

**Automat Pictures
In Association with Lottie & Lorraine Pictures
Presents**

**BOULEVARD!
A Hollywood Story**

A Film by Jeffrey Schwarz

USA / 85 min. / 2021

OFFICIAL SELECTION
Outfest Los Angeles LGBTQ Film Festival (World Premiere)

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**“There’s nothing else... just us... and the cameras...
and those wonderful people out there in the dark...”**
Norma Desmond, *Sunset Boulevard*

LOGLINE

The true story of Gloria Swanson’s attempt to make “Sunset Boulevard” into a musical and the resulting threesome with her songwriters.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Dickson Hughes and Richard Stapley, two young songwriters and romantic partners, find themselves caught in movie star Gloria Swanson’s web when she hires them to write a musical version of “Sunset Boulevard.” Life imitates art when Gloria falls for Richard, and the men find themselves living a real-life version of the classic film.

LONG SYNOPSIS

For Gloria Swanson, the iconic star of “Sunset Boulevard,” both the movie and the character of Norma Desmond provided a renewed spotlight. Seeing in Norma a portal back to the stardom she once commanded during her years as an actress in silent pictures, Swanson strategically began efforts to parlay “Sunset Boulevard” into a new phase of her career. Swanson had begun to envision a musical stage adaptation of the film.

Enter, Dickson Hughes and Richard Stapley, two struggling songwriters (and romantic couple) looking for their big break. Enamored by the idea of helping Swanson step into the next phase of her career, as well as craving the fame and fortune of writing a Broadway hit, Stapley and Hughes eagerly agree to her proposal. The men find themselves whisked away by Swanson to a sumptuous house in Palm Springs, where the trio set to creating the musical from the ground up. As the days wear on, a triangle begins to take hold that goes beyond mere creative partnership as Hughes and Stapley find their intimate relationship intruded upon by Swanson. In attempting to recreate Swanson’s most famous role, Hughes, Stapley, and the star herself discover that within each of them was a streak of Norma Desmond waiting to catch fire.

Years before Andrew Lloyd Webber would successfully bring his own adaptation of “Sunset Boulevard” to Broadway, Stapley and Hughes completed their own musical vision of Norma’s story. But when the show fails to gain traction with Broadway investors and Paramount Pictures refuses Swanson the rights to “Sunset Boulevard,” the situation the threesome has handled so delicately suddenly explodes. Swanson declares the project as dead as Norma Desmond’s monkey, and rides off into the sunset as only a Hollywood icon can.

Stapley and Hughes find themselves unemployed and at each other’s throats. After parting ways, Hughes continued to compose, while Stapley, ever chasing his star, set off to Europe to act in spaghetti westerns and James Bond rip-offs. For the three individuals who worked so

tirelessly on their passion project, the chapter on the “Sunset Boulevard” musical could have officially been closed forever.

...except, just like Norma Desmond, the show hadn’t taken its final bow quite yet.

In the early 1990s, Hughes revitalized the music written by he and Stapley into a cabaret act titled “Swanson on Sunset.” The show not only incorporated the music from the “Sunset Boulevard” musical, but also went further...telling the harrowing story of the failed production itself. An autobiographical ode to a musical moment in his life, Hughes was able to bring a sweet coda to his work all those years prior. The project catches the attention of Richard Stapley, now an aging out of work actor, who makes a sudden return to Hughes’ life to try and get a piece of the action.

From the dark alleys of LA to the desert nirvana of Palm Springs to the posh New York theater world, “Boulevard! A Hollywood Story” is the tale of three individuals who attempt to share a melody with all those people out there in the dark...and how the music of that moment defined the rest of their lives.

THE PLAYERS

Gloria Swanson

A veritable icon of the golden era of silent cinema, Gloria Swanson became known to a whole new generation of film fans for her portrayal of the dramatically devilish Norma Desmond in "Sunset Boulevard." Recognizing the power the part could play in revitalizing her career, Swanson set her sights on translating the film's story from screen to stage. However, even as she worked to bring her musical to the Great White Way, the film icon could have never predicted that the story of its journey would become its own bittersweet swan song.

