

School Pictures, Observatory Media, Pauleytics Productions,
Violet Horizon, and Studio One Productions LLC
Present



STUDIO ONE FOREVER

2023 | USA | 96 min | Color | Documentary

Festival Press Kit

LOG LINE

STUDIO ONE FOREVER is the untold story of America's first gay disco, a kaleidoscopic excursion into LGBTQ+ history through the lens of this groundbreaking club. Featuring interviews with Chita Rivera, Bruce Vilanch, Sam Harris, Felipe Rose, Charlo Crossley, Melissa Rivers, Roslyn Kind, Lance Bass, Thelma Houston, Julie Budd and many more. Narration by Bruce Vilanch and David Del Valle.

SYNOPSIS

Studio One was more than just a disco; it was a mecca for gay men looking for identity in a world that saw them as outcasts. Its adjoining nightclub, The Backlot, merged the gay community with the Hollywood elite for the first time. From 1974-1993 it became the center of nightlife in West Hollywood and the staging ground for the rise of the LGBT rights movement and the fight against the AIDS crisis. **STUDIO ONE FOREVER** takes the audience on an excursion into LGBTQ+ history through the lens of this groundbreaking club.

Featuring interviews with Chita Rivera, Bruce Vilanch, Sam Harris, Felipe Rose, Charlo Crossley, Melissa Rivers, Roslyn Kind, Lance Bass, Thelma Houston, Julie Budd and many more. Narration by Bruce Vilanch and David Del Valle.

PRINCIPAL CREW & CAST

Director: Marc Saltarelli
Producers: Stephen Israel, Michael Alden, Marc Saltarelli, Lloyd Coleman, Gary Steinberg, Chris Isaacson, Michael Roth, Loree Gold, Steve Saltarelli, John Duran, Steve Masterson
Executive Producers: Gary A. Carnow, Alan Eichler, MJ Humenuik, Pauley Perrette, Drew Sklar, Matt Zarley
Cinematographer: Kenneth Yeung, Marc Saltarelli, Phillip Arroyo Long
Editor: Marc Saltarelli
Animator: Videns, Chris "Wheelz" Curry
Composer: Kerry Muzzey
Sound Design: Josh Hurley
Music: Jake Simpson, Kerry Muzzey, Mitch Kaplan

Key Cast:

Chita Rivera, Bruce Vilanch, Sam Harris, Melissa Rivers, Felipe Rose, Lance Bass, Thelma Houston, Roslyn Kind, Julie Budd, Charlotte "Charlo" Crossley, Leigh McCloskey, Michael Koth, Gary Mortimer, Brian Lane Green, James "Gypsy" Haake, Paulo Murillo, John Duran, Carol Taylor DiPietro, Michael Solomon, Clifford Bell, Natalie Garcia, Greg Gorman, Michael Childers, Lloyd Coleman, Gary Steinberg, Geri Jewell



DIRECTOR NOTES

Marc Saltarelli (Director, Editor, Cinematographer)

When the former Studio One building - home of the first gay disco - was on the verge of demolition in 2019, we realized we were on the verge of losing a major piece of LGBT history. Over two years - through Covid and other delays - we shot interviews with those who lived, played, and survived those wonderful and turbulent decades years from 1974-1993. This film is about our gay history, as seen through the lens of this iconic club. But it's also a universal story since it was the first club to integrate gay culture with the Hollywood elite many years before Studio 54, and was the site of the first major fund raiser for AIDS, hosted by Joan Rivers. The Backlot - Studio One's performance space - became Los Angeles's "must-play" venue, and became the hang out of celebrities too numerous to mention, and the launching pad for many more. And as AIDS decimated the community, so went the club. As LGBTQ+ stories are on the verge of being forgotten (or even banned), the film preserves this remarkably unknown history as told by the people who lived it.

DIRECTOR Q&A

Marc Saltarelli (Director, Editor, Cinematographer)

How did this project come about for you?

