



## THE QUEEN

A film by Frank Simon  
1968 / U.S.A. / 66 min. / In English

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## Synopsis

More than 40 years before *RuPaul's Drag Race*, this ground-breaking documentary about the 1967 Miss All-America Camp Beauty Pageant introduced audiences to the world of competitive drag. The film takes us backstage to kiki with the contestants as they rehearse, throw shade, and transform into their drag personas in the lead-up to the big event. Organized by LGBT icon and activist Flawless Sabrina, the competition boasted a star-studded panel of judges including Andy Warhol and his superstars Edie Sedgwick and Mario Montez. But perhaps most memorable is an epic diatribe calling out the pageant scene's racial bias delivered by Crystal LaBeija, who would go on to form the influential House of LaBeija, heavily featured in *Paris Is Burning* (1990). A vibrant piece of queer history, *The Queen* can now be seen in full resplendence thanks to a new restoration from the original camera negative.



## **Producer's Statement**

### **HOW IT BEGAN**

by

Si Litvinoff, Producer

After twelve years, I left my law practice at Barovick, Konecny and Litvinoff to concentrate on my hopes for film production. I had recently produced the Broadway play, *Hail Scrawdyke*, directed by Alan Arkin. Before that, while practicing law full time, I had co-produced several Off-Broadway plays such as Leonard Bernstein's *Theater Songs*, Lonny Chapman's *Cry of the Raindrop*, and David Belasco's *Girl of the Golden West*, but I wanted to move on to film. I had already optioned novels like Anthony Burgess', *A Clockwork Orange*, John Barth's *End of the Road*, and Saul Bellow's *Henderson and the Rain King*.

I had taken a suite of offices at 65 East 55th Street with one office designated for my friend and ex-law client, Terry Southern, who was now to be my partner in hopefully many film ventures. Terry had gotten hot as the screenwriter of *Dr. Strangelove*, *The Cincinnati Kid*, and *The Loved One*, amongst others.

One day, I received a phone call from the artist, Sven Lukin, and the cinematographer, Frank Simon, asking to see me ASAP. We met, and they described to me what was to be the 1967 Drag Queen Miss America contest at Town Hall in New York City, and would I be interested in producing a film documentary of the event? They showed me the formal printed announcement of the event. The event was sponsored by George Raft, Huntington Hartford, (the Woolworth heir,) and Edie Sedgwick, both of whom I knew. If that wasn't enough, it stated "For the benefit of The Muscular Dystrophy Association of America; Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, Honorary Chairman." It was described to me as "Ziegfeld's psychedelic re-write of *Helzapoppin*...a satirical happening."

Obviously, I was hooked. It sounded outrageous and sensational. I asked Frank, who was to be the director and, Sven, who was to do sound, to arrange a meeting with the owners immediately, as the show was to be on very soon. I met Jack Doroshov. His Nationals Academy puts on these shows, and he also emcees in drag under the name of *Flawless Sabrina*. I liked Jack and we agreed on terms and I excitedly went back to my office and drafted a contract.

My first movie had come out of the blue and despite the fact that I knew people in Hollywood through my law practice, I was sure that Hollywood would not finance this project. Money was needed now for the Nationals, for raw stock, for equipment rentals, additional cinematographers, etc. I had another problem. I had never produced a film, let alone an independent film without the support of a Hollywood studio. I solved one problem by giving co-producer credit to a theater investor, who rented an office in my suite, in exchange for the front money I needed. Next, I phoned my friend, Lewis Allen who had produced an independent film of the play *The Connection*, (written by my former law client, Jack Gelber and directed by my former law client, Shirley Clarke,) to

see if he would produce it with me. He excitedly agreed and provided his recent knowledge and more investors. Thanks to The Connection, he had gained relationships and credit all over town. Terry was excited and wanted to be an interviewer and judge. He got our friend, the artist Larry Rivers to also serve as both interviewer and judge. Another interviewer was Jay Presson Allen, Lew's wife, the playwright and screenwriter of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Hitchcock's film, *Marnie*, *Cabaret*, *Funny Lady*, etc... We also got Bernard Giguel, the US head for Paris Match do interviews. I then set out to get the rest of the judges. I contacted former law clients. Artists, Andy Warhol, Jim Dine, rock legend Jerry Leiber, authors Bruce Jay Friedman and George Plimpton all agreed to be judges. Frank got a crew together.

