.

GLOSSARY OF VOGUING TERMINOLOGY

BALL - A type of fashion show originating in Harlem, where minority men and women compete for trophies in a variety of categories.

BANGEE - A street-tough or thug; in ball terminology, a category for competition, as "Bangee Boy Realness".

BUTCH QUEEN - A masculine gay man; in ball terminology, a man who competes in men's clothing.

BUTCH QUEEN, FIRST TIME IN DRAGS AT A BALL - The one cross-over category between Butch Queen and Femme Queen; younger ball-walkers who dress in women's clothes for the first time, primarily for fun; as opposed to Real Femme Queens for whom wearing a dress is no joke.

CATEGORY - The divisions of competition at a ball; categories for both Butch Queens and Femme Queens include: Sportswear, Eveningwear, Schoolboy/Schoolgirl Realness, Executive Realness and Military Realness; other categories include Muscular Body (Butch Queens only) Luscious Body and Model-type Body (Femme Queens only) Best Dressed Butch (for masculine lesbians) and Best Dressed Woman (for feminine women, gay or straight).

CHILDREN - The younger ball-walkers, or members of a House.

EXECUTIVE REALNESS - Category in which walkers wear business suits, carry briefcases and copies of The Wall Street Journal. Detail is important: briefcases may contain real plane tickets and charge cards.

FEMME QUEEN - In ball terminology, a man who competes in women's clothing. Often these men dress as women in their daily lives. Various surgical improvements are not uncommon.

HOUSE - An organization of ball-walkers, a gay street gang. Houses can be named after a designer, as in House of Chanel; after a House founder or Mother, as in House of Labeija; or simply for impact, as in House of Ninja. Houses provide support for the ball-walkers in preparing for competition, and serve as surrogate families for younger members who are orphaned or rejected by their families.

LEGENDARY - Noteworthy in the ball world, winner of many trophies, as "The Legendary Dorian Corey" or "Pepper Labeija, Legendary Mother of the House of Labeija".

LUSCIOUS BODY - A category for fat, curvaceous, sexy Femme Queens; also billed as "Femme Queen -- 300 Pounds and Over", proving that ball standards don't always adhere to conventional ideals of feminine beauty.

MOPPING - Stealing or pilfering; what one does when one is a dirt-poor Black drag queen, with little chance of advancement on the economic and social ladder, who must have a three thousand dollar designer gown for the ball.

MOTHER - A leader, often founder of a House, either Butch or Femme Queens. Mothers must be very talented, popular, hard-working and wise and compassionate. A Mother acts as surrogate parent to her Children both in and out of competition.

PIG LATIN - In ball terminology, a variation on traditional Pig Latin with "ug" or "ugga" replacing the "ay" sound.

READING - The act of verbally abusing, criticizing and humiliating a competitor or rival in a witty and stylish manner; having a "reading session".

REALNESS - In ball categories, the ability to pass as something you are not, as in poor for rich, male for female, gay for straight. In life, Realness can be a matter of survival, as passing for straight to avoid homophobic violence.

SHADE - Verbal abuse, criticism and humiliation of a competitor or rival in vicious, direct terms; the verb is "throwing shade".

TOWN AND COUNTRY - A ball category in which competitors pass as Real Polo players, debutantes etc., named for the magazine.

VOGUING - A ball category in which dancers recreate the poses of models, integrating acrobatic moves and complex expressive gestures. Named for the magazine.

WALK - In ball terminology, to compete, as to "walk a ball". Walking the balls is to House Children what street fighting is to gangs.

WORK - In ball terminology, a term of encouragement shouted during competition, as "Work, Miss Pepper, work!"

MAKING "PARIS IS BURNING" by Jennie Livingston

Washington Square Park, the summer of 1985, I had just moved to New York and I was walking around with my still camera.

"Butch Queen in Drags!" "Pop! Dip! Spin!" "Saks Fifth Avenue Mannequins!"

