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LESLIE
ZEMECKIS

Leslie Zemeckis is a best-selling author, actress, and award-winning documentarian. Her current film *Grandes Horizontales* about the lives and loves of the 19th Century courtesans in Paris has won numerous Best Documentary awards at festivals throughout the world.

Her other critically acclaimed, award-winning films include Showtime's *Behind the Burly Q*, the true story of men and women who worked in burlesque during its Golden Age; *Bound by Flesh* about conjoined twins Daisy and Violet Hilton, and *Mabel, Mabel, Tiger Trainer* chronicling the extraordinary world of the first female tiger trainer, Mabel Stark.

Zemeckis is the author of three best-sellers, *Behind the Burly Q*, the definitive oral history of burlesque, *Goddess of Love Incarnate; the Life of Stripteuse Lili St. Cyr* and *Feuding Fan Dancers*, about Sally Rand, Faith Bacon and the golden age of the showgirl is at work about the worlds most extravagant courtesan and the 2018 Santa Barbara debris flow disaster.

As an actress she has worked in films alongside Tom Hanks, Steve Carell and Jim Carrey

Leslie writes a monthly book column in the *Montecito Journal*, and has contributed to *Huffington Post*, *Medium*, *Talkhouse*, *W Magazine* and *Stork Magazine*. She is the founder of the program “Stories Matter,” with professional female authors mentoring the next generation of female storytellers.

In 2023 she was honored for her work inspiring women with the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in part for “sharing and preserving stories of women who were once marginalized and stigmatized.” The Medal is officially recognized by both Houses of Congress and is one of our nation’s most prestigious awards.

Zemeckis has spoken at panels and universities including Santa Barbara City College, Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, The Chicago Club, Chicago History Museum, and MoMa. <http://www.lesliezemeckis.com/>



She Named Her Classic Cadillac After a Legendary Burlesque Dancer

Leslie Zemeckis's 1954 Cadillac Eldorado is a bold head-turner, much like its namesake, Tempest Storm

Leslie Zemeckis, an actor, documentarian and author living in Montecito, Calif., on her 1954 Cadillac Eldorado convertible, as told to A.J. Baime.

I have always been into vintage stuff. I like past eras. Years ago, I wrote a book and made a documentary about the history of burlesque, and I acquired a large collection of clothes from past burlesque stars. A friend of mine had an old Cadillac, and when I saw that car, I thought: “I get it.” It had that same vibe. This friend was the one who found my 1954 Cadillac at a dealership in Canada. It was a reputable dealer. I thought: This car is for me.

The day the Eldorado arrived on a big truck in 2017, I thought, “Oh, my God!” It was huge. And it was in such pristine condition. The paint just sparkled. The car immediately reminded me of a famous burlesque star that I had interviewed years earlier named Tempest Storm. She had red hair, and my car’s paint was red. Tempest was brassy and bold, a real head-turner. And so was this car. I decided to name the car after her. I had a license plate made—TEMPSST. It’s not the exact spelling, but it was the closest I could get.

Ever since, I have been driving this car about once a week. I live in a small town, and this is a cruise-around-town car. I drive really slowly, like a little old lady. It is not like driving a normal car. It is more like driving a boat. It floats down the street, and when I park it, it takes up two full spots.

I used to take my kids to school and pick them up in Tempest. [Ms. Zemeckis is the wife of filmmaker Robert Zemeckis.] I have driven it in the local Christmas parade and in the Fourth of July parade. I am in a local antique car club. For my next book, about [the Montecito debris flow of 2018](#) (where 23 people died), I have interviewed a lot of firefighters in the town where I live. The car is almost the same red color as the fire engines. So I take Tempest to the station, and the firefighters appreciate the car.

[ARTICLE HERE](#)



What I enjoy most about it is the way it takes me back into the past. You can envision while you're driving what the town looked like in 1954, and what the traffic looked like. I always dress up when I drive Tempest—vintage gloves and a hat and a scarf.

More than anything, Tempest is a make-people-happy car. People see it and they smile and flock to it. Every time I drive it, it feels like it makes the world a little bit brighter.

