

HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS

THE JANES

A film by Tia Lessin and Emma Pildes



#TheJanesHBO

DEBUTS 2022 ON HBO

Press Contact

HBO Documentary Films

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LOGLINE

THE JANES is the story of an underground network of women in Chicago in the late 60s and early 70s who provided safe, affordable, illegal abortions to women in need.

SYNOPSIS

In the spring of 1972, police raided an apartment on the South Side of Chicago where seven women who were part of a clandestine network were arrested and charged. Using code names, fronts and safe houses to protect themselves and their work, the accused had built an underground service for women seeking safe, affordable, illegal abortions. They called themselves Jane.

Directed by Oscar®-nominee Tia Lessin (HBO's "Trouble the Water") and Emmy®-nominee Emma Pildes (HBO's "Jane Fonda in Five Acts"), THE JANES offers first-hand accounts from the women at the center of the group, many speaking on the record for the first time.

THE JANES tells the story of a group of unlikely outlaws. Defying the state legislature that outlawed abortion, the Catholic Church that condemned it, and the Chicago Mob that was profiting from it, the members of Jane risked their personal and professional lives to help women in need. In the pre-Roe v. Wade era — a time when abortion was a crime in most states and even circulating information about abortion was a felony in Illinois — the Janes provided low-cost and free abortions to an estimated 11,000 women.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

THE JANES is a cautionary tale – a jarring reminder of what's at stake as abortion providers in the U. S., and the women they serve are forced back underground. The story is our past and potentially, our future.

We began collaborating on the film in the fall of 2018, in the wake of Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings. Two years later, at the end of a long day of interviews in Chicago, we learned of the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg. And as we were editing the rough-cut in the spring of 2021, the Texas legislature essentially banned abortions in that state. Spurred on by these troubling events, we raced against the clock, and against a global pandemic, to finish the film. Now, as we release THE JANES, we face the reality that Roe may be overturned in a few months' time.

We set out to make a film that captured the drama of the story – a group of ordinary women turned outlaws, risking arrest and a lifetime in prison to help strangers. The film is equally about the lengths that women went to get abortion care during the pre-Roe era, and the countless women without the means or luck to find compassionate and skilled care who ended up in the hospital, or in the morgue.

Staying away from “experts,” we found those with lived experience from that era. The interviews took us to unexpected places: the Chicago mafia's dangerous abortion racket, the early role of the clergy – not in opposition but in support of abortion rights. We also learned that everyone was touched in some way by illegal abortion. Everyone. These myriad stories reinforced for us just how personal, how universal and critical this topic is.

We are very proud of THE JANES – not just the urgent politics of it, but also the filmmaking choices we made. The subject matter is deeply serious, but we wanted to reach a wide audience with an entertaining and engaging film. Collaborating with editor Kristen Huntley and composer Max Avery Lichtenstein, we built on the natural drama of the story by playing with the conventions of 60s and 70s-era heist films. At times giving it an almost caper feel, a clandestine playfulness.

We also wanted to capture the feeling of the turmoil and hope of 1960s and early 70s Chicago and the civil rights, anti-war and women's movements which were the training grounds for so many of our subjects. We knew early on that Chicago was not only a backdrop for the Janes but also, in a sense, another vibrant character in our story.

Making the film transported us to a time when abortion was illegal in most of the country. The Janes were ordinary women doing what they felt they had to do at that critical moment. As the Supreme Court is poised to overturn Roe and render abortion a crime once again, there scarcely could be a more timely moment for THE JANES.

-Tia Lessin and Emma Pildes

BIOS

DIRECTOR: TIA LESSIN

Tia Lessin was nominated for an Academy Award for her work as a director and producer of the Hurricane Katrina survival story “Trouble the Water,” winner of the 2008 Sundance Grand Jury Prize and the Gotham Independent Film Award. She directed and produced “Citizen Koch,” about the rise of the Tea Party in the Midwest, which also premiered at Sundance and was shortlisted for an Oscar in 2014. “The Janes” is the third feature-length documentary that Tia has directed. In 2001, Tia received the Sidney Hillman Award for Broadcast Journalism for directing the documentary short “Behind the Labels” about the labor trafficking of garment workers on U.S. Saipan.

Tia was on the producing teams of Palme D’Or winning “Fahrenheit 9/11,” Academy Award-winning “Bowling for Columbine,” and the Grammy-winning “No Direction Home: Bob Dylan.” She produced the film “Where to Invade Next” and executive produced “Fahrenheit 11/9.” Her work on the 1998/99 television series “The Awful Truth” earned her two Emmy nominations, one arrest, and a lifetime ban from Disneyland.

Tia is a past fellow of the Open Society Institute and the Sundance Institute and has served as an advisor to IFP, Sundance and Creative Capital artists. Her filmmaking has been supported by The Bertha Foundation, Chicken & Egg, Cinereach, Creative Capital, The Ford Foundation’s JustFilms, Fork Films, the International Documentary Association’s Pare Lorentz Fund, the MacArthur Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program. She is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences and the Directors Guild of America.

DIRECTOR: EMMA PILDES

Emmy-nominated filmmaker Emma Pildes has an extensive background in, and boundless love for, non-fiction storytelling. “The Janes” is Emma’s directorial debut. As one of Pentimento Productions’ principal producers, Emma produced “Spielberg,” “Jane Fonda in Five Acts,” and “Very Ralph” -- all for HBO Documentary Films. “Spielberg” had its world premiere at the New York Film Festival in 2017 and was later nominated for an Emmy. “Jane Fonda in Five Acts” had its world premiere at Sundance Film Festival in 2018 and its international premiere at Cannes Film Festival. The film was nominated for the 2019 Emmys. At PBS’ American Masters, Emma helped to produce the Emmy and Peabody-award winning “LennoNYC,” Emmy-award winning “Inventing David Geffen,” as well as “American Masters: Billie Jean King.” Born and raised in Chicago, Emma graduated from Sarah Lawrence College and is based in Brooklyn, NY.

