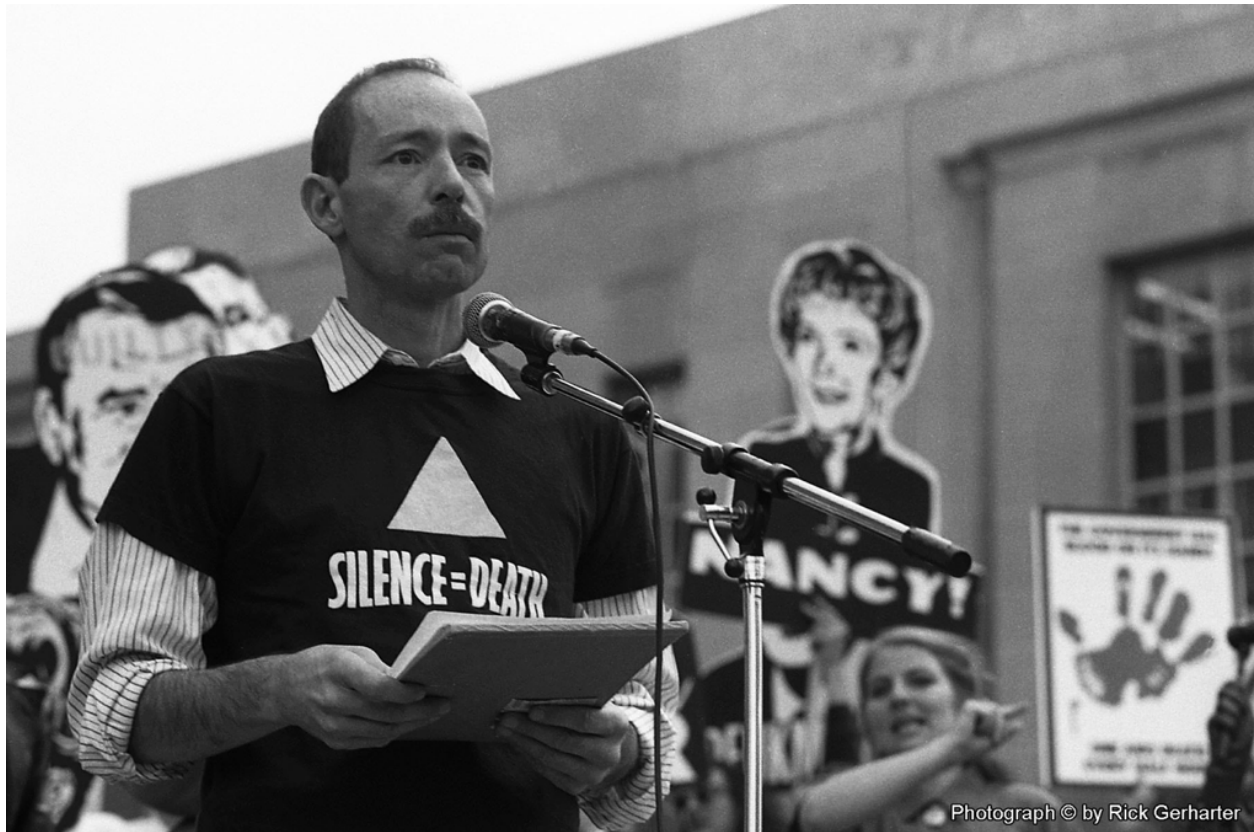


HBO Documentary Films
and Automat Pictures
Presents

VITO



Photograph © by Rick Gerharter

TIP SHEET

Title	Vito
Genre	Documentary
Running Time	93 Minutes
Format	HDCam
Copyright	2011
Producer / Director	Jeffrey Schwarz
Executive Producer	Bryan Singer
Co-Producers	Philip Harrison, Lotti Pharriss Knowles
Editor	Philip Harrison
Director of Photography	David Quantic
Composer	Miriam Cutler
Associate Producers	Jon Glover, Adam Robitel, Taryn Teigue
Logline	The story of Vito Russo, founding father of the gay liberation movement, author of "The Celluloid Closet," and vociferous AIDS activist in the 1980s.
Short Synopsis	In the aftermath of Stonewall, a newly politicized Vito Russo found his voice as a gay activist and critic of LGBT representation in the media. He went on to write "The Celluloid Closet," the first book to critique Hollywood's portrayals of gays on screen. During the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, Vito became a passionate advocate for justice via the newly formed ACT UP, before his death in 1990.
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VITO **SYNOPSIS**