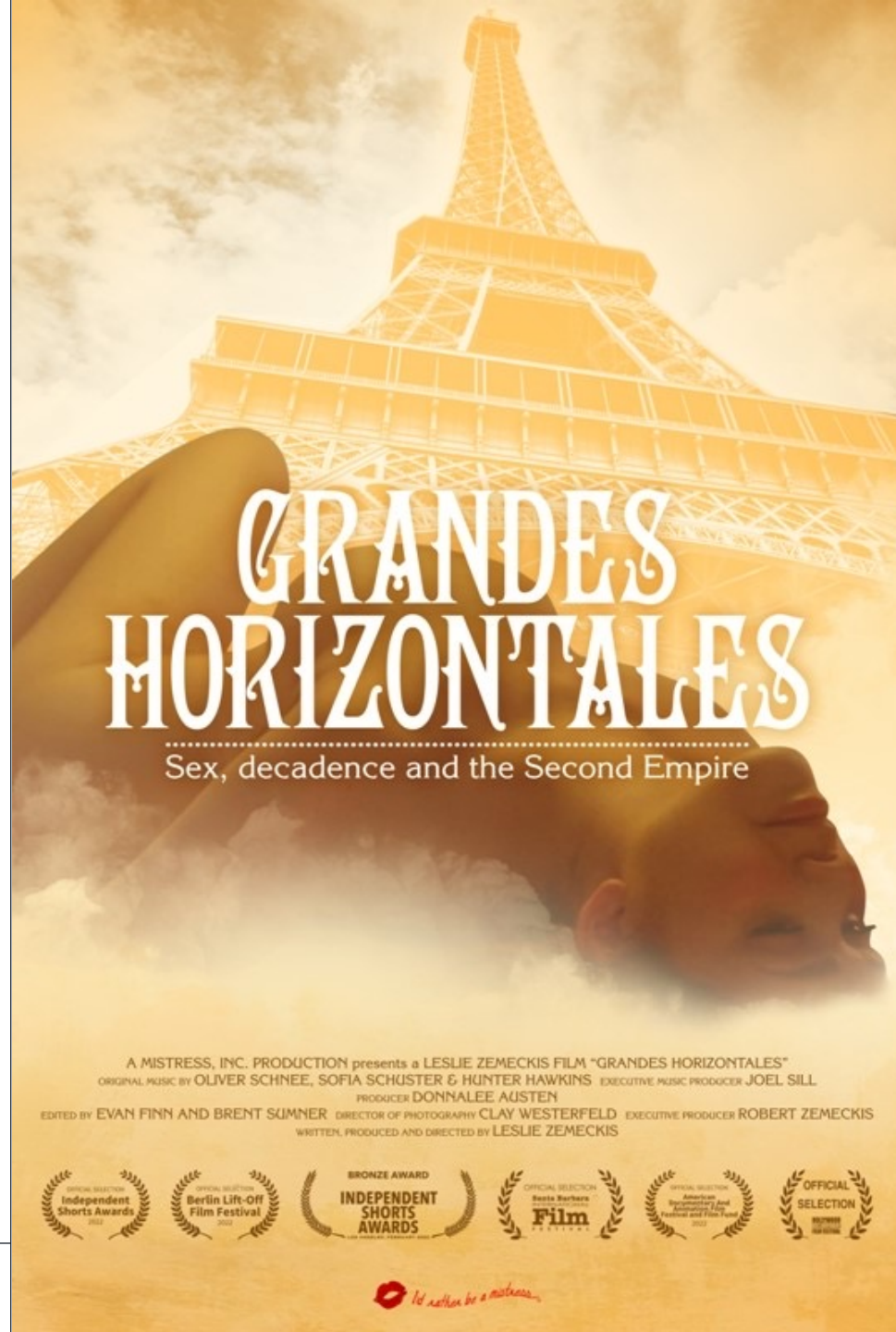
Grandes Horizontales is a documentary about the lives, loves and enduring influence in art, literature and fashion of the Grandes Horizontales - the A-list of courtesans, the pop stars of their day. They were marked by an extravagant lifestyle, often ruinous to their patron or patrons as it took a handful of lovers to pay their expenses. It was said "their ability to wind men around their fingers while picking up a chateau or two on the side was legendary."

Women and power are the main theme of the documentary. A never before in-depth look at the culture of the courtesan. It is about a group of women who took their circumstances and molded them to their advantage, to rise to the top of the pile of manure they were given, who turned it into gold.

Set during the Second Empire in France, 1852-1870. The Empire is run by Napoleon III. Paris is changing. It is the most decadent period in French history with plenty of sex, vanity and frivolity. It is a specific moment in time when the Grandes Horizontales enjoyed immense power and influence.

