

FOREVER'S GONNA START TONIGHT



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**A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY
MICHELLE LAWLER**

USA, 54 MINUTES, 2009

PRESS CONTACT

Matt Johnstone
Matt Johnstone Publicity
T: 323 938-7880
1365 McDuff Street
Los Angeles, CA 90026
mattjohnstone-pr@sbcglobal.net

SALES CONTACT

Aggressively Enthusiastic Films
3910 Melrose Ave #3
LA, CA 90029
415.533.6842
forever.tonight.movie@gmail.com

Synopsis

Log Line

Forever's Gonna Start Tonight tells the astounding life story of San Francisco living legend Vicki Marlane, America's oldest professional transgender entertainer.

Synopsis

Forever's Gonna Start Tonight tells the astounding life story of San Francisco living legend Vicki Marlane, still strutting it onstage at 74. Vicki takes us on the ride of her life — from cross-dressed rollerskating in her youth to working the carnival sideshows circuit in the 1950s, from the wild years of San Francisco in the 1970s, to survival in the 1980s and her legendary performances at Aunt Charlies, where she continues to perform today.

Through video documentation of Marlane's performances, archival images of her glory days, and first-person interviews with Marlane and her circle of friends, fans and co-workers, *Forever's Gonna Start Tonight* tells the remarkable story of America's oldest professional transgender entertainer.

Vicki recounts her childhood as a poor Minnesota farm boy who ran away, more than half a century ago, to work as a “hoochie-coochie dancer” and performer in traveling carnival sideshows. Marlane eventually worked her way up into big-time show business as a “female impersonator,” starting out in mafia-controlled nightclubs in Chicago back when lip-synching was still known as “record pantomime.”

By the late 1950s, she was performing in drag acts across the nation, and by the mid-1960s, Vicki was a headliner at some of San Francisco's wildest nightspots. We hitchhike through the adventures that led to her being San Francisco's “Toast of the Town” in the early 1970s, and Vicki even shares her tips of the trade acquired from decades of drag experience at hot-spot venues including Aunt Charlie's in the Tenderloin District, where she still performs.

Yet, her life hasn't been all glitter, glitz, and glamorous gowns. In candid interviews, we learn how Vicki has battled drug addiction, HIV, and

alcoholism; how she survived the suicide of a lover and several broken hearts; and how, more than once, she was arrested and jailed for the crime of wearing women's clothes in public (as well as how she broke out of prison and took another girl along with her!).

Directed by Michelle Lawler, and produced by archivist and historian Kim Klausner (*It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues In School*) and Emmy Award-winning Susan Stryker (*Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*) this documentary is a loving tribute to a drag icon, and a fascinating look at LGBT history and culture, all told through the memories of a San Francisco living legend.

Key Production Credits

Director, Producer

Michelle Lawler

Executive Producer

Kim Klausner

Co-Producer

Susan Stryker

Director of Photography

Mark Arellano

Editor

Monica Nolan

Gaffer

Bill Basquin

Audio Engineer/Sound Recordist

Darcel Walker

Filmmaker Statement

When I first moved to San Francisco in 1999, I lived on 6th and Market, one block from the crossing of Turk and Taylor Streets. To this day, this intersection remains at the heart of one of the toughest neighborhoods in San Francisco. Located in the middle of so much chaos is Aunt Charlie's lounge, one of San Francisco's oldest drag bars. Little did I know that regularly performing inside the bar was local drag legend Vicki Marlane.

The first time I saw Vicki perform was on her 68th birthday, and she had such a profound effect on me. She performed with such emotion and passion. I couldn't believe that at her age, she could still entertain an audience with such fire and grace. I started to wonder where she came from, how she got started, and how she landed at Aunt Charlie's.

At the time I was a cinema student at San Francisco State University, and I was interested in documenting oral history in the LGBT community. I felt strongly that there was a lack of emphasis on the histories of the aging LGBT population in particular, and I was immediately curious about Vicki's story. I also wanted to cinematically capture Vicki as a performer. Vicki is known to bring those who see her shows to tears and I wanted to preserve that somehow. What is it about her that evokes so much emotion from people?

I thought about making a documentary about Vicki for three years -- how would I do it? With what money? Would the other performers who work there even want me putting cameras in their faces night after night? I finally got the courage to call Vicki up on the phone and tell her that I would like to make a documentary about her. Her immediate response was, "Well honey, why would you want to do that?" I proceeded to tell her that I thought she was an amazing performer and that she should just think it over for a week and let me know if she was interested. I was surprised when my phone rang the next day. Vicki asked me if I would come over to her house and talk.