Dickson Hughes

When Dickson Hughes was approached by Gloria Swanson to help her craft a musical version of "Sunset Boulevard," he couldn't have foreseen the long, strange journey on which the project would take him. An accomplished composer and conductor who would later tour the world with his musical prowess, Hughes would be the one to eventually realize an incarnation of the "Sunset Boulevard" musical that he had labored on with Swanson and Stapley years prior. Reimagining the show as a cabaret act detailing its own production, Hughes was able to put a button on an odyssey embarked upon decades prior... and finally bring Norma out of the dark once more.

Richard Stapley

More than just Dickson Hughes' songwriting partner, Richard Stapley was an actor who continued to pursue his dreams until the end. Stapley was a strikingly handsome leading man who conquered the London and Broadway stages before Hollywood came calling. He soon found himself under contract at MGM, groomed to be the English Clark Gable. But stardom eluded him, and he never quite became a household name. Stapley's eclectic career found him wrestling with Boris Karloff to gun slinging in spaghetti westerns to making a cameo in Hitchcock's "Frenzy," but he eventually aged out of Hollywood and couldn't find work. With the hopes that "Sunset Boulevard" could still be his ticket to the big time, Stapley never let go of his Tinseltown dreams.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Jeffrey Schwarz

My first awareness of Norma Desmond was, like many kids growing up in the 1970s, seeing Carol Burnett lampoon the silent screen diva on her comedy show. It wasn't until years later that I finally saw "Sunset Boulevard" and fell in love with it instantly. It's a movie about the dark side of Hollywood and the perils of holding on to the past, personified by Norma Desmond - a tragic heroine living in a world of shadows and delusion, discarded by the industry she once ruled. "Sunset Boulevard" blends real life elements from the life of its star Gloria Swanson, so much so that character and actress merged in the public's mind as one.

I love learning about the behind-the-scenes drama of classic movies, and devoured film historian Sam Staggs' book "Close-up on Sunset Boulevard." It was here I first learned about Gloria Swanson's failed attempt to launch a musical version of "Sunset Boulevard," and the resulting creative threesome with her composers - Dickson Hughes and Richard Stapley. The two men were lovers but presented themselves to the world as writing partners and roommates, a necessary contrivance in the homophobic 1950s. Their working relationship with Gloria Swanson mirrored the plot of "Sunset Boulevard," and they found themselves living a real-life version of the film when Gloria fell for the handsome Richard Stapley. Life imitates art, indeed!

It was obvious that this story had all the ingredients of a delicious movie melodrama and I started thinking about how to bring this story to the screen. Sadly, Richard and Dickson are both gone, and Gloria never mentioned the failed musical in public so I wasn't sure if the story could be told. I reached out to my friend Alan Eichler, who was friends with Dickson Hughes and interviewed for the Staggs book. After telling Alan I was considering making a film about these events, the first thing he said was, "I've been waiting twenty-five years for someone to tell this story." Alan then introduced me to Stephen Bock, a friend of Richard Stapley's who had the foresight to interview Richard on camera about his experiences working with Gloria. Then came a call to Brooke Anderson, Gloria Swanson's granddaughter and guardian of her legacy, who graciously gave us her blessing. Brooke pointed me in the direction of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin. It was here I discovered a treasure trove of archival material relating to the musical - correspondence, love letters, personal photographs, scripts, and hours of never-before-heard audio recordings of all the songs the team wrote. It became clear that this wealth of archival was just waiting for someone to breathe new life into it and a documentary could be made.

And now, "Boulevard! A Hollywood Story" is ready for its close-up.

This film is about how our protagonists poured their heart and soul into a creative venture that would ultimately blow up in their faces. It's a heartbreak any creative person can identify with - presenting something to the world only to have it be met with at best indifference, or at worst a critical drubbing. This is what attracted me to the story of Dickson Hughes and Richard Stapley, who both faced barriers to success over the course of their lives but never gave up on their

dreams. "Boulevard!" is also about growing old, and how our protagonists faced the challenges of aging in a youth-obsessed society. Richard Stapley found himself desperate and destitute toward the end of his life, but never gave up hope that things might turn around for him. He was living in another time, much like Norma Desmond, and his story is ultimately a tragic one. Dickson Hughes clung to his dreams of a "Sunset Boulevard" musical, but chose a philosophy of patience and acceptance, and unlike Richard ended his days peacefully. Gloria Swanson struggled with the impression that she was a dusty relic from the silent age, while in fact she was a thoroughly modern woman. She could never really escape Norma Desmond, and was faced with the same curse actresses in Hollywood deal with to this very day – being over fifty.