The boys who were shouting these things contorted their bodies into a graceful imitation of fashion models, Olympic gymnasts and Egyptian hieroglyphic figures.

I learned that this was "voguing" and that if I really wanted to see it, I would have to go to a ball.

My first ball was a small affair, a "mini-ball" at the Gay Community Center in the Village. I graduated to larger fashion events, the majority of which were held at the Elks' Lodge on 129th Street in Harlem. In the course of two years of making still photos of the balls, I attended events at a bingo hall on 125th Street, the Harlem YMCA, the Parkway Chateau on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn and the Savoy Manor in the Bronx. Because, traditionally, many ball-walkers work in nightclubs, balls would be scheduled for four or five in the morning. By nine or ten they would finally get under way, continuing into the evening. Balls are held every month or so, usually on Sundays.

I was immediately taken by the people I met. Here were people who were excluded from the mainstream in every way--by virtue of race, class and sexual orientation--yet their whole subculture was based on imitating the very people who were excluding them: the schoolboys and schoolgirls, the executives, the military men, the models.

There was an intense irony at work here, as people expressed themselves by imitating a world that, if given half a chance, would spit on Black and Hispanic gays or at best ignore them.

I had my own conceptions about what oppression does to people, but my cultural assumptions were overturned when I realized that these men and women had adopted attitudes based on the certainty that--in the expression of the ball world--they were not **bothered**. They had more style, more fortitude, more wit and more true intelligence than most people with five times their opportunities. The ball people I filmed could have turned out spiteful, angry or downtrodden. Instead they opted for a wildly creative life, with the idea to become as fierce as possible. The balls are a response to homophobia and racism, yet are full of optimism and spirit.

I wanted to get to know an array of people who would represent the various types of ball-walkers. I met Junior, the brilliant ball announcer who combines a verbal eloquence and a spirituality

straight out of church with a vicious feel for Shade--a form of insult that is essential to the ball's competitive spirit. I began to speak to Venus, Octavia and Carmen--tough, ultra-feminine drag queens who were trying to reconcile their intense ambitions with the realities of their economic and sexual situation. Willi Ninja, Mother of the House of Ninja, was one of the balls' best voguers and planned to make a career in dance and choreography. Freddie and Kim represented the ingenues, the upcoming generation; Venus and Octavia were the young queens, the "ball Children" who imagined that beauty would lead them everywhere; Dorian and Junior and Pepper were the wise sages who could point out the danger--and the necessity--of the House Children's preoccupation with fame.

As Dorian says, the Children walk the balls primarily "to achieve a small fame" and the kind of fame ball people are after is probably unique to twentieth-century America. The "Realness" that is part of ball competition is not limited to the ball world. Most Americans, barraged by magazine, television and movie images, strive for Realness in one way or another. What woman can look at Vogue models and not feel a bit envious that this image of womanhood is foisted on her? What man can look at the moguls on "Dynasty" and not wonder what his life would be like if he had inherited millions? Advertising is often designed to make people feel that they're not sexy enough, rich enough or beautiful enough, and to compel them to buy the things that will make them sexy, rich and beautiful. To economically disadvantaged people who have little hope of acquiring the things they see on television every day, the realm of advertising and the media represent an entry into wholeness, into reality, into a place where they are no longer invisible Blacks, invisible Latinos, invisible gays, but, like the people on television and in magazines -- "Real".

Certainly the people that I met and filmed worked with me in part because I represented a vehicle through which they could speak out, be in front of a camera, show off. Still, I hope I represented more than just a way to be heard, but an opportunity to begin to erase that invisibility by speaking out. I consider "Paris is Burning" a collaboration on the deepest level. The people who we filmed are articulate, funny and poised. While the film's editor, Jonathan Oppenheim, and I worked to make coherent form of all that we shot, the film was truly written by the ball people themselves.

I began in 1985 with the film's first co-producer, Meg McLagan, who had been working in the independent film world in New York. She thought, as I did, that a film must be made on the ball world. I still went to balls alone to photograph, but sometimes Meg would join me. We spent hours with Willi Ninja in particular, watching him rehearse in the June Laberta Studio in midtown with a dance group he'd formed called "Breed of Motion".

