

Community

Dancing with pride

New Paltz's Gail Freedman to release film about same-sex ballroom dancing

by Rich Corozine

NEW PALTZ-BASED DOCUMENTARY filmmaker Gail Freedman had just finished her "Making of the 9/11 Memorial" for the History Channel (which aired in primetime on the tenth anniversary of that event) when she wondered what to do next. Her long-time cameraman Joel Shapiro (out of Olivebridge) happened to mention a childhood friend of his, who runs a same-sex dance group on the West Coast and a series of competitions that come out of it.

"Oooh," said Freedman, thinking about her love of dance being connected to the zeitgeist's biggest civil rights issue. And from that thought, "Hot to Trot" was born. "It was just instinctual," said Freedman, "reflecting the beauty and elegance of dance and wrapping that in a powerful fusion of art and politics." This feature-length documentary-in-progress (approximately 90 minutes) goes deep inside that intriguing world, using the storytelling techniques of narrative cinema and a seamless blend of verite, interviews and dance performance. It follows the interwoven personal narratives of several talented dancers over time, as their complex lives unfold, on and off the dance floor (including competing at the 2014 Gay Games in Cleveland -- the international Olympics-like competition of the LGBTQ com-



Gail Freedman on the steps of the Cleveland Museum of Art last August during the Gay Games.



Same-sex Latin dance partners Ernesto Palma and Nikolai Shpakov strut their stuff on the streets of Cleveland during the 2014 Gay Games.

munity). There's drama, conflict, pathos, along with unalloyed joy. "Our characters see dance as personal power and also political engagement, shaping -- and reshaping -- their identities and their sense of self," said Freedman. "At heart, I see the film as a kind of idiosyncratic attack on bigotry -- filtered through this gorgeous and captivating culture."

"It was great to get to know the amazingly diverse group of men and women in the same-sex dance

scene," said Freedman. "And I've been privileged to have the support of a real pioneer in the LGBT community," she noted, mentioning advocate Ann Northrop, who was one of the original ActUp activists and co-hosts "Gay USA," TV's longest-running LGBT news show. "I worked at CBS News with Ann years ago, and she generously co-hosted an early fundraiser and buzz-builder for the film in New York City. Ann is one of those iconic figures, who commands enormous respect and admiration, and she's really gotten behind this project. For me, that's huge."

"To me, film is another way of changing hearts and minds," said Freedman. "But I didn't want to make a preachy film, or a scolding one, so I love the dimension of personal-passion-meets-political-muscle. We have a handful of amazing 'stars,'" she adds, "and the film unfolds through their stories and in their voices. It's not narrated. It's an action film -- we follow the characters over time, as their lives evolve and their relationships with their families, their dance partners and themselves develop and deepen -- and as they do, we understand, vividly and personally, the real impact of the LGBTQ politics that we read about every day."

The documentary is over 90% shot, and Freedman, who is also producing the film through her company, Parrot Productions, is trying to round up the rest of the money for post-production. The rough-cut edit (with long-time editor Dina Potocki) will be finished by late fall 2015 and then color-corrected, sound-mixed and scored. "With an indie (independently produced) film, the biggest challenge, outside of raising money, is the distribution. HBO has shown interest after seeing some early footage, but it's not a given," said Freedman, who

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NEW PALTZ/HIGHLAND | 4TH OF JULY

Fireworks in New Paltz, Highland and on the Walkway Over the Hudson

HUGE BOOMERS AND rings of starry bursts alternating with aeries before dissolving into the night sky above: what would July be without our annual ritual of fireworks to celebrate our country's freedom? This year the spectacular displays locally are spread out over a three-day period: New Paltz is kicking things off early on Thursday, July 2 to be followed by Highland on Friday, July 3. Walkway Over the Hudson will offer the opportunity to view the City of Poughkeepsie fireworks from their unique vantage point on Saturday, July 4.

New Paltz: Ulster County Fairgrounds

The annual Fourth of July celebration in New Paltz will be in its usual location at the Ulster County Fairgrounds at 249 Libertyville Road on Thursday, July 2. (Rain date will be Sunday, July 5.) Gates open at 5 p.m. with no admission fee – although donations are welcome – and visitors will find plenty of bouncy houses and activities for kids. Attendees can bring a picnic or purchase refreshments from a variety of food vendors. The event is sponsored by ShopRite supermarket.