Rehearsals and the show itself were marvelous and Frank captured it all. When I saw the rough cut, I decided that though it was not the convention, the film flowed better without seeing the interviewer asking the question but with just the answer. Lew and Jay agreed. We made a distribution deal with the publisher, Grove Press, which had established a film division and was enjoying a successful start with *I Am Curious Yellow*.

The film opened at the Kips Bay Theater in New York City to unanimous rave reviews and broke box office records and did the same all over the country. It was invited to screen at the 1968 Cannes Film Festival. Roman Polanski, in his autobiography "Roman," referred to it as "the toast of Cannes." He and fellow jury member Truman Capote had intended to award it a special jury prize, but unfortunately, the festival ended after one week when the entire country of France went on strike.

## **Selected Producer Filmographies**

Si Litvinoff:

*The Queen*, 1968

*All the Right Noises*, 1971

*A Clockwork Orange*, 1971

*Walkabout*, 1971

*Glastonbury Fayre*, 1972

*The Man Who Fell to Earth*, 1976

Lewis Allen:

*The Connection*, 1961

*The Balcony*, 1963

*Lord of the Flies*, 1963

*Fahrenheit 451*, 1966

*The Queen*, 1968

*Fortune and Men's Eyes*, 1971

*Never Cry Wolf*, 1983

*O.C. and Stiggs*, 1985

*Swimming to Cambodia*, 1987

*Miss Firecracker*, 1989

*Lord of the Flies*, 1990

Selected Lewis Allen stage credits:

*Annie*, 1977 (Tony Award Winner for Best Play)

*Master Class*, 1986 (Tony Award Winner for Best Play)

*I'm Not Rapaport*, 1996 (Tony Award Winner for Best Play)

**Director Filmography** (as director, except where noted)

*The Queen*, 1968

*Glastonbury Fayre*, 1972 (cinematography)