On June 27, 1969 a police raid on a Greenwich Village gay bar called the Stonewall took a surprising turn when patrons decided it was time to fight back. As a riot erupted on Christopher Street, a new era in the Gay Rights Movement was born. Vito Russo, a 23-year-old film student, was among the crowd. Over the next twenty years until his death from AIDS in 1990, Vito would go on to become one of the most outspoken and inspiring activists in the GLBT community's fight for equal rights. He was a pivotal part of three well-known organizations during their formative years: the GAA (Gay Activists Alliance), which staged subversive works of protest performance art to secure rights and dignity for all gay people; GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), formed to ensure that media representation of gays and lesbians was accurate; and ACT UP (The AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), a guerilla activist group that turned the fury over President Reagan's refusal to do anything about AIDS into a series of highly telegenic acts of civil disobedience. In the midst of his commitment to activism, Vito was also a prolific writer. His seminal book "The Celluloid Closet" explored the ways in which gays and lesbians were portrayed on film, what lessons those characters taught gay and straight audiences, and how those negative images were at the root of society's homophobia. Even before the book was published, Vito was taking "The Celluloid Closet" on the road, traveling to gay film festivals and college campuses for an entertaining and informative lecture-slash-clip show that intertwined Vito's love of show business and radical gay politics. He continued writing, lecturing, speaking out and acting up until just months before his death.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

After coming out and becoming secure in my identity as a gay man, I naturally gravitated toward films with LGBT themes. This was the early 90s, and movies like *My Own Private Idaho*, *The Living End*, *Poison*, and *Swoon* were formative. These films were outré, edgy, and empowering for a young queer. Even though I was a newbie, there was one book that everyone knew was the bible of gay film. It was called "The Celluloid Closet" by somebody named Vito Russo. This book combined my two favorite obsessions - homosexuality and the movies - and I devoured it. Vito introduced me to a whole world of images I had no idea existed, and helped me see films in a new way. As an activist, Vito knew that the key to acceptance was visibility and championed sympathetic and realistic portrayals of our lives.

When I found out that Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Freidman were making "The Celluloid Closet" into a film, I jumped at the chance to be part of it. Working with Rob and Jeffrey as an assistant editor on *The Celluloid Closet* film adaptation gave me a chance to help them bring Vito's vision to the screen. It also allowed me to get to know Vito Russo, only three years after his death from AIDS. All of Vito's research for "The Celluloid Closet" was at my fingertips - interviews, articles, videotapes, lectures - and best of all, Rob and Jeffrey's extended conversations with Vito himself. Beyond his work as a film scholar, I learned about the years Vito spent battling AIDS as both a person with the disease and a passionate and angry agent for change. Although he didn't live long enough to see much of the progress he had been hoping for, his work forever changed the landscape for those living with the disease.

The idea of a film came about when I realized that Vito participated in every significant milestone in the gay liberation movement - from Stonewall to ACT UP - and that his story was also the story of our community. A documentary could contextualize how he and his gay liberation brothers and sisters were able to begin to overcome homophobia and oppression, and emerge from invisibility to liberation. We are all living the end result Vito's work, and our freedom is his gift to us.

As time marches on, a new generation of LGBT youth is coming of age without knowing about pioneers like Vito Russo and how he made it possible for us to live proudly and openly in the world. Vito's message of standing up, speaking out, and living passionately and bravely in the face of adversity is something we can all aspire to, regardless of sexual orientation. More than twenty years after Vito's death, members of the LGBT community around the world still face prejudice and persecution, and HIV / AIDS is still a crisis. Vito knew the goal of equality goal of equality and justice would not be achieved in his lifetime, but that it would come to pass. It's my hope that this film will celebrate one of the founding fathers of the LGBT movement, and allow his work to once again move and inspire us all as we continue the battles that he once fought.

THE FILMMAKERS

JEFFREY SCHWARZ (PRODUCER / DIRECTOR)



Jeffrey Schwarz is President & CEO of Automat Pictures, a leading producer of studio EPKs (electronic press kit), Blu-ray and DVD content, original TV programming, and feature films. He has contributed to the success of dozens of major studio releases for directors such as Martin Scorsese, David Lynch, Jonathan Demme, Ron Howard, Sam Mendes, Wes Craven, Rob Reiner, Joe Dante, Barry Sonnenfeld, Paul Verhoeven, John Carpenter, Chris Columbus, and the Coen Brothers. Television productions include Starz's *Sex and the Cinema*, *In the Gutter*, *Hitchcocked!* and *Shooting the Police: Cops on Film*, and IFC's *Reservoir Dogs Revisited* and *Still Swingin'*. Automat Pictures provided exclusive backstage content for the 2010 Academy Awards produced by Adam Shankman and Bill Mechanic. In 2008, Jeffrey premiered the GayVN

award winning feature documentary *Wrangler: Anatomy of an Icon*, a portrait of adult film star Jack Wrangler. It is distributed by TLA Releasing and had its television debut on the LOGO network. *Spine Tingler! The William Castle Story*, about the legendary Hollywood showman, won the 2007 AFI Fest Documentary Audience Award among many other festival honors. It was released in 2009 by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. He is currently in production on *I Am Divine*, an independent feature documentary about John Waters' legendary muse. A New York native, Jeffrey attended SUNY Purchase's Film Department. His first job in the film industry was as an apprentice editor on *The Celluloid Closet*, Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman's film adaptation of Vito Russo's seminal book.