Live music will begin at 7:30 p.m. with "Wonderama," a Stevie Wonder tribute band playing all his hits. The lineup features local musicians who all contribute to the vocals: Akie Bermiss on keyboards, Jim Curin on bass, Phil Nestor on drums, Angelo Ficara on guitar, Madlyn Phelan on vocals, Rich Decrosta on trumpet and Dr. Lori Morris on saxophone.

At 8:30 p.m. the "Retro Rockets" will play funk, R&B, soul and rock music. Frontmen Jimmy Eppard and John Cariddi on guitar and vocals are backed by a veteran rhythm section that includes Pete Levin on keyboards, Charlie Kniceley on bass and Richard Crane on drums.

Local talent Esme Hyman will keep the tradition of the last few years now by singing the National Anthem at 9:30 p.m. followed by the fireworks extravaganza and then, a second set of live music by the Retro Rockets. Attendees are encouraged to stay for the music for awhile, which helps keep the departing traffic from piling up too much on Route 299. (Visitors can also make a right turn out of the parking area to go home through Gardiner on Libertyville Road.)

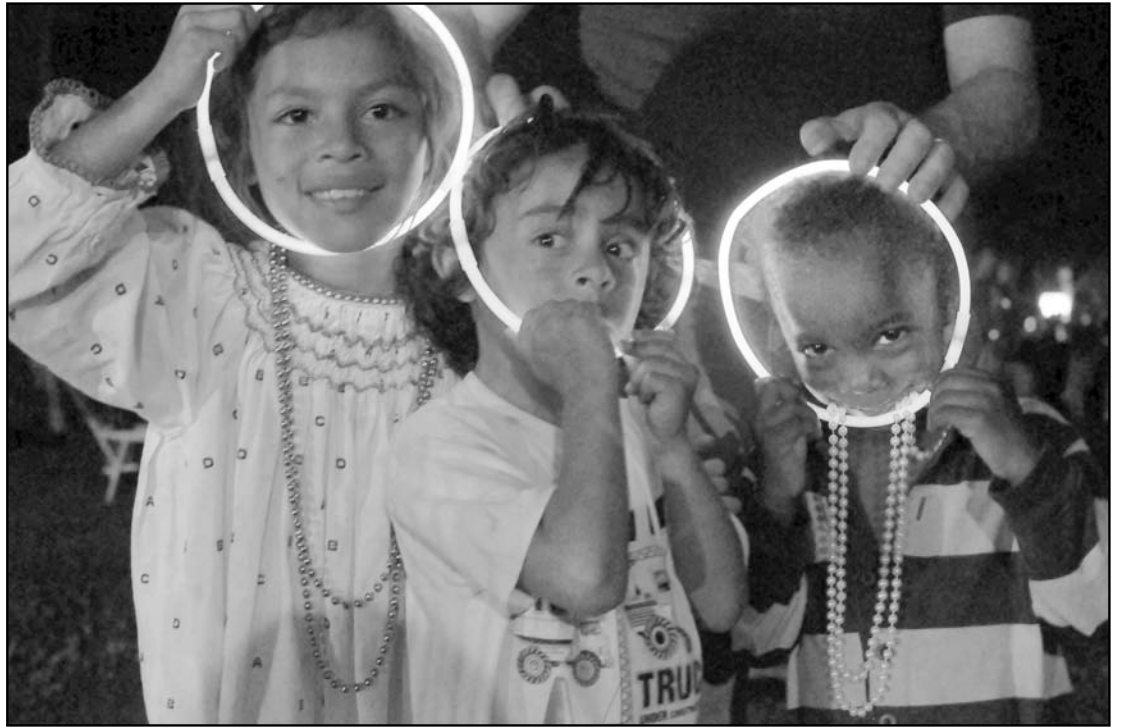
Highland: Town Field

Highland will host its traditional old-fashioned Independence Day celebration with fireworks on Friday, July 3 from 6-10 p.m. at the Town Field behind the Methodist Church on the corner of Vineyard Avenue and Main Street in the hamlet. Bluesy rock standards will be performed live by the Touch of Rhythm band and recorded music by DJ Rick Knight will enliven the event organized by the town Events Committee and sponsored by the Highland Business Association.