I sold my car--which I couldn't afford to insure anyway--and

borrowed some money, and Meg produced a five-minute trailer which I directed. We shot the piece at the "Paris is Burning" ball, an annual event at the Elks' Lodge in Harlem, in February of 1986. With that trailer I was able to get two grants totalling \$24,000. One was from the New York State Council on the Arts and one was from Minnesota's Jerome Foundation. With these grants I shot more balls in 1987 and conducted over thirty hours of interviews on audio tape with Venus, Dorian, Willi, Junior and many others in the ball world.

But these two grants would not be enough to cover the scope of people and situations I intended to include in the film. Finally, a public television station agreed to co-produce "Paris". Between late July and late September of 1987, I hit the streets with cinematographer Paul Gibson, co-producer Claire Goodman, production manager Natalie Hill, various sound and assistant camera people and several unpaid production assistants. The filming process was completely unpredictable, and never easy (drag queens are not known for their punctuality) and we could offer the people who spoke to us--many of whom worked at very unconventional jobs--little more than the outlet of speaking to our camera.

At festivals and colleges, I have often been asked what it was like as a white woman entering this world. Well, after seeing me at balls and after inviting me into their homes between 1985 and 1987 when we began filming, the ball people saw me less as "that white girl Jennie" than as just plain "Jennie" or in the ball lingo "Miss Jennie". I'm not Black and I'm not male, but even if I looked the part, I'm not nearly witty or stylish enough to pass as a Black queen! This subculture, created by people who are cast out because of sex, color and class, was not about to turn me out because of who I was.

My strangest experiences were not when I was actually at the balls, but rather in places where people didn't know what to make of me. At "Sally's Hideaway", a bar where Dorian performs, a drag queen looked at my close-fitting striped leggings and long over-shirt and said "You're good, Honey"--meaning I looked like a real girl. Walking into the sunlight out of an all-night ball, I would frequently look at men or women, and wonder, are they real? What is a real woman or a real man? Were we all just playing at gender?

I talked to scholars like Esther Newton, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Vito Russo, among others, who all helped to round out my sense of how gay culture collides with straight, black with white, subculture with culture-at-large. I read Malcolm X, James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon and others, as part of looking for a way to think about what I was seeing in the ball world. The creation of the Houses was not the first time that Blacks, Latinos, gays and poor people had formed an island against a world that oppresses or ignores them.

I learned that many of the moves of Voguing originate from centuries-old African dance; the back-and-forth insults ("Reading" "throwing Shade") come directly out of an African-American sensibility of the verbally eloquent insult; while "camp", an ironic stance--both visual and verbal--is as old as gay culture itself. Although little of this historical information finds its way directly into "Paris is Burning", I think that it was essential that I understood what I was seeing in a cultural and historical context before I sought to condense it all into a single film. A few scenes in the film arise directly from this research: Junior made his moving "This is White America!" speech in the course of a conversation he and I had about Malcolm X and his talks on "white devils".

Looking back, if I could have done anything differently, I would have filmed more of the intimate scenes of people's lives--of people talking to their parents, of House members talking to their House Mothers and to each other. But, saddled with time constraints and trying to present a broad view of the House world, I took the more direct route--the interview.

Ultimately what's strongest about "Paris is Burning" is what people have to say for themselves. Although the film has its explanatory moments and its moments of spectacle, it's always the insights and intellect of the ball people themselves that's truly on parade. We worked hard not to turn ball people into anthropological "subjects", and we strove to avoid voyeurism masquerading as "dramatic conflict".

Frequently the crew and I would work late into the night. Once, as we were filming at Dorian's apartment in Harlem, a gun battle erupted on the corner where our van, along with some of the crew in it, was parked. Luckily no one was hurt, but the sound person quit.