With the economy stable, after 50 years of turbulence and revolution gold was pouring into Paris and through the tapered fingers of our ladies for sale. The GH were building huge mansions, employing dozens of servants, riding horse drawn carriages through the parks. They attended the opera, cafes and concerts and balls. At a time when women were not in charge of their own money, nor were they allowed to own property, nor could they divorce, and had very little say in who they married, the GH had a freedom that was unparalleled.

It isn't for us to judge their choices but to reveal the answers behind the why and the what about these free-spirited, determined women that inspired decades of artists who tried to capture their likeness, their essence, their appeal.



GRANDES HORIZONTALS

Sex, decadence and the Second Empire

A MISTRESS, INC. PRODUCTION presents a LESLIE ZEMECKIS FILM "GRANDES HORIZONTALS"
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY OLIVER SCHNEE, SOFIA SCHÜSTER & HUNTER HAWKINS EXECUTIVE MUSIC PRODUCER JOEL SILL
PRODUCER DONNALEE AUSTEN

EDITED BY EVAN FINN AND BRENT SUMNER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CLAY WESTERFELD EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ROBERT ZEMECKIS
WRITTEN, PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY LESLIE ZEMECKIS



Id rather be a mistress

Grandes Horizontales is a documentary about the lives, loves and enduring influence in art, literature and fashion of the Grandes Horizontales - the A-list of courtesans, the pop stars of their day.

WHY HOOKERS

Well, they weren't hookers. It's been called "the world's oldest profession." Working girls have been labeled everything from sporting girls, courtesans, mistresses, prostitutes, les biches, harlots, les belles petites, grandes cocottes . . . But there is a certain type of "kept woman" a very few, a handful of charming, beautiful, alluring, expensive creatures that were known as the Grandes Horizontales (we'll call them GH).

They were a part of the demi-monde. The term literally means, half world, or shadow world, and refers to those living on the fringe. They existed in a sort of parallel universe alongside polite society. There and yet not there. They were women who lived off their charm, wit, and beauty. As someone said "what is the point of being beauty if you can't benefit from it." And boy did they!

The GH's where the celebrities of their day, written about in the daily and weekly papers. Society gossiped about them, women imitated their fashions, men went bankrupt trying to support them, artists immortalized them in paintings, sculpture, poetry, plays, songs and books. Judging by the annual amount of books that are still being published today, we realized these misunderstood women still fascinate today. These tantalizing tarts amassed fortunes, ruined a few princes along the way and led distinctive, dramatic, decadent lives.

The GH were at the upper echelon of their profession. A GH was marked by an extravagant lifestyle, often ruinous to their patron or patrons as it took a handful of lovers to pay their expenses. Their food and wine was the best, they were dressed by courtier's such as Charles Worth. They owned stables, mansions and chateaus. They draped themselves in head to toe jewels. It was said "their ability to wind men around their fingers while picking up a chateau or two on the side was legendary."

Women and power is the main theme of the documentary. Leslie, has made a career of examining and portraying marginalized, misunderstood women in her past documentaries, from former burlesque strippers, to Siamese Twin superstars to the world's first female tiger trainer. This is a project Leslie has been researching for a decade. A never before in-depth look at the culture of the courtesan.

Santa Barbara
INTERNATIONAL
FilmTM
FESTIVAL



GRAND HORIZONTALES- AWARDS





**SANTA BARBARA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
ANNOUNCES 2022 PROGRAM**

**37TH FESTIVAL OPENS WITH THE U.S. PREMIERE OF “THE PHANTOM OF THE
OPEN” AND CLOSURES WITH “DIONNE WARWICK: DON’T MAKE ME OVER”**

FESTIVAL TO PRESENT 95 U.S. PREMIERES AND 48 WORLD PREMIERES

**10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF “SILVER LININGS PLAYBOOK” WITH
DAVID O. RUSSELL**

GREG NAVA RETROSPECTIVE INCLUDING “EL NORTE” AND “SELENA”

Santa Barbara, CA. (Thursday, February 10, 2022) –The Santa Barbara International Film Festival (SBIFF), presented by UGG®, announced today the highly anticipated lineup for the 37th edition, which will run March 2 to 12, 2022. The festival will feature 48 world premieres and 95 U.S. premieres from 54 countries, along with tributes featuring the year’s top talent, panel discussions, and free community education and outreach programs.