Digging up stories from the past and re-invigorating legacies for a new generation has been my creative mission over the years. With "Boulevard! A Hollywood Story," a hidden Hollywood saga will finally be revealed, and provide a big screen comeback for Gloria Swanson, Richard Stapley, and Dickson Hughes. Piecing together the fragments of what they left behind to make this film has been an enormously moving experience, and it brings me great joy to finally share this story with audiences around the world.

CREDITS

Director – Jeffrey Schwarz
Producer- Jeffrey Schwarz, p.g.a.
Producer - John Boccoardo
Executive Producer - Alan Eichler
Executive Producer - Gerald Herman
Executive Producer - Scott Sigman
Co-Executive Producer - Paul Marcarelli
Co-Producer- Aimée Flaherty
Co-Producer- Taki Oldham
Consulting Producer – Jeff Wolk
Associate Producer – Adam Baran
Associate Producer – Elijah Drenner
Associate Producer – James C. Hormel
Associate Producer – Larry Spitler
Composer - Miriam Cutler
Cinematographer – Doug Hosdale
Cinematographer – Matt May
Animation Art - Maurice Vellekoop
Titles & Graphic Design - Grant Nellessen
Editor - Jeffrey Schwarz

FEATURING

Robert Osborne – film historian, in one of his final appearances
Brooke Anderson – granddaughter of Gloria Swanson
Cari Beauchamp – film historian and scholar of women in Hollywood
David del Valle – film historian and friend of Richard Stapley
Stephen Michael Shearer, author of *Gloria Swanson: The Ultimate Star*
Stephen Bock – Richard Stapley’s friend and music publisher
Alan Eichler – friend of Dickson Hughes
Chandler Warren – Richard Stapley’s friend and attorney
Mark Saltzman – writer and authority on American musical theater
Laurie Franks – played Gloria Swanson in Dickson Hughes’ *Swanson on Sunset*
Richard Leibell – played Richard Stapley in Dickson Hughes’ *Swanson on Sunset*
Luke Yankee – director of Dickson Hughes’ *Swanson on Sunset*
Derrick Lewis – friend of Dickson Hughes
Richard Wuerth – friend of Dickson Hughes
Steve Hayes – host of *Tired Old Queen at the Movies*

FILMMAKER BIOS

JEFFREY SCHWARZ – Producer / Director

Jeffrey Schwarz is an Emmy Award-winning producer, director and editor based in Los Angeles. His previous documentaries include “The Fabulous Allan Carr,” which premiered at the 2017 Seattle International Film Festival, the 2015 SXSW premiere “Tab Hunter Confidential,” the Emmy Award-winning HBO Documentary Films’ “Vito,” “I Am Divine” currently streaming on Netflix, “Wrangler: Anatomy of an Icon” currently streaming on Amazon Prime, and the 2007 AFI Fest Documentary Audience Award winner “Spine Tingler! The William Castle Story.” He is also a producer of studio Blu-ray and DVD content, and original television programming through his company, Automat Pictures. Hailed as an “EPK samurai” by Variety, he has produced content on major studio releases for directors such as Martin Scorsese, David Lynch, Jonathan Demme, John Waters, Wes Craven, Rob Reiner, Barry Sonnenfeld, Paul Verhoeven, Chris Columbus, and the Coen Brothers. Schwarz appeared in The Advocate’s “Out 100” in 2013, and was the recipient of the 2015 Frameline Award, which honors those who have made a major contribution to LGBT representation in film, television, and the media arts.

JOHN BOCCARDO – Producer

A practicing architect and real estate developer, John Boccardo has lately returned to his first love, film. Prior to “Boulevard! A Hollywood Story,” he produced “The Fabulous Allan Carr” (2017) and co-produced “Tab Hunter Confidential,” (2015) both directed by Jeffrey Schwarz. He is also executive producer on the documentaries “Bernstein’s Wall” (2021), “My Name is Lopez” (2021), “Where’s My Roy Cohn” (2019), and the smash-hit “Won’t You Be My Neighbor” (2018) directed by the Academy Award-winning Morgan Neville. John is also associate producer on the 2017 feature films “Columbus,” “Lucky,” and “The House of Tomorrow.” A graduate of USC Film School, Boccardo worked as a screenwriter and script analyst in Hollywood prior to becoming an architect. John is actively involved in the Sundance Institute in Park City, Utah, where he lives part time.