Since I was following several people, and their schedules always changed, it was impossible to make up a definite shooting schedule; it was always hard to decide whom to film on any given day. Sometimes, we would make an appointment with someone and that person wouldn't be there. Other days we'd just hang out on the Christopher Street pier and wait for someone we knew to show up. Although most of the people I interviewed I had met from my two years of research, we spent one night in Times Square with Carmen and Brooke and met two of my favorite people in the film, the teenage boys who have the film's last word.

When the shooting was done, we had seventy hours of film and little money left from the public television co-production to edit. Small grants came in--between \$2,500 and \$6,000--from organizations like Art Matters, Inc., the Edelman Fund, the Paul Robeson Fund and the New York Foundation for the Arts. I was grateful for these grants, but they were barely enough to cover equipment rental and to pay Kate Davis, the editor at that time. As most documentary filmmakers will tell you, there is currently

no structure in America which funds whole films. Filmmakers get a little money from here, a little money from there, and in the process waste time and, frequently, money. This is particularly true when films are political, or when they are about current--and not historical--events. We stopped work in January of 1988, but in May, two private contributions came in and editing resumed, this time with editor Jonathan Oppenheim who had edited the original five-minute trailer. We worked for a time, and then again ran out of money at the end of 1988.

Late in 1988 I began to work with another co-producer, Barry Swimar, a photographer I knew from Yale. We filed (the second of two) NEA applications, and we wrote to David Byrne of Talking Heads. Byrne referred us to Nigel Finch of the BBC, who runs a weekly documentary program called "Arena". On a trip to New York, Nigel saw our material and expressed interest. As checks began to come in from the NEA, Jesse Helms began his rant against photographer Robert Mapplethorpe and against the NEA. We prayed, yes Jesse, we prayed, that no one in the far right would find out that the NEA funded our film about minority drag queens! As luck would have it, not only did Jesse not find out, but in August of 1989, the BBC came through with co-production funding, enough to actually finish the film! I still think it's ironic that we finally completed the project with British and not American money. Sadly, the United Kingdom, which has a smaller population and far less media money than does the United States, funds far more experimental, political, and gay projects.

We resumed cutting in August, 1989. In editing, whole character portraits wound up on the cutting room floor. We had hours of footage of Carmen and Brooke (the girls on the beach) that didn't make it in, and hours of scenes of characters that aren't in the film at all. But I'm not sorry I shot all this extra footage because I believe that when you shoot, you can't know exactly what you're getting or how it will fit into the finished film. When I filmed Dorian and Pepper in their homes, I had no idea how important these interviews would be to the film's structure. "Paris" is the first film of any length that I've made, and I was lucky to work with an editor as sensitive, and simultaneously as brutal as Jonathan Oppenheim. He helped me pare the film down to a piece that's both political and dramatic. Left to my own devices, "Paris" may easily have wound up much more political and less "entertaining" or "commercial" than it did.

Jonathan and I, along with sound editor Stacy Thompson and co-producer Barry Swimar--who strove to maintain sanity in the cutting room--worked hard to finish a shorter version of "Paris is Burning" in time for an April 1990 broadcast on the BBC's "Arena" series. (Can you imagine a film like "Paris is Burning" on one of America's major channels?). It got the highest ratings of any "Arena" that season. Most critics in the major U.K. papers were outraged by a movie about "pathetic" American homosexuals who "couldn't even speak English." Despite these reviews, however, the British public everywhere tuned in in

record numbers.

In the Spring of 1990, "Paris" was screened at a few small festivals. Although there was no final print, no credit sequence and the film had to be shown in double-system (sound and picture separate, often leading to sync problems) I was afforded an opportunity to see the film with an audience. This was a particularly thrilling experience at the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival where the film screened to an audience of nearly 1600 people at the Castro Theater. It got a five-minute standing ovation--the biggest audience response in the history of that ten-year-old festival, according to festival director Michael Lumpkin. It won the Audience Award for Best Documentary there as well as at the New Festival, New York's gay festival.