2022 FILMS

Grandes Horizontales
Directed by Leslie Zemeckis
World Premiere
United States

GRANDES HORIZONTALES PREMIERES AT SBIFF



Opening night at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival included Red Carpet interviews with film makers including local Leslie Zemeckis, who arrived looking stunning in her designer couture. This was her third time submitting a film at the 37th Santa Barbara International Film Festival and she said she was excited and happy to be at the Arlington Theatre once again with her newest film *Grandes Horizontales*. The premieres March 4 at the Metro Theatre #4 on State Street at 8:40 p.m.

This film is one of absolute empowerment for women filmgoers on understanding how a select group of females in past centuries used their sexual prowess to experience lavish lives in society through their private relationships with groups of powerful men and secure opulent comfort zone lives in their community. Zemeckis worked on this project for five years and did her own extensive research in Paris, France, and Los Angeles, California.

Zemeckis shared that the lives of the courtesans always fascinated her, and the subject was largely unexplored without prejudice so thought she would jump in. The research was done solely by the film maker who said she likes to hold all the information in her own head, and then cross reference things. The film was shot in Paris and here in Santa Barbara and features some amazing photographs, paintings, and sculptures of courtesans of the period.

The narration of the film by Zemeckis and Andrew Kursanov is done with sensitivity and at times a sense of fun, but always filled with interesting personal detail on how these clever women managed to live such amazing lives, as well as details on the sad endings of some. Cinematography was done so well by Clay Westervelt, educational, sensual but not sensational.

Full Cast & Crew include Leslie Zemeckis, Writer/Director, Cast: Andrew Kirsanov, Dianna Miranda, Michelle L'Amour, Sheri Hellard, Mosh, Minxie Minnieux, Ed Anthony Budzius, Producers: Donnalee Austin, Leslie Zemekis, Robert Zemeckis, Executive Producer, Music Oliver Schnee, Joel Sill Executive Music Supervisor, Film Editing, Evan Finn, Brent Summer and Leslie Zemeckis, Make Up, Sara Chamiedes, Poster Arts Jason Kauzlarich.

Knowing this woman in my community as a wife, and as a dedicated mother who creates divine cooking videos at home, an active community member as well as the creator of a writer's group that inspires and offers unique assistance to other women authors, I am not at all surprised by this outstanding film, but delighted by knowing that before the Santa Barbara International Film Festival had even begun the Leslie Zemeckis *Grandes Horizontales* film has received three major awards from Hollywood and Los Angeles Film groups.

Congratulations to our talented Santa Barbara lady and thank you for this beautifully researched and presented story on a subject that warrants exploration and understanding.

[ARTICLE HERE](#)



"JUICY... FUNNY!"
-Variety

"A DELIGHT!" -NEW YORK TIMES

BEHIND THE BURLY Q

The Story of
Burlesque
in America

ON STAGE IN PERSON
APRIL MARCH PLUS
STRIPTEAUSE CONTEST

GIRLS COMEDY GIRLS
BURLESQUE
ALL STAGE SHOWS - NO MOVIES

Featuring To-Nite Only

- ★ Alan Alda
- ★ Lili St. Cyr
- ★ Margie Hart
- ★ Harry Lloyd
- ★ Lou Costello
- ★ Blaze Starr
- ★ Dixie Evans
- ★ Tempest Storm
- ★ Kitty West
- ★ Sherry Britton
- ★ Rita Grable
- ★ And Many More!

"UTTERLY ENTERTAINING!"
-Village Voice

A film by **Leslie Zemeckis**



Burlesque dancer
Margie Hart
circa 1940

HOT DOC

BACK TO BURLESQUE

The new documentary *Behind the Burly Q* (in theaters now) uncovers a lost art. —ADAM MARKOVITZ



SETTING THE STAGE

"People think burlesque is just stripping," says first-time director Leslie Zemeckis (above). "But really it was a big vaudeville-type show. Everything comes from it: Johnny Carson...*The Carol Burnett Show*, *Saturday Night Live*."

KENNEDY CONNECTION

It seems that President John F. Kennedy was quite the burlesque fan: Tempest Storm, now 82, claims in the film that she had an affair with him, while another dancer says Kennedy once sent a

car to retrieve her after the show—only to send her home when he learned she was only 14.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

The movie's exec producer is Zemeckis' husband, director-producer Robert Zemeckis (*Forrest Gump*). "He didn't know anything about burlesque," she says.