PRODUCER: DANIEL ARCANA

Daniel Arcana is an independent producer, writer and creative strategist with over 25 years of professional experience in content creation and brand marketing.

In addition to co-developing and co-producing “The Janes,” Daniel is a consulting producer for Doc Shop Productions, where he co-developed TNT’s “American Race” documentary series featuring Charles Barkley, the Netflix documentary Series “AFFLICTED Afflicted” and the feature film “#UNFIT: The Dangerous Mind of Donald Trump.”

Daniel is also the co-founder and former President of Exopolis, a multi award-winning creative agency and motion graphics studio; best known for creating the original network launch of “Nicktoons” and its work for Apple, including the global launches of both the original iPhone and

the iPod “colors” campaign. Exopolis worked extensively for clients such as: Universal Pictures, Disney, WB, Sony Pictures, Dreamworks, Nike, Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Xbox, Delta Airlines, Formula 1, VH1, HBO, Cinemax, TCM, IFC, Sundance Channel, A&E and was the recipient of many Key Art and Broadcast Design awards.

PRODUCER: JESSICA LEVIN

Emmy and Peabody award winning producer Jessica Levin has devoted her career to creating high quality non-fiction films, bringing to each new project her passion for music and the arts as well as her seasoned approach to archival material and inventive storytelling. She has collaborated with Susan Lacy on a rich variety of films, including the American Masters documentaries “Joni Mitchell: A Woman of Heart and Mind,” “Judy Garland: By Myself,” “No Direction Home: Bob Dylan,” “Annie Leibovitz: Life Through A Lens,” “LennoNYC,” and “Inventing David Geffen.” Some of Jessica’s earlier producing credits include PBS projects “Swingin’ with Duke” and “The Shakespeare Sessions” plus ABC specials “Wingspan” and “The Beatles’ Revolution.” As one of Pentimento’s principal producers, Jessica most recently produced “Spielberg,” “Jane Fonda in Five Acts,” and “Very Ralph,” and “The Janes,” all for HBO Documentary Films. “Spielberg” had its world premiere at the New York Film Festival in 2017 and was later nominated for an Emmy. “Jane Fonda in Five Acts” had its world premiere at Sundance Film Festival in 2018 and its international premiere at Cannes Film Festival. The film was nominated for the 2019 Emmys. “Very Ralph” had its world premiere at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and aired on HBO in 2019. “The Janes” had its world premiere at Sundance Film Festival in 2022. Jessica is based in Los Angeles, CA.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: SUSAN LACY

Susan Lacy is most well known for creating American Masters, the acclaimed PBS biography series profiling artists & visionaries who have helped shape our country’s culture. Susan created the series in 1986 and went on to serve as its Executive Producer for nearly 30 years.

“American Masters” has garnered unprecedented awards over the years – Susan earned the series 71 Emmy nominations and 28 wins, including a remarkable 10 for Outstanding Non-Fiction Series, in addition to 12 Peabody awards, 3 Grammy awards and a nomination, and an Academy award and 4 nominations.

Susan has also directed multiple award-winning films for the series: “Inventing David Geffen,” “Judy Garland: By Myself,” “Joni Mitchell: A Woman of Heart and Mind,” “Leonard Bernstein: Reaching for the Note,” “Lena Horne: In Her Own Voice,” “Rod Serling: Submitted for Your Approval.” She produced the American Masters films “Paul Simon: Born at the Right Time,” “LennoNYC,” and “No Direction Home: Bob Dylan.”

Susan has received lifetime achievement awards from CINE and the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts. She served on Television Academy’s governors board for two terms and is currently a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

In 2013, Susan began a new chapter in her long and celebrated career - she made the move from public television to independent filmmaking, with the formation of her own company, Pentimento Productions.

Susan has most recently directed & produced “Spielberg,” “Jane Fonda in Five Acts,” “Very Ralph,” and executive produced “The Janes,” all for HBO Documentary Films. “Spielberg” was the first project in her company’s exclusive multi-picture deal with HBO. The film had its world premiere at the New York Film Festival in 2017 and was later nominated for an Emmy. “Jane Fonda in Five Acts” had its world premiere at Sundance Film Festival in 2018 and its international

premiere at Cannes Film Festival. The film was nominated for the 2019 Emmys. "Very Ralph" had its world premiere at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and aired on HBO in 2019. "The Janes" had its world premiere at Sundance Film Festival in 2022.

EDITOR: KRISTEN HUNTLEY

Kristen Huntley is an award-winning film editor. She won the Primetime Emmy Award for Picture Editing on "Judy Garland: By Myself," directed by Susan Lacy. Her documentary work includes "New School Order," directed by Gini Reticker, "Women, War & Peace," which received the Edward R. Murrow Award from the Overseas Press Club, "Out In The Night," directed by blair dorosh-walther, winner of the audience award at both the New Orleans Film Festival and Seattle Queer Film Festival, and the Emmy Award-winning "Ladies First," in PBS's Wide Angle series. She has collaborated with the director Kent Jones and producer Martin Scorsese on several projects, including "Val Lewton: The Man in the Shadows." Her television work includes comedy shows such as "The Problem With Apu," starring Hari Kondabolu, "Strangers with Candy" and the Emmy Award-winning "TV Nation" with Michael Moore.

CREDITS

HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS PRESENTS

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