BRYAN SINGER (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER)

Since his debut feature film, Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner *Public Access*, Bryan Singer has consistently entertained audiences by directing films that can be characterized by his bold visual style and richly drawn characters. Bryan first gained widespread attention in 1995 with the mystery/thriller *The Usual Suspects*, which won two Academy Awards® for Best Supporting Actor and Best Original Screenplay. Subsequently he directed the feature films *Apt Pupil*, *X-Men*, *X2: X-Men United*, *Superman Returns*, and *Valkyrie*. In television, Singer directed the pilot and serves as an executive producer on the Emmy® and Golden Globe® award

winning FOX series *House*, and also served as Executive Producer on the ABC Emmy® and Golden Globe® award nominated series *Dirty Sexy Money*. Singer has directed and/or produced a myriad of other projects through his Bad Hat Harry Productions banner, a motion picture, television and video game production company he formed in 1994. A few of his producing endeavors include the feature length documentary *Look, Up in the Sky: The Amazing Story of Superman*; the Sci-Fi Channel miniseries *The Triangle*; the genre film festival favorite *Trick 'r Treat*; and the upcoming sci-fi web series *H+* for Warner Brothers. Most recently, Singer has returned to the *X-Men* universe as producer on *X-Men: First Class*, a prequel based on his original story. He is concurrently directing the epic 3D live action film, *Jack the Giant Killer*.

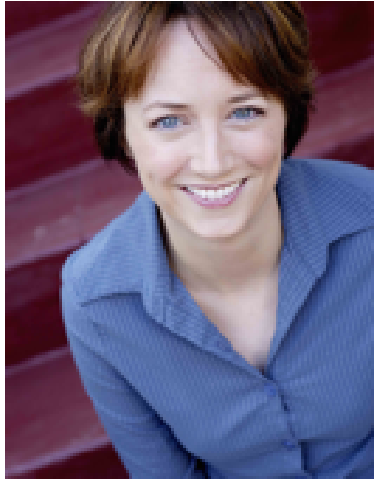
PHILIP HARRISON (CO-PRODUCER / EDITOR)



Philip Harrison has collaborated as editor with Jeffrey Schwarz on the documentaries *Spine Tinger! The William Castle Story*, *No Day But Today: The Story of Rent* and *Never Sleep Again: The Making of A Nightmare on Elm Street*. He has also edited the 2008 San Diego Film Festival Audience Award winner *The Last Lullaby*, *On These Shoulders We Stand*, 2009 Outfest Special Program Award winner, *Bam Bam and Celeste*, which premiered at the 2005 Toronto Film Festival, and *Die Mommie, Die!* winner of a special jury prize for best performance at the 2003 Sundance Film Festival. He co-edited *The Politics of Fur*, named Best North American Feature at Outfest 2002, as well as Kelly Reichard's short film *Ode*, which was presented at the 1999 Venice Film Festival.

Previously, Philip collaborated as assistant and associate editor on such films as Ang Lee's *Ride with The Devil*, Mary Harron's *American Psycho*, and David Duchovny's *House of D*. Philip recently completed work on the independent film *Arcadia Lost*, starring Nick Nolte and directed by acclaimed cinematographer Phedon Papamichael. Philip was an editor at the 2006 Sundance Director's Lab. He is a graduate of the SUNY Purchase Film Department.

LOTTI PHARRISS KNOWLES (CO-PRODUCER)



Lotti Pharriss Knowles is a writer, producer and partner in Weirdsmobile Productions, Inc. She has produced two short films with Weirdsmobile to date: *Shadow.net*, based on an article optioned from Wired magazine (Winner, Best Thriller – Dragon*Con Independent Short Film Festival); and *Weak Species*, based on the writings of cult author Dennis Cooper (Winner, Best Short – FilmOut San Diego and Honolulu Rainbow Film Festival). Lotti also produced the world premiere run of her play *Because They Have No Words*, co-written with Tim Maddock about his experiences as a volunteer in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The play was nominated for two 2007 LA Stage Alliance Ovation Awards for Best

Ensemble and World Premiere Play, and will be published in 2011 by Northwestern University Press as part of the anthology *Katrina Onstage: Five Plays Exploring Hurricane Katrina*. A native of the San Francisco Bay Area, Lotti holds a BA in Performance Studies from Northwestern and an MA in Theatre from University of Illinois at Chicago. Lotti is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, and has volunteered as an adult theatre artist and mentor with the Virginia Avenue Project in Santa Monica since 1994. Her current producing projects with Weirdsmobile include the annual event Vampire-Con and her original feature film *Chastity Bites*, which was a semi-finalist in the Acclaim Film & Television Screenwriting Competition.