A REVEALING TRUTH

The film dispels the popular misconception that dancers twirled and tossed their clothes off the stage. In fact, performers—who often paid for their own elaborate costumes—gingerly carried each garment off stage to avoid damaging it.

DVD NOTES
PEEKABOO

Boy, are the Cultural Studies people going to love this: "Behind the Burly Q," a new DVD release (First Run Features) of Leslie Zemeckis's 2010 movie on the history of burlesque. Burlesque, which peaked in the nineteen-thirties, was basically a variety show enhanced by a girlie show. Zemeckis's film has the usual documentary ingredients: interviews and old film. The burlesque queens had wonderful names: Blaze Starr, Tempest Storm, Candy Cotton. (Ms. Cotton supplies the best quote in the show: "My mother always wished I had taken up some other form of work.") As "Gypsy" informed us, the stars all had gimmicks. Lili St. Cyr famously opened in a bubble bath; another, as the curtain went up, appeared on a bed emitting smoke. Then there was the one who had mastered a sort of arm hitch whereby she could make her breasts hop out of her gown and then hop back in. Yet another would set her pasties on fire before twirling the tassels. (One night, she says, she burned the front of her hair off.) Sally Rand was the first to appear as God made her, though brandishing a couple of peekaboo fans. Her son reports that he was embarrassed by her act until she explained to him what it was really about: the fans represented two

herons flying over a moonlit lake in the mountains, etc. Despite this true meaning, Rand was repeatedly arrested.

The audience wasn't just men. Alan Alda, one of Zemeckis's interviewees (his father was a "tit singer," the man who, with the chorus girls, opened the show), says that burlesque was family entertainment. Little boys were there, playing hooky; housewives came, on their shopping days. This was the Depression, and the shows were cheerful and cheap. You got in for ten cents, maybe fifteen.

Zemeckis likes fun, but she asks important questions: What motivated the women to go into burlesque? (The usual answer: poverty. Chorus girls started at a hundred and fifty dollars a week—a princely sum to a girl whose family picked cotton.) How did they fare? (Some say their time in burlesque was the happiest of their lives. Others, reportedly, kept a 7-Up bottle filled with gin backstage. "And that would get us through the midnight show.") Finally, Zemeckis tells us what killed burlesque: pornography, feminism, and, as with so much live theatre, television.

—Joan Acocella

PRAISE FOR *BEHIND THE BURLY Q*



“Utterly entertaining *Behind the Burly Q* is a painstakingly researched love letter to the women and men who once made up the community of burlesque performers...its treasure trove of vintage photographs and performance footage is enough to make historians and fans of classic erotica swoon...insightful, fascinating.” –Ernest Hardy, [The Village Voice](#).

The New York Times “Charming, entertaining...a delight!” – Manohla Dargis, [The New York Times](#).

DAILY NEWS “Affectionate and engaging...wonderful vintage footage, a fascinating glimpse into a corner of American history.” –*New York Daily News*



“Fascinatingly strips away at the myths surrounding the most popular American entertainment form of the first half of the 20th century.” –Michael Musto, [The Sundance Channel](#).



“Provides a privileged front-row seat to sample several of the form's most memorable practitioners... stories run from raunchy to touching to funny to flat-out incredible.” – Ronnie Scheib, [Variety](#).



“Quickly paced, absorbing.” –Kyle Smith, [The New York Post](#).



CRITICS' PICK! “Intriguing...fans of theatrical history are well advised to check it out,” *New York Mag*.



“Taps into a world of burlesque as we've never seen it before.” - Linnea Covington, [New York Press](#).

Montecito Miscellany

Courtesan and the City

Award winning author and documentarian **Leslie Zemeckis** is premiering her latest work: a 45-minute documentary, *Grandes Horizontales* – an in-depth look at the culture of the courtesan – at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

Leslie, wife of *Back to the Future* film director **Robert Zemeckis** and a *Journal* contributor, has had a number of successful documentaries in the past including *Bound by Flesh*, *Behind the Burly Q*, and *Mabel, Mabel, Tiger Trainer*.

Her latest work, which she wrote and directed, delves deeply into the sex and decadence of the Second Empire, around the time of Napoleon III between 1852 and 1870, considered the most decadent period in French history.

“I’ve been fascinated by the subject for years!” says Leslie, 53. “I hadn’t seen any other documentaries on it and wanted to push the boundaries of the art form.

“I mean, if we are talking about cour-

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