Because I had only seen Vicki at Aunt Charlie's under a red light with a gown and a wig, I was surprised when a demure and soft spoken 71-year-old woman in jeans and long grey hair answered the door. She invited me into her home, and as soon as we sat down on her couch, she began telling me incredible adventures -- story after story about running away with the carnival when she was a teenager, traveling the country, female impersonation in the '50s, being arrested for wearing women's clothes and then breaking out of prison. She also knew so much about the old

drag days in San Francisco; the clubs, the girls, the police, the sex, the drugs, and the glamour that characterized the tenderloin in the '60s and '70s. She told me that making this film was how she wanted to leave her legacy; that she would not be around much longer and she wanted to tell people her story. I was honored that she was going to trust me with this responsibility.

When we started filming the documentary, I had about \$600 and a friend cooking lasagna to feed the crew that was volunteering their time for a planned two-day shoot. After we had completed a fundraising trailer, Vicki suggested that we show the trailer in between her performances each weekend night and pass around a hat to collect money. The girls at the bar collected close to \$4000 in two months. Each week Vicki would call me up and say "I have some more money for you honey," and when I went to pick it up she would hand me stacks of small bills. The money she collected at the bar is such a testament to the importance Vicki has to her community.

This also speaks to the ardor people feel have about preserving LGBT history and stories like Vicki's. I would go to the bar when the trailer was showing and someone would always come up to me and tell me how happy they were that someone was making a film about Vicki, how much they loved her, and how much she means to so many people. When I asked Vicki why at 73 she still performs every Friday and Saturday night, she says simply, "because they enjoy it, so I enjoy doing it".

This film is my tribute to Vicki Marlane, and a contribution to the preservation of a collective LGBT history.

- Michelle Lawler

Filmmaker Bios

Director, Co-Producer

Filmmaker Michelle Lawler moved to San Francisco from Massachusetts in 1999 to pursue a film and television career in the bay area, attending film school at San Francisco State University while working as a cinematographer, camera operator, assistant camera, gaffer and key grip. She is director of photography on several documentaries, including *Diagnosing Difference* (2009), screening at Frameline 2009. After earning her B.A in cinema studies at San Francisco State University in 2009, she was selected as the Departmental Honoree of her Graduating Cinema Class. She recently relocated to Los Angeles Ca to continue her dual careers in cinematography and directing. *Forever's Gonna Start Tonight* marks her feature directorial debut.

Executive Producer

Kim Klausner produced and directed the award winning documentary film *Choosing Children* in 1985. Winner of the Best Short Documentary Award, New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, *Choosing Children* has recently been chosen for preservation by the Outfest Legacy Project. Klausner was Consulting Producer for Academy Award winning *Deadly Deception: General Electric, Nuclear Weapons and Our Environment* and Cine Golden Eagle winner *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School*. Klausner is an archivist and historian and has done archival film footage research. She was also one of the founders and publisher of OUT/LOOK, Lesbian and Gay Quarterly.

Co-Producer

Susan Stryker won a Northern California Emmy Award for her ITVS-funded documentary, *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, which she produced, wrote, and directed with Victor Silverman (co-produced by Jack Walsh). Previous screen credits include scenarist and scriptwriter on Shu Lea Cheang's *Brandon* (an online multimedia installation commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum), and performance artist/interviewee in Monika Treut's *Gendernauts*. She has served on the Board of Directors of the queer media arts organization Frameline. As former Executive Director of the GLBT Historical Society, she consulted as an historian on several film projects, including Michelle Handelman's *Bloodsisters*, Peter Stein's *The Castro* and *The Fillmore*, and Eric Slade's *Hope Along the Wind*, as well as documentaries on the history of sexuality in San Francisco produced for the Discovery Channel, VH1, and gay television outlets around the world.

Director of Photography

Mark Arellano's credits include *Voices Carry* (Screenwriter, Producer, Director, Editor), *Anonymity* (Producer, Director of Photography), *Tragic Kingdom* (Director of Photography), *Ronnie Rocket* (Producer, Director), *Jornalero* (Editor), *An Old Acquaintance* (Director of Photography) and *Day In the Life* series (Creator, Director, Camera Operator, Editor). He is a producer/director for Conscious Creative, an agency that provides high quality, eco-friendly design, photography and video services.

Editor

Monica Nolan earned her MFA in Cinema from San Francisco State University in 2000. She wrote, produced, and directed several short films including *World of Women*, which won awards for best narrative short from the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and from the Imaginaria Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in Turin. Since 1999 she has worked as a freelance editor in the Bay Area, primarily for broadcast news and independent productions. Her credits include *Grrlyshow*, *By Hook or By Crook*, *Matzoh Maidels*, *We Interrupt This Empire*, and *Bachelorette, 34*. She has taught at San Francisco State University, and created a class called "The Aesthetics of Editing" at Film Arts Foundation.