In 2018, I heard about plans to develop a hotel/restaurant complex on Robertson Blvd. in West Hollywood at the site of the former Studio One Disco. Lloyd Coleman, a backlot producer in the 80's, was planning a final farewell reunion show and asked if I had interest in potentially making a documentary about it. When I began researching, I learned that when the developer announced plans to demolish the factory building an outcry from the community swelled up and a movement to SAVE THE FACTORY came about. I realized there was an incredible untold story about a time and place that had so much significance not only to the local community but for LGBTQ history. We filmed several days inside the factory building (which had become a straight hip hop club), and then the reunion event happened on November 9, 2019. That kicked off the production, followed soon by the Covid lockdown. In that quiet time, I was able to nurture the story and find more people willing to share their experiences. There was no shortage of passionate people wanting to tell their story.

What is your personal connection to Studio One?

I moved to LA in 1983 from Illinois to finish my undergrad film studies at Loyola Marymount University. I had recently come out and heard about the famous Studio One disco in West Hollywood. Every weekend this good Catholic boy would make the trip from Westchester to visit Studio One. I remember going up those stairs and entering a fantasy world of lights and sound and men. I wasn't in Illinois anymore! Not bold enough to rip my

shirt off and join the jumping mass of men, I enjoyed watching the show from the sidelines. This was right on the verge of the AIDS epidemic. I enjoyed my times there, but I had no idea of the history that happened before I arrived and what was to happen in the coming years. It would have been a shock to my 19-year old self that I would be tasked with telling this story so many years later.

The film beautifully balances archival footage with contemporary interviews, what were the challenges in weaving these sections together?

It was quite a challenge to locate archival footage from that time. LGBT people were mostly in the closet and didn't want to be caught on film. Fortunately, since Studio One and the Backlot became a mainstream club, many major events and several film/TV shows provided footage, along with several folks who offered their personal home movies/videos. The largest archive of photographic stills were shot by Studio One's official photographer Rose DeCastro who left over 100,000 stills from the club's entire 19-year history. Every weekend she photographed patrons and the following week those photos were projected on a rear screen projector as patrons entered. Rose has since passed, and we were only able to find a handful of her photos. The search provided an interesting contemporary angle since one of the themes of the film is protecting and preserving our LGBT history before it's lost forever. (This has gained new relevance in this political climate that wants our history banned). By a lucky chance, I was introduced to Natalie Garcia, a young lesbian woman who found a stash of hundreds of slides from Studio One that were ready to be thrown out in a garage next to her building. An animal rescuer, TV host and artist, Natalie took it upon herself to rescue this piece of gay history that was on the verge of being lost forever. When we met through a series of improbable connections, she didn't know exactly what the slides were of, but they intrigued her. Michael Koth, one of the first bartenders and a major character in our film, confirmed that they were indeed Studio One. He helped her identify many of the people in the photos, most of whom had passed from AIDS. The film weaves in and out of flights back in time, and the present-day preservation struggles that keeps it contemporary. So we get a fast-paced excursion of LGBT history from the early 70's when the gay civil rights movements was in its infancy and through the AIDS era when the club became ground zero for AIDS activism, courageously hosting the first AIDS fundraiser by Joan Rivers and Sylvester despite death threats. Melissa Rivers powerfully talks about being with her mother at that event.

The pace of the film is entertaining and fast moving. As the director and editor, what was your goal in creating and telling such a kaleidoscopic story, with so many stories and archival periods woven together?

I wanted to not only tell the story of a club and its fascinating founder Scott Forbes, but of an entire nearly 20-year era when the club existed. I filmed over 50 interviews and over 80 hours of footage from a variety of people who had a role in making the club happen as well as the patrons who experienced it. It truly was a place where, for the first time, gay men could feel free to express themselves without fear inside these walls. Standing in line meant frequent drive-by abuse and even bottle throwing by homophobes. But inside it was nirvana and it was safe. Initially I had a basic structure in mind, but it evolved as I progressed. There are so many wonderful stories that I couldn't include in this 90-minute film, but I'm hopeful that they will be seen at some point. The potential for a doc series is great! The club held over 1000 people every night for 20 years. Each one of those people has a valuable story to tell.

What is the importance of this film as LGBTQ+ history?