SCOTT SIGMAN – Executive Producer

Scott is a graduate of UCLA, an avid LA Kings fan, and an entrepreneur who has run a number of successful clothing companies around the world. He’s also a published songwriter and musician who has played in several bands. Scott hungers for truths untold and places unseen, so decided to get involved for the first time in the filmmaking process. “Boulevard! A Hollywood Story” is his first documentary.

GERALD HERMAN – Executive Producer

Gerald Herman has had a fifty-year career in theatre, film and television in the United States, Europe and Asia. From 1993 - 2017 Herman was based in Asia, producing and directing features, shorts, documentaries and television commercials, as well as establishing southeast Asia’s first “art house” cinema - the Hanoi Cinémathèque. Recent feature documentaries include “Finding Phong” (2015), “Film Hawk” (2017), “Making Montgomery Clift” (2018), and “Circus of Books” (2019). Mr. Herman's shorts and features have been selected and screened at 61 international film festivals, including AFI Fest, Tribeca, Frameline and Outfest

ALAN EICHLER – Executive Producer

Alan Eichler is a theatrical producer, talent manager and press agent who has represented numerous stage productions, produced Grammy-winning record albums and managed such singers as Anita O'Day, Hadda Brooks, Nellie Lutcher, Ruth Brown, Johnnie Ray and Yma Sumac. He was personal publicist for Tony Award-winning "Dreamgirls" author Tom Eyer for more than 20 years and co-produced Eyer's hit "Women Behind Bars." In 1994, he produced the original stage musical "Swanson on Sunset" featuring Dickson Hughes as himself. It was performed at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel Cinegrill, and inspired the making of this documentary.

PAUL MARCARELLI – Co-Executive Producer

Paul Marcarelli is most recognizable from his twenty years as an actor in commercials, most recently as the spokesman for Sprint. He wrote and produced the feature films "Clutter" and "The Green." He was co-producer on Jeffrey Schwarz's "I Am Divine," executive producer on Cynthia Silver's "Adult," "The Shallow End," and "Chemistry." He is executive producer on Jenni Olson's 2015 Sundance hit "The Royal Road" and its follow-up film, "The Quiet World." He lives in Litchfield, CT with his husband and two rescue pugs.

AIMÉE FLAHERTY – Co-Producer

With more than twenty years of experience in both independent and studio filmmaking, Aimée Flaherty has excelled in numerous feature films, documentaries, commercials, and web content. Aimee's career spans all aspects of production from development to post production. She has always seen filmmaking as a collaborative endeavor and has traveled the globe many times over to orchestrate elaborate film productions. Aimée received her education from Emerson College and FAMU in the Czech Republic. She has worked on such films as "Moulin Rouge," "Killing the Colorado," "Street Gang," "Light Girls," "Tabloid" and "This Is It."

TAKI OLDHAM - Co-Producer

Taki Oldham worked as a documentary film producer and director in Australia before coming to the US in 2013 to co-produce Robert Kenner's "Merchants of Doubt." Since then, he has worked on projects including Jeffrey Schwarz's "The Fabulous Allan Carr" (2017), the Academy Award short-listed "Command and Control," (2016), and the Emmy Award-nominated "Bing Crosby Rediscovered" (2014). Taki was Executive Producer and co-director of the Netflix Original "The Confession Killer," which premiered in 2019.

JEFF WOLK - Consulting Producer

Jeff Wolk is an award-winning independent film and theater producer. In 2009, after a long career in the New York real estate business, he launched Hawk House Productions, a production company whose main focus is cinematic and character-driven documentaries. He executive produced "A Birders Guide to Everything," (2014) featuring Sir Ben Kingsley and Kodi Smit-McPhee, and "After Louie," (2018) starring Alan Cumming and Zach Booth. Jeff produced the Off-Broadway show Maurice Hines "Tappin' Thru Life," which was nominated for three Lucille Lortel Awards. During the show's run, he produced a behind-the-scenes documentary about the show's legendary Broadway producer, Leonard Soloway. "Leonard Soloway's

Broadway” (2019) captures what goes on behind the curtain of New York Theater in a way that has rarely been seen. Jeff lives in Cleveland, Ohio.