Gaffer

Bill Basquin is an award-winning film director and lighting professional, director, and cinematographer. His most recent short film, *Range*, screened at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. The list of his independent film work is long and varied, including: *Live, Nude, Girls UNITE!*, *Maquilopolis*, *By Hook or By Crook*, *Maggots and Men*, *Lost and Found* and *Come Nightfall*. He's currently at work on a short film about objects and physical absence called *These Things Have Sentimental Value* and a longer project about urban agriculture called *Soiled*.

Audio Engineer/Sound Recordist

Darcel Walker currently is an audio engineer for Funky Tiki LLC, an audio and video production company. Darcel studied at San Francisco's California Recording Institute, where he specialized in audio engineering. With over eight hundred hours of Field Sound Mixing under his belt, he is one of the most sought after Bay Area field audio techs. Darcel has produced films, television pilots and commercials as well as a national television news network for artists (Art and Music News-AMN) now in pre-production.

Vicki Marlane

Vicki was born Donald Dave Sterger in 1934 in the small town of Eldrid, Minnesota. From an early age, Vicki borrowed her mother's clothes, and battled her town's homophobia, dressing in drag to go roller skating. Raised by her grandparents, Vicki refers to herself as growing up "poor white trash" in a house with no running water or plumbing.

In 1950, at 16, Vicki moved out of the house and settled in Chicago with a lesbian friend named Pat. Vicki changed her name to Donnetta Dumont. Pat became Pat Dumont, and they lived in Chicago as brother and sister. After returning to Minnesota, Vicki landed on the carnival circuit, working as a 'Hoochie Coochie' erotic dancer, as well as filling in for sideshow performers such as the alligator skin girl, the girl in the iron lung, the talking head, and Miss Electra. Vicki spent years traveling the carnival circuit, and was arrested several times for wearing women's clothes. After escaping from one jail stint, Vicki hitchhiked and traveled from Niagara Falls to Florida, turning tricks to make ends meet.

In the early 1960s, Vicki lived in Detroit and performed as a popular female impersonator named Mr. Peel, eventually moving to Chicago to successfully work at many clubs, including the glamorous Club Diplomat, the mafia-owned Talk Of the Town, Nightlife, and Club Chesterfield, which was raided and closed down. Vicki was a salaried entertainer, also traveling across the country performing.

In Chicago, Vicki met her first lover Johnny, who left the Navy for her and traveled the country with Vicki during her hey day in the 60s. She also started dressing in drag full time and living her life as a woman. In 1969, The Guided Cage, the famous female impersonation venue in San Francisco, hired Vicki's whole revue to come to San Francisco. Vicki moved to San Francisco, where she and Johnny ended their tumultuous relationship.

Vicki then met San Francisco drag legend Pat Montclair, who helped Vicki start a long run of epic 70s Broadway style drag shows at the 181 Club, also working at the Frolic Room, the Ebb Tide, the Landmark, the Metro, the Mother Load, Marlana's and many other popular San Francisco clubs.

After a whirlwind few years, feeling burned out on the performing circuit, Vicki took a hiatus and got a 'straight' job as a receptionist, also beginning a three year affair with Michael, a married man with two

children. At 47 years old, when the romance ended, Vicki decided to get gender reassignment surgery in Trinidad, Colorado. As a result, she was forced to leave her office job, moved to San Diego, and fell in love for the third time with Randy. Tragically, Vicki's lover ended his life, and a distraught and suicidal Vicki moved back to San Francisco.

Vicky began seeing a therapist, building up her life, and with encouragement from drag mother Pat Montclair, began performing again. At the age of 74, Vicky is a remarkable, resilient survivor and performer, having battled and survived addictions, homophobia and prejudice, and HIV.

Vicki continues to perform every Friday and Saturday night at Aunt Charlie's Lounge in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco.

In 2003, Vicki served the honor of Grand Marshall of the San Francisco Gay Day Parade.

Screening History

OUTFEST: Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
July 9th, 2010

Audience Award Outstanding Documentary Feature!

Sri Lanka LGBT Film Festival
July 5th - 11th, 2010

Out Takes Wellington
June 4th, 2010

QDoc : Portland Queer
Documentary Film Festival
June 3rd, 2010

Out Takes Auckland
May 28th, 2010

Translations: The Seattle Transgender Film Festival
May 15th, 2010

Audience Award for Best Film!