The MAGA right wing extremists that have taken over the Republican party are trying to ban our history and with it our long-fought struggle for civil rights. Now more than ever, films like this are critical. For the younger generation of LGBTQ who are coming of age in this age of social media have no idea of the struggle that so many endured to give them the freedoms they currently enjoy and take for granted. As West Hollywood city councilman John Duran so poignantly says, "There would not be wedding cakes today, had it not been for the struggles of the men and women who danced in Studio One." So many gave their lives during the AIDS crisis. I hope this film will honor that lost generation, our angels, and pass on their heroic stories to future generations. Our rights and freedoms are hanging on by a thin thread now... we need to remember where we came from.

The sections documenting the AIDS crises are heartbreaking, how did you approach the shooting and editing of this portion of the film?

I wanted the first two acts of the film to be joyful and celebratory before the devastation of AIDS began taking so many. The same people who experienced nirvana at Studio One, rallied together to help during the crisis. As survivors of that time, our participants were passionate and anxious to tell their stories. The hour-long interviews were structured much like the film. After taking the subject on a journey through joyful memories, a catharsis happened when it came to the AIDS crisis. At times, we needed to stop filming if the emotions were too painful. It was unavoidable. The lingering effects of that time will never go away.

How is the history of Studio One a universal story?

It's not just a story about a club, but about the joy and struggles and pain that we all lived through during those turbulent times. Since the Backlot Theater was host to so many great performers like Chita Rivera, it brought in the Hollywood elite from the golden era to come and see the shows in this gay disco. From Bette Davis, to Jimmy Stewart, to Cary Grant, the club integrated for the first time the gay community with the mainstream world of Hollywood. I believe that this created acceptance and understanding that trickled into the art and movies they created that influenced the world. It's also about the humanity of our film's participants. I think that's the most important element in the film as dark forces in the world today seek to dehumanize our community. The Backlot also served as a launching-pad for talent that would be culturally influential.

I hope that people will take a ride with us and either re-live or learn for the first time what those times were like. It's important to remember our past before it's lost forever. And if you weren't around to remember it, it's even more important for younger generations to learn where we came from.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Marc Saltarelli (Director, Producer, Editor, Cinematographer)

Marc Saltarelli is an award-winning director with both narrative and documentary credits. He has directed seven narrative films that have collectively screened in over 250 major film festivals, including OutFest Los Angeles, Palm Springs ShortFest, Hollywood Film Festival, BFI London, Barcelona, and Mumbai Film Festivals. He is a two-time Iris Prize nominee and a Planet Out Short film winner. His short doc *I Knew Andy Warhol* was the centerpiece of the Warhol exhibit at the Palm Springs Museum of Art and won best documentary at the

Hollywood Reel Independent Film Festival. His feature documentary **Studio One Forever**, the untold story of America's first gay disco, will have its World Premiere at Outfest Los Angeles 2023, followed by its Southern premiere at OUTSouth in Durham, North Carolina.

Stephen Israel (Producer)

London-born, LA-based, prolific indie producer Stephen Israel may still be known best for 1995's **Swimming With Sharks** - one of the most damning commentaries on the "me too" workplace, which (ironically) launched the film career of Kevin Spacey. Among the twenty-plus films he's since produced are some of the best-loved gay films - including two-time Independent Spirit nominee **Swan Song** (2021), the multi award-winning features **Boy Culture** (2007) and **G.B.F.** (2014), as well as 2016 Outfest audience award-winner - **Miles**. A former strategic consultant and studio executive, Stephen adds seasoned management & financial expertise to hands-on production in film.

Michael Alden (Producer)

Michael has been at the helm of film, theater and special event production in a career that has spanned over thirty years. Film works include the recently released feature **Estella Scrooge: A Christmas Carol With A Twist**, the feature documentary **My Beautiful Stutter** premiering on Discovery +, **Just Cause** with Sean Connery, Stephen Daldry's **The Hours**, and the award-winning **Kissing Jessica Stein**. As a theater producer, his credits include the West Ends **Come From Away** (Olivier Award for Best Musical), **The King's Speech** and **Bat Boy The Musical**. On Broadway, **Come From Away**, **Disgraced**, (2015 Pulitzer Prize - Drama), **Grey Gardens** and **Bridge & Tunnel** (Special Tony Award).