*Polanski Meets Macbeth*, 1972

*Weekend of a Champion*, 1972

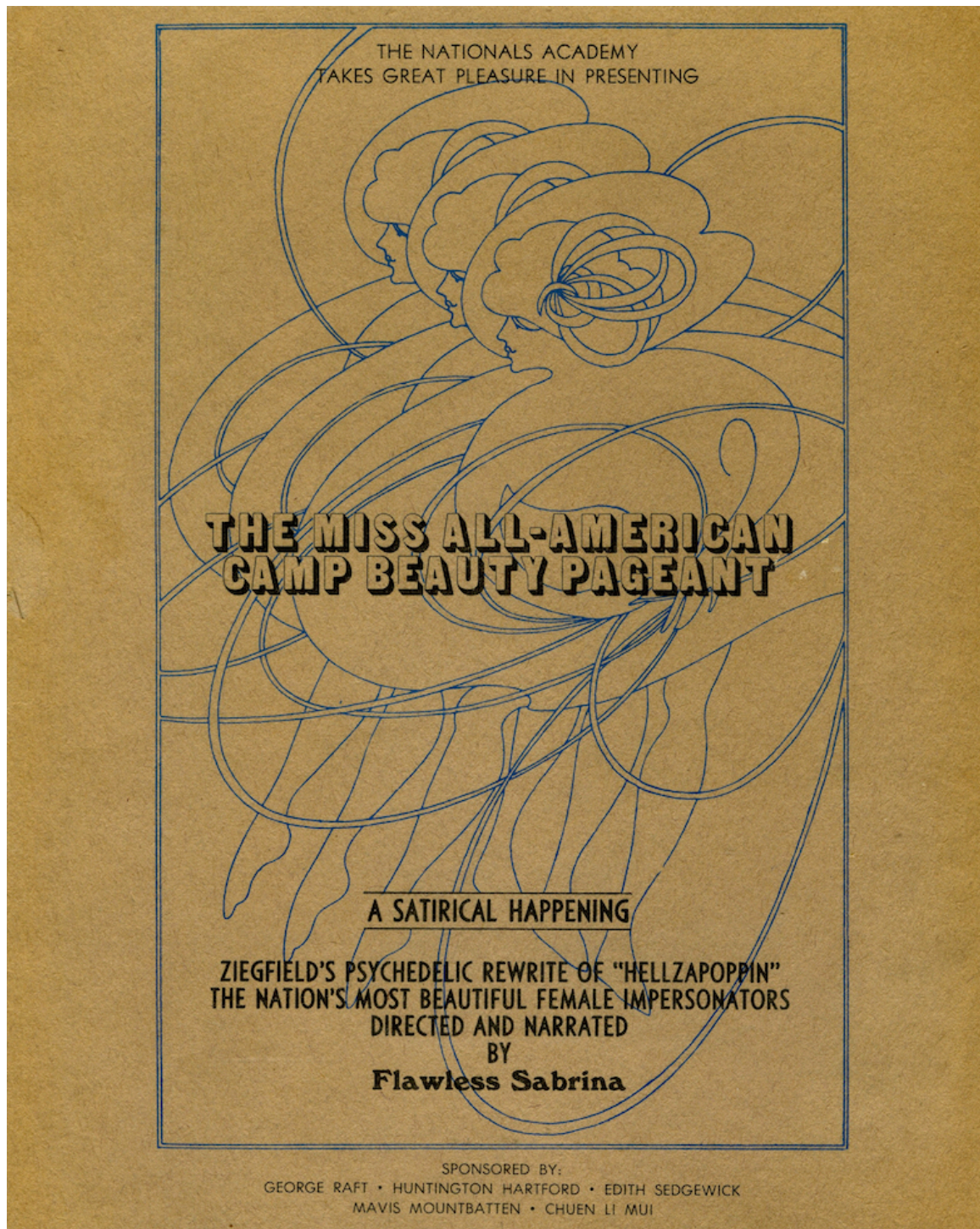
*The Chicken Chronicles*, 1977

**Awards and Festivals for *The Queen***

International Critics' Week, 1968 Cannes Film Festival

### **About the Restoration**

This 4K Restoration was produced by Bret Wood of Kino Lorber, in cooperation with the Harry Ransom Center (University of Texas). ***The Queen*** was reconstructed from the 16mm A/B original camera negatives, the 35mm internegative, and 35mm optical track negative. Special thanks to Shade Rupe, Outfest UCLA Legacy Project, the UCLA Film & Television Archive, and Brooke Allen. Scanning by OCN Digital Labs.



Original invitation to the 1967 Miss All-American Camp Beauty Pageant



**"‘THE QUEEN’ IS A STONE GAS!"**  
—DA LATIMER, EAST VILLAGE OTHER

**"FUNNY, INSPIRED, EXTRA-ORDINARY! ONE GROWS FOND OF ALL OF THEM!"**  
—RENATA ADLER, N.Y. TIMES

**"A BEAUTIFUL FILM; ITS SENSATIONAL AND SHOCKING SUBJECT MATTER IS TREATED WITH SUCH SENSIBILITY, TASTE AND COMPASSION!"**  
—JUDITH CRIST, NEW YORK MAGAZINE



**the Queen**

Si Luvnoff-Vineyard Films—MDH Enterprises Production  
Exec. Producers: Lewis M. Allen and John Maxtone-Graham  
Produced by Si Luvnoff and Don Herbert • An Evergreen Film  
Presented by Grove Press • Directed by Frank Simon

**IPS BAY** LE 2 6668  
on 2nd Avenue & 31st St.  
12:30, 2:05, 3:40, 5:15, 6:50, 8:25, 10, 11:40

**"The Queen' is a beautiful film; its sensational and shocking subject matter is treated with such sensibility, taste and compassion that what might have been a grind-house movie emerges as an impressive human document and a finely made film as well."**  
—Judith Crist



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Presented by Grove Press  
Directed by Frank Simon  
*in color*

**NEW YORK PREMIERE TODAY**

**IPS BAY** LE 2 6668  
on 2nd Avenue & 31st St.  
12:30, 2:05, 3:40, 5:15, 6:50, 8:25, 10

**ALL HAIL "the Queen"**

**"Funny—and inspired—extraordinary—in their Atlantic City of Genet—in their Forest Hills of drag—these gentlemen in bras, diaphanous gowns, lipstick, hairfalls and huffs—discussing their husbands in the military in Japan, or describing their own problems with the draft—one grows fond of all of them."**  
—Renata Adler, N. Y. Times

**"The Queen' is a beautiful film; its sensational and shocking subject matter is treated with such sensibility, taste and compassion."**  
—Judith Crist, New York Magazine

**"The Queen' is a stone gas!"** —Da Latimer, East Village Other

**the Queen**  
IN COLOR

Si Luvnoff-Vineyard Films—MDH Enterprises Production Exec. Producers: Lewis M. Allen and John Maxtone-Graham Produced by Si Luvnoff and Don Herbert • An Evergreen Film Presented by Grove Press • Directed by Frank Simon

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New York newspaper ads from the 1968 theatrical release of *The Queen*.