These festival screenings were also useful in that we met people who helped us move toward a final print. After the New Festival in New York, one woman gave us \$1,000 toward printing costs, and a graphic designer named Borden Elniff approached us and offered to help us with our yet-to-be-completed title sequence by typesetting the titles free of charge.

The Toronto Film Festival was the first major festival for "Paris". We finally had a good print of the film including a credit sequence which did justice to the ball people who starred in the film and to all of the people who worked on the film. Scores of people had labored for free or for far less than they would usually make, and others had donated money or services. In Toronto, the film sold out two shows and was one of twenty (out of a festival of 300 films) that were screened again by popular demand on the Sunday following the festival.

As the film screened in the Berlin Film Festival, at Sundance, in the Sydney and Melbourne film festivals, at a gay festival in Turin, Italy, in the Baltimore Film Forum, and elsewhere, it gathered its own momentum. It was exciting for us to see the film generating heat and discussion among audiences all over the United States and abroad. It's thrilling that those audiences wanted to talk--and presumably think--about issues of class, race, gender, and consumerism.

When the film was finished, people from the ball world came to several screenings and liked it. Gay Men of African Descent, a Black gay political group, did a benefit screening of "Paris" for their organization.

When we designed the "Paris is Burning" credit sequence, I had the misanthropic idea of following the "Very Special Thanks to" and "Special Thanks to" sections with a section labelled "Made with Absolutely No Thanks to". Included on the list would be ex-lovers who were mean to me, overbearing former employers that I'd never had a chance to tell off, and--primarily--funders who didn't fund the film while professing a primary goal of supporting gay and minority causes. It was frustrating that many

funding organizations that were overtly gay or socially conscious were clearly made nervous by "Paris is Burning."

At times it seemed no one would fund "Paris," not the political organizations, not the individuals who often come forward to help independent filmmakers. The project appeared risky to so many people, which makes me even more indebted to people like Davis Lacy, Nigel Finch, David Byrne, and to organizations like The New York State Council on the Arts, the Jerome Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Paul Robeson Fund, and the NEA, among others.

There have been occasional questions from both critics and audiences about the fact that I'm white and have made a film about an African-American subculture. I never set out to make a film about the history of African-American life; I was not competing with an African-American director who wanted to make this film. "Paris" shows a very small group of people in New York City, people I got to know well, people who speak in the film in their own words about their ideas. Although "Paris is Burning" is the first feature-length film about its subject, it's not the first film to include the drag balls, and I hope it won't be the last. I am not setting myself up as an authority on African-American culture; but as a woman, as a gay person, and as a Jew of German descent, I have very deep feelings about sexism, racial injustice, and homophobia. I think the film's huge popularity in New York and abroad with audiences and critics of all colors, ages, and sexual orientations speaks for itself.

I agree that there aren't enough films by Black directors, although progress is being made. Nor are there enough stories about women on the screen. In fact, 95% of all Directors Guild of America directors are male; 52% of the world's population is female! Movies are still directed and produced primarily by straight, white men, and the world view we see in films reflects that state. Things are changing slowly; "Paris is Burning" is a small part of that change.

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE FILMMAKERS

JENNIE LIVINGSTON (Producer/Director) is currently working on four new film projects. One is a nineteenth-century circus script based on a true story; one is a comedy about fundraising, witchcraft and sexual assault, set in New York and staged in the wacky style of early Almodovar and early John Waters; one is a short film adapted from a short story by Deborah Eisenberg, and the other is a documentary project on yet another American subculture certain to be as difficult to fund as "PARIS IS BURNING". In the next year, Livingston hopes to complete one or more of these films, and to begin to make a living directing commercial film and video projects.

Jennie was born in 1962 and grew up in Los Angeles, daughter of children's book writer Myra Cohn Livingston and CPA Richard Livingston. In 1983 she graduated from Yale where her drawings and photographs earned her the Sudler Prize, given yearly to one graduating senior in the arts. With the prize money she toured the United States and Europe taking more pictures. Upon her return she was frustrated by the silence of the photographic medium and in May of 1985 she moved to New York to make films.