ADAM BARAN – Associate Producer

Adam Baran is a filmmaker, writer, curator whose work focuses on hidden histories of queer sexuality. Baran's latest short “Trade Center” has screened at South by Southwest, AFI DOCS, Frameline, and the Oak Cliff Film Festival, where it received a Special Jury Mention for Best Documentary Short. Baran produced the Emmy-nominated Netflix documentary “Circus of Books” and directed the award-winning gay narrative short “Jackpot.” Baran is the co-curator of the acclaimed Queer/Art/Film screening series, now in its 11th year, and has been a programmer for Outfest and NewFest. He is the producer of the new webseries “How to Have Sex in a Pandemic” from director Michael Leibenluft. His next documentary as director explores the untold history of the New York-based private leather club The 9+ Club.

ELIJAH DRENNER – Associate Producer

Elijah Drenner is a Los Angeles-based documentary filmmaker and producer of Blu-ray/DVD bonus content. His work can be found on The Criterion Collection, Kino Lorber, Shout! Factory, Vinegar Syndrome, Arrow Video and other specialty labels. His first feature-length documentary, “American Grindhouse,” made its world premiere at SXSW Film Festival in 2010. In 2014, Drenner premiered his second documentary at SXSW, “That Guy Dick Miller,” a tribute to the late beloved character actor.

JAMES C. HORMEL – Associate Producer

James C. Hormel has devoted his life to the advocacy of basic human rights and social justice. Jim served as United States Ambassador to Luxembourg from June 1999 to December 2000. A recipient of numerous awards honoring his leadership and philanthropy, Jim has been instrumental in developing resources for organizations serving people affected by HIV and AIDS, substance abuse and breast cancer. He is chairman of Equidex, Inc., a San Francisco-based firm that manages his family’s investments and philanthropic activities.

LARRY SPITLER - Associate Producer

While Larry has always enjoyed films and documentaries, he had never entered into the production side of the business, until a friend invited him to join “Tab Hunter Confidential” as an Associate Producer. In 2017, Larry co-produced “The Fabulous Allan Carr,” also directed by Jeffrey Schwarz. He is also Associate Producer of “The Zen Speaker,” released in 2019. Larry is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma, lives in Henderson, Nevada and is retired. He is also an Executive Producer of the short documentary, “Are You Really My Friend?”

MIRIAM CUTLER - Composer

Three-time Emmy-nominated Composer Miriam Cutler has an extensive background in scoring for independent film & TV projects, as well as two circuses. Her passion for documentaries has led to a focus in non-fiction award-winning and festival favorites. She wrote the scores for “RBG” (CNN) and “Dark Money” (PBS) which both premiered at Sundance 2017 and “Love, Gilda” (CNN) which premiered at Tribeca 2018. All three films had theatrical releases with “RBG” being one

of the highest earning documentaries ever. Other highlights include BAFTA nominated "Lost In La Mancha," Emmy winners "One Last Hug," "Vito," "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib," "Desert of Forbidden Art" (score also nominated); Emmy nominated "Ethel," "Thin," and "Pandemic: Facing AIDS." She has served as Lab Advisor for the Sundance Institute Documentary Composers Lab since it began in 2003, is co-founder of The Alliance For Women Film Composers, and has been a long-time Society of Composers and Lyricists Board member.

MAURICE VELLEKOOP - Animation Art

Maurice Vellekoop is an illustrator and cartoonist whose work has appeared in major international magazines, advertising, books and comics anthologies for thirty-five years. He is currently at work on a major graphic memoir for Pantheon Books. He lives on Toronto Island with his partner, writer and editor Gordon Bowness.

GRANT NELLESEN - Titles & Graphic Design

Grant Nellessen has designed and art directed title sequences for notable films such as "Dreamgirls," "Drag me to Hell," and "The Other Guys," which was named the best title sequence of 2010 by the New York Times. He's created title sequences for "Casa De Mi Padre," "The Vanished Elephant," "Ana Maria in Novela Land," and the director's cut of "54." He's also produced titles and/or animated content for the documentaries "When the Beat Drops," "Out of Iraq," "Scotty and the Secret History of Hollywood," "The Untold Tales of Armistead Maupin," "I Am Divine," "Citizen Jane: Battle for the City," and the Oscar-Nominated "How to Survive a Plague." A longtime Los Angeles resident, he began his career with a degree from the American Film Institute followed by several years designing and art directing at the Picture Mill.