Michael Roth (Producer)

Michael was a practicing physician during the early days of the HIV-AIDS pandemic and served as medical advisor for the groundbreaking film **An Early Frost**. After retiring from medicine, he joined Steven J. Wolfe as director of development for Sneak Preview Entertainment. He went on to produce many classic gay films including **Circuit** and **Hellbent**.

Gary Steinberg (Producer)

Gary, a native son of Los Angeles, began his career as a commercial actor in Hollywood, then moved to NYC and performed off-Broadway in the early '80s. After returning to Hollywood, he partnered with Lloyd Coleman as co-founder of the Live Production company **Rocket Entertainment**. The company was contracted by Scott Forbes to create and produce shows at the Studio One's Backlot during its heyday of the eighties.

Lloyd Coleman (Producer)

Lloyd moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in music after touring globally for 3 years with **The Young Ambassadors**. In the 80's he parlayed his musical talents and experience with large concert performances into the position of Executive Producer of **Rocket Entertainment** that delivered some of the most notable LIVE music shows and events at Studio One's Backlot and other Hollywood and national venues.

Chris Isaacson (Producer)

Chris has created, produced, & promoted over 750 events since the company's founding in 2004. From small clubs to major theatres, CIP has presented some of the most influential stars of this generation including K.D. Lang, Adam Lambert, Sergio Mendes, Paul Anka,

Trixie Mattel, Neil Patrick Harris, Andy Grammar, Jennifer Holliday, Donna McKechnie, Dick Van Dyke and more.

Stephen Saltarelli (Producer)

Stephen is fascinated by big characters and magical worlds. A former lawyer and 2020 Nicholl semifinalist, he is also producing a documentary on an obscure sports community in Venice Beach, California.

Pauley Perrette (Executive Producer)

Pauley is best known for her role as Abby Sciutto on the long-running series NCIS. Since leaving the show she founded the production company Pauleytics Productions, and has focused on producing and directing documentary films that speak to her passion for social justice. She collaborated with Marc Saltarelli on her short film *Red Ribbons of Love* that recently won best documentary at the Toronto LGBT Film Festival.

Gary A. Carnow (Executive Producer)

Educator, technologist, author, grantwriter, founded *Observatory Media LLC* in 2023. His play *The Red Car* and a memoir on the pandemic are forthcoming.

Drew Sklar (Executive Producer)

Drew is known for *Treatment*, *Swan Song* and *The Getaway*.

Matt Zarley (Executive Producer)

Former Broadway dancer, award-winning, Billboard charting recording artist, writer, producer, director, editor, dog dad.

KEY CAST BIOGRAPHIES



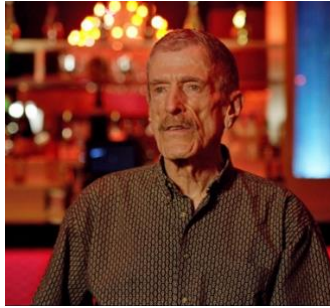
MICHAEL KOTH

Michael was the first face seen as the front bartender at Studio One from 1976-1985. Michael has a background as a health and wellness practitioner, personal trainer, spiritual collaborator, and is versed in clinical and depth psychology.



LLOYD COLEMAN & GARY STEINBERG

Lloyd and Gary were Backlot producers and boyfriends in the 80's. They were instrumental in planning the Studio One/Backlot reunion event in 2019.



GARY MORTIMER

Gary was the first bartender hired for the new Backlot Theater in 1973. He hung out with the nightly parade of celebrities who visited the Backlot. Later he owned an exotic bird store near the factory building.



JOHN J. DURAN

John Duran is a gay rights attorney, former West Hollywood city councilman, and the former Mayor of West Hollywood (2001-2020). But before all that - he found his footing on the dance floor at Studio One.



CAROL TAYLOR DIPIETRO

Carol lived and worked with Studio One founder Scott Forbes during the 70's and early 80's. She was instrumental in convincing Disney to host the first Gay Night at Disneyland.



BRUCE VILANCH

Bruce Vilanch is a two-time Emmy winning comedy writer, songwriter, and actor. Vilanch is best known to the public for his four-year stint on Hollywood Squares, as a celebrity participant; behind the scenes he was head writer for the show. He wrote many shows for the Backlot for performers including Bette Midler. He is an expert in Hollywood lore and LGBTQ history.