The party in Highland has the flavor of a small-town block party with hundreds of people arriving hours beforehand to enjoy a summer evening with friends while tossing around a football or watching the kids jump around the bouncy houses. Picnics can be brought into the park or food can be purchased from local vendors who offer chicken kabobs, hamburgers and hot dogs and treats like fried dough and ice cream. Bringing blankets and folding chairs along is advised. After the National Anthem is sung at approximately 9:30 p.m., an impressive array of fireworks will light up the sky.

Walkway Over the Hudson

Fireworks set off by the City of Poughkeepsie can be best viewed from the



A previous Fourth of July celebration at the Ulster County Fairgrounds in New Paltz.

Walkway Over the Hudson at Walkway State Historic Park on Saturday, July 4. The park will close to the public at 5:30 p.m. for setup and safety preparations, then reopen at 6:30 p.m. for those possessing valid wristbands for entrance.

Tickets cost \$12.50, available online at www.walkway.org or from Mahoney's Irish Pub & Steakhouse in Poughkeepsie, Adams Fairacre Farms in Poughkeepsie or Wappingers Falls, the Walkway Café in Highland and Caffè Aurora in Poughkeepsie. Walkway members receive a 20 percent discount when purchasing tickets online and kids age five and under are admitted free, although preregistration is required. All who enter the park must wear a wristband. Early purchase is advisable, as tickets have sold out in advance in previous years. In the event that tickets do not sell out, the remaining supply will be available for cash purchase at both entrances to the bridge.

The City of Poughkeepsie fireworks display is expected to begin between 9 and 9:30 p.m. Radio station Q92.1 FM will broadcast live from the center overlook. In the event of severe weather, the rain date is Sunday, July 5. Updates will be posted on the Walkway Over the Hudson Facebook page and at www.walkway.org. All ticket sales are final; no refunds will be issued. Proceeds benefit the Walkway Over the Hudson organization.

A few other things to note: the elevator to the bridge will not be operating after 5:30 p.m. No dogs, bicycles, rollerblades, skateboards, scooters or firearms are allowed. The Walkway is smoke-free and alcohol-free. Rolling coolers or glassware will not be permitted, and visitors are advised to bring a flashlight and carpool.

All Poughkeepsie and Lloyd parking regulations will be in effect. In addition to on-street parking available on Verrazano Boulevard and other nearby streets, there will be parking at Mahoney's Irish Pub & Steakhouse, 35 Main Street; Gellert & Klein, 75 Washington Street; Redl Buildings, 82 Washington Street; Pulaski Park, Talmadge Street; Mid-Hudson Civic Center, 14 Civic Center Plaza; and NYS Parks, 61 Parker Avenue. Parking in the Town of Lloyd can be found on the left side of Haviland Road in Highland and NYS Parks, 87 Haviland Road. The celebration on the Walkway is presented by Mid-Hudson Regional Hospital of Westchester Medical Center along with the Poughkeepsie Journal, Health Quest, Green Mountain Energy and Macaroni Kids.

More information is available by calling (845) 454-9649 or visiting walkway.org.

-- Sharyn Flanagan

also intends to showcase "Hot to Trot" at many film festivals, both in the high-profile mainstream cinema world and on the LGBT festival circuit.

Freedman has been directing/producing documentaries for a long time, introducing us to the now-famous Temple Grandin (autism) in the PBS special "Breaking The Silence Barrier," on the subject of people with disabilities; Jim Casey, the founder of UPS and a big-time philanthropist in "A Forever Family;" "Lessons for The Future" for the Discovery Channel, which explored

whether American education can meet the challenges of the 21st Century; and a host of other productions for PBS, *60 Minutes*, *20/20*, *National Geographic*, ABC News, CBS News, MSNBC, Lifetime Television, et al.

And not to claim prescience, but the synchronicity of Freedman finishing this ground-breaking film at the same moment that same-sex marriages have

finally been declared legal across the land certainly bodes well for the talented director, producer, writer (and former professor at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism). "It's been a true labor of love for three-plus years," said Freedman. "I'm always obsessed, but I'm more obsessed with this film than all the others I've ever made." ++

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