Since then she has worked as a photographer, studied film at the NYU summer program, worked on Laurie Anderson's film "HOME OF THE BRAVE" and assisted on Alan J. Pakula's feature "ORPHANS". She began work on "PARIS IS BURNING" during the summer of 1985 after she met some boys who were voguing in Washington Square Park.

"As a photographer I was obsessed by images that challenged conventional ideas about gender, race and class; I fell in love with the drag balls in Harlem because their participants played with many of these ideas; I didn't realize until I'd shot the film just how articulate and strong and creative the people in the ball world are. It's ironic that ball people recreate a society that hates them, but perhaps even more ironic that in the end, when Madonna made voguing such a big thing, society imitated the ball people! Ultimately for me, the strength and spirit of the House members far outstripped the difficulty of trying to imitate a society that hates them, and that's what I was lucky to learn in directing the film."

BARRY SWIMAR (Co-producer) was born in New Haven, Connecticut; he grew up there and went to college in Boston and in San Francisco, at Harvard and San Francisco State. In school, he acted, directed and designed sets for theatre, and began to photograph, creating a series of portraits of teenage hustlers on San Francisco's Polk Street, which were exhibited at three San Francisco galleries.

Breaking his vow never to return to Connecticut, he left San Francisco to study with Tod Papageorge at the Yale Photography MFA program. While in New Haven he photographed people on the streets of New Haven and New York, influenced by photographers

like Diane Arbus, Robert Frank and Garry Winogrand.

After graduating from Yale, Swimar moved to New York and continued to photograph. In 1988, Swimar--who knew Jennie Livingston from Yale--became the third co-producer on "PARIS IS BURNING", working to raise post-production money at a time when there were no funds to edit. He and Livingston worked as co-producers from then on, and Livingston credits Swimar with "keeping everyone from killing everyone else" during the editing process.

Swimar confides that "Walking 'PARIS IS BURNING' was like making a tightrope." Swimar, previously unable to balance his checkbook, became a businessman during the making of "PARIS IS BURNING", shocking himself and those close to him.

He has a documentary about countertenors up his sleeve and is currently collaborating with playwright Paul Minx on a melodrama for the screen. Swimar and Livingston share more than a producing partnership; they co-parent two dogs, Molly and Lulu, whom Swimar rescued from the ASPCA. Swimar also owns three birds. An avid reader, he has felt a lifetime compulsion to decide between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

JONATHAN OPPENHEIM (Editor) was raised in a family of actors, writers and musicians. Before coming to film, he was a serious student of painting. He feels that his years as a painter, as well as his family background have been significant for his work as an editor.

"Documentary film is a visual and musical medium which must be structured to tell a story," Oppenheim says. "The various influences in my life helped me to think on the different levels necessary to edit film." He has worked in features and television on such projects as "STREETWISE", "A MATTER OF TRUST: BILLY JOEL AND THE U.S.S.R.", "ARTHUR", "THE MUPPETS TAKE MANHATTAN", "OMNI" and "THE WORLD OF MOTHER THERESA".

"The thing that was always in front of me while I worked on this film was the way that these ball people, through their need, were transforming some of the dearest and deadliest aspects of our culture into something alive and sustaining for themselves. The challenge was to weave a context that reflected the political realities of their lives while keeping the focus on this aliveness."

Future projects include making a film about the poet Frank O'Hara and continuing to edit documentary and dramatic films.

PAUL GIBSON (Director of Photography) went to NYU graduate film school. He has shot numerous documentary and dramatic features, including "AS SEEN ON TV"--a PBS "Live from Off Center" production featuring performance artist Bill Irwin; "SWEET INSPIRATION"--an AFI-funded film about the gospel singer Cissy

Houston; "FALLEN ANGEL"--the story of Michael Milken for England's Channel Four; and "THE REFRIGERATOR"--a soon-to-be-released 35mm black comedy feature, directed by Tony Jacobs, which premiered at the Munich Film Festival; "THE ART MERRY-GO-ROUND"--about the art scene in Soho; and "PUT BLOOD IN THE MUSIC"--a documentary on the underground music scene in New York City.