CHITA RIVERA

Legendary Broadway icon and star of the original Broadway productions of **Chicago** and **West Side Story**. When **Chicago** was on hiatus after Bob Fosse had a heart attack, Chita came to West Hollywood and turned the fledgling Backlot Theater into an overnight sensation. Chita has been honored with both the Kennedy Center Honor and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



FELIPE ROSE

An original member of the iconic disco group THE VILLAGE PEOPLE. He appeared in the film **Can't Stop The Music** which was partly filmed at Studio One.



ROSLYN KIND

Roslyn Kind is an American actress and songwriter. She has been performing on Broadway and other venues since her teenage years. Her cabaret show at the Backlot was the first time that she acknowledged on-stage that her sister is Barbra Streisand.



GREG GORMAN

Iconic celebrity photographer Greg Gorman was a regular attendee of Studio One.



MICHAEL CHILDERS

A founding photographer for Andy Warhol's Interview and After Dark magazines. He would frequently visit Studio One with his partner *Midnight Cowboy* director John Schlesinger. They were considered the first "out couple."



THELMA HOUSTON

A Grammy-winning recording artist and performer since the late 60's, best known for her #1 hit *Don't Leave Me This Way*, which she performed at the closing nights of Studio 54, Catch One, and Studio One.



MELISSA RIVERS

An actress and TV host, she is the daughter of late comic icon Joan Rivers. When Studio One hosted the first AIDS fundraiser, young Melissa was in attendance.



GERI JEWELL

Geri Jewell is an American actress, stand-up comedian, diversity consultant, and motivational speaker, noted for roles on the 1980s sitcom *The Facts of Life* and the mid-2000s western *Deadwood*.



JULIE BUDD

Julie is a successful recording artist and actress. She was a mainstay at the Backlot Theater in the 70's and 80's.



SAM HARRIS

A multi-million dollar recording artist of pop and Broadway music. His career was launched in 1983 as the grand champion singer of Star Search. He credits his early performances at the Backlot as one of the reasons for his success.



BRIAN LANE GREEN

A Tony-nominated stage and television actor and singer. His performance at The Backlot launched his Broadway career.



LEIGH McCLOSKEY

An actor, artist, author and philosopher, Leigh has appeared in numerous films and television series, including the long-running *Dallas*. He starred in the groundbreaking 1977 LGBT-themed TV Movie *Alexander: The Other Side of Dawn* filmed partly at Studio One.



CHARLOTTE "CHARLO" CROSSLEY

A singer and actress best known for her Broadway roles in *Hairspray* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. She was one of the original Harlette's for Bette Midler and appears in the Oscar-winning documentary *20 Feet From Stardom*. Her singing group *Formerly of The Harlettes* appeared many times at The Backlot.



JAMES 'GYPSY' HAAKE

A legendary drag performer who hosted nightly at Gypsy's in NYC and then LaCage Aux Folles in West Hollywood. As an actor, he is known for his role in Mel Brooks' *To Be Or Not To BE*. Gypsy performed frequently at Studio One.



NATALIE GARCIA

Natalie saved a piece of LGBT history when she rescued a treasure trove of slides taken at Studio One that were on the verge of being lost forever. She is a TV host, artist, and animal rescuer. Natalie founded Maeday Rescue that has saved hundreds of homeless animals.



DAVID DEL VALLE

A Journalist, columnist and film historian, David spent many nights dancing at Studio One.



LANCE BASS

A singer, dancer, actor, podcaster and club owner. Lance rose to fame as the bass singer for NSYNC. He owns the dance club HEART and the sports bar Rocco's located in the heart of West Hollywood. He is a passionate supporter of preserving our LGBTQ history.

FILM INFORMATION

Country:	USA
World Premiere:	2023 Outfest Los Angeles LGBTQ+ Film Festival 2023
Running Time:	96 minutes
Production Companies:	School Pictures, Observatory Media, Pauleytics Productions, Violet Horizon, and Studio One Productions

Film Format: Digital Cinema formats, including Red 8K cinema and Sony 4K cinema cameras

Filming Locations: West Hollywood, Palm Springs, San Jose CA; New York City, New York

Social: <https://www.facebook.com/studiooneforever>