# The Queen

68 MIN. COLOR RENTAL: APPLY

Directed by Frank Simon. Consultant: Sidney Meyers. Photographed by Frank Simon, Ken Van Sickle, Robert Elfstrom, Alfonse Schilling, Joseph Zysman. Si Litvinoff-Vineyard Films-MDH Enterprises Production. Executive Producers: Lewis M. Allen and John Maxtone-Graham. Produced by Si Litvinoff and Don Herbert; with Jack Doroshow (Flawless Sabrina) and Richard Finnochio as Harlow. An Evergreen Film.

Neither exploitive nor shocking, but a sensitive and often moving documentary about real people, THE QUEEN introduces the general public unfamiliar with the lives of female impersonators to the men who compete each year for the drag Miss All-American beauty contest. THE QUEEN is *cinema vérité* of a transvestite pageant.

Frank Simon has shot the preparations for, and the performances in, the 1967 "Nationals" attended by female impersonators from all over the country. Jack Doroshow, called "Sabrina" by the gay world, is pageant director and mistress of ceremonies; his protegee, a beautiful 18-year-old named Richard ("Harlow") Finnochio, is one of the chief participants. Jack calls a meeting and announces the ground rules, which eschew the leering or the sensational. As the contestants, from the South and from New York, fair-skinned and heavy-bearded, homely masculine-looking and beautiful feminine-looking, prepare in their hotel rooms, they discuss their homosexuality with disarming humor. Their conversation is girlish (some have "husbands" in the army) but not bitchy.

On the night of the pageant, in New York's Town Hall, there is a small crisis (Harlow's "fall" has not been sent from Philadelphia), but Sabrina is at last introducing the contestants to an audience that has paid \$15 a seat. Mario Montez sings; the judges (Andy Warhol, Terry Southern, Edie Sedgwick, Larry Rivers, and others) evaluate the bathing-suit competition while the band plays "Am I Blue?" and the song-and-dance performances earn much applause.

The five finalists are announced. Miss All-American of 1967 is "Harlow." As in all beauty contests, the victory is bitterly greeted by jealous losers.

Carefully edited and well-photographed, THE QUEEN makes a serious contribution to a subject which might have been explosive in less capable hands.

Selected for exhibition, Cannes Film Festival, 1968.



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"It's a stone gas." (Da Latimer, EAST VILLAGE OTHER)

"Funny — and inspired — extraordinary in their Atlantic City of Genet — in their Forest Hills of drag — these gentlemen in bras, diaphanous gowns, lipstick, hair-falls and huffs — discussing their husbands in the military in Japan, or describing their own problems with the drafts — one grows fond of all of them." (Renata Adler, NEW YORK TIMES)

"The transvestite aura with fascinating, gripping detail. It is a unique phenomenon." (William Wolf, CUE)

"A brilliant film." (SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE)

"An authentic shriek of sociology, hairier than most and strangely sad." (PLAYBOY)

"... A triumphant demonstration of how to present such unconventional material in such a way as to leave us with a higher regard for its given grotesque characters as human beings, and how to understand without patronage or enddistancing pity." (LONDON TIMES)



1960s Grove Press Films catalog entry for *The Queen*.





In this uncredited 1967 photo, pageant judges Andy Warhol, Jim Dine, Larry Rivers, and Terry Southern appear from left to right.

## CREDITS

Executive Producers:

Lewis M. Allen  
John Maxtone-Graham

Director:

Frank Simon

Co-Producer:

Si Litvinoff

Cinematography:

Robert Elfstrom

Frank Simon

Ken van Sickle

Joseph Zysman

Geraldine Fabrikant

Editor:

Jim Dine

Cast:

Flawless Sabrina

Bruce Jay Friedman

Harlow

Jill Krementz

Jerry Leiber

Mary Ellen Mark

Mario Montez

George Plimpton

Larry Rivers

Edie Sedgwick

Terry Southern

Andy Warhol