"Working on "PARIS" made me much more confident of the handheld camera, of its unique ability to respond gracefully to the nuances of any situation. I liked the vibrancy and humor and honesty of the ball world, the way the ball people grab onto whatever part of life they can."

CLAIRE GOODMAN (Associate Producer) has produced numerous radio and television shows for the BBC and for Channel 4 in England, including "TSIAMELO--A PLACE OF GOODNESS", "THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE", "STREET EVANGELISTS" and "BEATLEMANIA". She has lived and worked in New York for six years.

MEG McLAGAN (Associate Producer) is currently working toward her doctorate in the Ethnographic Film and Video Program at New York University's Department of Anthropology. She is currently directing a video project on three Tibetan monks in New York.

NIGEL FINCH (Executive Producer) produced the TV version of "PARIS IS BURNING" for the BBC Television show "ARENA". He has directed ARENA segments about Robert Mapplethorpe, Graham Greene and Kenneth Anger, and is currently directing a film of David Leavitt's novel "The Lost Language of Cranes."

DAVIS LACY (Executive Producer) worked for PBS for several years and recently produced the award-winning documentary series "EYES ON THE PRIZE II".

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PERFORMERS

WILLI NINJA

"`Paris is Burning' is important to me," says Willi Ninja "because it tells the truth about the Gay community and how we've succeeded and progressed." He has turned "voguing", a passionate recreation, into a respected art form and a profitable international career. It has made the 28 year old dancer a voice within American culture.

Ninja is the world's best known Voguer. He has performed on three continents in over half a dozen countries, exhibiting what has become one of the most dynamic and creative dances of the decade. Combining poses struck by magazine fashion models, pantomime and gymnastics, voguing has emerged from New York's underground club and street scene and has made its way into the mainstream. For Ninja, voguing has given him a new sense of dance, a confidence to try new things, and has taken him from the drag balls of Harlem in the mid-80's to a busy career as a professional dancer.

Ninja was born in New Hyde Park, New York and grew up in Flushing. He graduated from Bay Side High School and attended Queens College and the Robert Fiance School of Cosmotology. Ninja went to his first ball in 1985 and began competing or "walking" in balls a year later. His first ball was "Paris is Burning". That ball started a four year career of competing at balls in such Houses as Xtravaganza, Omni, and Pendavis. Soon Ninja became a Legend and the Mother of his own House ---The House of Ninja.

Ninja's last ball was at The House of Field in 1989. Now Ninja judges balls or simply spectates, and he travels world-wide as a professional dancer. He has danced in Tokyo for the opening of Club XYRelax and for the opening of Psyche Theatre with Soul II Soul, Grace Jones, and Ofra Haza; in Miami for the Century Hotel Christmas/New Year's party; and for artists Malcolm McLaren, Ofra Haza, and Dee-Lite. He has vogueed down runways for Gortex Fabrics in Germany with Grace Jones; for designer Thierry Mugler in Moscow and Paris with Diana Ross, Lauren Hutton, and Traci Lords; for the 150 Years of British Fashion Celebration in London; and for Avant-Garde in Munich. And he has worked with Japanese Photographer Kobiyashi as well as with Johnny Walker Red on a six week tour through Spain.

Coming up for Ninja is a show for designer Carol Rollo, dancing for Clubland in New York, and background vocals for a video by recording artist Marcus Gill.

Ninja's success as a dancer has allowed him to explore one of his favorite hobbies: travelling. While he isn't busy working nation-wide and over-seas, he lives in Flushing, N.Y. with his mother. He loves to see movies, visit museums, and go camping at

his family's dairy farm in upstate New York. "But," Ninja says, "even though it is my job, dancing is still my most favorite hobby of all."