Boston LGBT Film Festival
May 9th, 2010

24th BFI London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival
March 23rd, 2010

Mix Brasil Film Festival of Sexual Diversity
November 17th & 18th, 2009

Cine Mental Film Series at The Brattle Theatre
October 21st, 2009

Frameline at The Center Film Series
October 8th, 2009

Homo a go go
August 14th, 2009

Frameline, San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival
World Premiere

June, 2009

T e c h n i c a l S p e c s

Documentary

Color

Aspect Ratio: 4:3

Completion Date: 2009

Total running time: 54 minutes

Screening format: Beta SP, DVCam, MiniDV

Full Production Credits

Director, Producer Michelle Lawler
Executive Producer Kim Klausner
Co-Producer Susan Stryker

Director of Photography Mark Arellano
Camera Operators Cheri Larsh Arellano, Michelle Lawler
Sound Darcel Walker
Sound Mix Dan Olmstead
Gaffer Bill Basquin
Grip John Word
Interviewer Shoshanna von Blankensee
Editor Monica Nolan
Additional editor Nica Ross
Story consultant Jonathan Skurnik
Color Correction Carey Burens at Spy Post
Original Music Jenny Hoyston

Thank you to the crowd at Aunt Charlie's
Joe
The Hot Boxxx Girls:
Bobby
Gypsy Calabrese
Daffney Deluxe
Felicia Elizondo
Gina La Divina
Collette Le Grand
Angelina Josefina Manicotti
Pinky Maraschino
Miss Reality
Bonnie Sawyer
Victoria Secret
Aurora Styles
And all of its patrons, performers, and friends

Special Thanks to
My Mother, Annie S. Lowry

Brent Alberghini
Melody Brown
Kaliisa Conlon
Dennis Conroy
Jennifer D'urso
Brynn Gelbard
Lis Goldschmidt
Silas Howard
Jenny Hoyston
Pat Jackson
Tara Jepsen
Matt Johnstone
Kirsten Kuppenbender
Lindsay Lautz
Annie Lin
Jill Montgomery
Lila Thirkield & The Lexington Club
Bob Ostertag
Raymond Rea
Greta Snider
Anjali Sundaram
Jim Swanson
Shoshana Von Blankensee
Jack Walsh
Brooke Wentz

Conscious Creative
Funk! Tiki AV Media
KPFA
Jason at Miller Video
San Francisco State University

Extra Special Thanks
All who tossed money in the hat at Aunt Charlie's to help make this film
All who watched the trailer night after night, version after version.

Archival Footage
Christine Jorgensen collection, Royal Danish Archive, Copenhagen
Internet Archive
KRON
Prelinger Archives

Archival Photographs
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society
Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection
San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library
Tampa Bay History Center
JD Doyle, www.QueerMusicHeritage.us
John Robinson, Sideshowworld.com
Vicki Marlane

Legal Services
Edward Ruttenberg

Fiscal Sponsor
Bay Area Video Coalition

Music Clearance
The Rights Workshop

Music
"He had just gotten out of Prison"
Performed by Jenny Hoyston

"That Half Naked Gown"
Performed by Jenny Hoyston

"Ballin' the Jack"
Written by Jim Burris & Chris Smith
Performed by Ken Colyer
Courtesy of Universal Music

"Theme From Route 66"
Written by Nelson Riddle
Performed by Nelson Riddle and His Orchestra
Courtesy of Capitol Records
Under license from EMI-Capitol Special Markets

"Topsy"
Written by Edgar Battle and Eddie Durham
Performed by Joe Bucci Trio
Courtesy of Capitol Records
Under license from EMI-Capitol Special Markets

"Total Eclipse of the Heart"

Written by Jim Steinman
Performed by Bonnie Tyler
Courtesy of Sony Music Entertainment

“All Coming Back To Me Now”
Written by Jim Steinman
Performed by Celine Dion
Courtesy of Sony Music Entertainment

“Le Jazz Hot”
Written by Henry Mancini & Leslie Bricusse
Performed by Julie Andrews
Courtesy of Rhino Entertainment Company
By arrangement with Warner Music Group Film & TV Licensing

“I Want to be A Cheerleader”
Written and performed by Deirdre Flint

“Genie in A Bottle “
Written and performed by Christina Aguilera

“Miss Celie's Blues (Sister)”
Written by Quincy Jones, Rod Temperton & Lionel Ritchie
Performed by Táta Vega

Funding provided by
Frameline Completion Fund

Barbara DeGenevieve
Betty & Bob Klausner
Harvey Molotch
Amelie Ratliff
Jim Van Buskirk & Allen Sawyer
And many others