DORIAN COREY

"'Paris is Burning' has been like a door opening," says The Legendary Dorian Corey. "It has made a lot of people aware of a segment of the population they didn't know--the world of the Harlem ball scene," a world that Dorian has been in for over thirty years.

Dorian Corey was born in Buffalo, New York in 1937. At the age of eighteen, Corey went to New York City to attend Parson's School of Design and New York University. He found a much more valuable education in the theatres and nightlife of 42nd Street. A year later in Buffalo, Corey saw, for the first time, a female-impersonator show and was immediatley hooked. For the next twenty-seven years, Corey travelled with that very show, "The Pearl Box Review". The group performed everywhere from Boston to Miami to the Bahamas with Corey featured as The Goddess of the Jungle.

Corey also became an integral part of the New York ball scene, winning his first grand prize in the High Fashion Couture category in 1973. Since then, Corey has gone on to win over fifty grand prizes at a variety of major balls. He was a six-year grand prize winner at Allen Marshall's Funmaker Ball, a five-year grand prize winner at The Echelon Ball in New Jersey, a two-year grand prize winner at The Xtravaganza Balls, and a grand prize winner at The Paris is Burning Ball. Corey has also been M.C. at Sally's Hideaway in New York for the past five years, for which he was awarded 1990 M.C. of the Year. In the Summer of 1990, Corey was crowned Mrs. Fire Island in addition to winning the Fire Island Most Unique Costume Award.

"Paris is Burning" marks Corey's American film debut. He also appeared in the European cult classic "Harlem Fantasy"; but it is "Paris is Burning" that gave Corey an opportunity to comment on the ball world--its complexities and evolutions. As the Grande Dame of the ball world, Corey is the film's omnipotent commentator, arbiter, and historian. He details the changes within the ball circuit from when "everybody was a Ziegfeld Girl" trying to have "the models effect" to the emergence of butch queens and voguing--"the perfect marriage of fashion, movement, and rhythm." From Corey's special vantage point, the viewer watches the ball children as they find the means to express themselves in the world of the Harlem drag balls. Says Corey, "'Paris is Burning' has brought to the screen what has been going on for years, but what no one ever realized was so complicated."

This summer Corey will compete in the annual fashion show on Fire Island. He works regularly as a costume designer and seamstress. And when Corey is not performing at Sally's Hideaway and other stages throughout New York City, he enjoys painting, designing, and looking after the rising legends--the ball children.

ABOUT PRESTIGE FILMS...

PRESTIGE is a division of Miramax Films, dedicated to marketing and distributing the highest quality American independent and foreign language films, employing for these special titles the expertise that has established Miramax as the leader in its field. Said Miramax president Harvey Weinstein at the founding of Prestige in October of 1990, "This is an incredibly exciting time for young and very talented filmmakers, emerging from all corners of the globe, and we want to have the capability of working with as many of them as possible. Prestige will give us an expanded base upon which to develop these relationships so that we can continue to present the full range of fresh, quality entertainment to our audiences."

In addition to "Paris is Burning", upcoming titles for the division include: Claude Berri's "Uranus" starring Gerard Depardieu, Michel Blanc and Philippe Noiret opening in New York in late August and nationally in September; Lars Von Trier's "Europa" starring Barbara Sukowa and Jean-Marc Barr opening in the Fall; and Issac Julien's "Young Soul Rebels" which will be released at the end of the year.

Past successes for Prestige include Carlos Saura's "AY CARMELA!", the official Spanish entry to the 1990 Academy Awards, Shirley Sun's "Iron and Silk", Etienne Chatiliez's "Tatie Danielle", Peter Greenaway's "Drowning by Numbers" and Alex Van Warmerdam's "Reflecting Skin" (voted the best film of the decade by Dutch film critics).

Prestige Executive Vice President, Mark Lipsky, said recently, "Miramax has made great strides over the past few years and the new division exemplifies Harvey and Bob Weinstein's commitment to quality independent films, both big and small. It's a commitment and passion we share equally."