

THE STORY OF LEGENDARY TRANS ACTIVIST GLORIA ALLEN



DIRECTED BY LUCHINA FISHER

MAMA GLORIA

BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA PRESENTS LITTLE LIGHT PRODUCTIONS FILM "MAMA GLORIA"
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER LESLIE FIELDS-CRUZ PRODUCERS YVONNE WELBON AND ZAINAB ALI
ORIGINAL SCORE JOCELYN C. CHAMBERS DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY STEPHEN J. LEWIS EDITOR CAROLINE BERLER
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS LIANA HAGENAH AND LORNA GRISBY
FEATURING "PRESENCE OF A LEGEND" BY SHEA DIAMOND AND JUSTIN TRANTER
DIRECTOR, WRITER AND PRODUCER LUCHINA FISHER WWW.MAMAGLORIAFILM.COM

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SYNOPSIS

Mama Gloria is a feature documentary about Gloria Allen, a trailblazing 74-year-old Black transgender activist who started a charm school for homeless trans youth and is now aging with joy and grace. It is the story of a mother's love – the love that Gloria's mother had for her and the love that Gloria has for her chosen children. And it is fueled by the love that filmmaker Luchina Fisher has for her teenage transgender daughter, Gia.

At a time when Black transgender women face escalating violence and make up the majority of transgender people murdered each year, Gloria's story is an inspiring portrait of aging seldom seen. Born in October 1945, Gloria came of age amid the legendary drag balls on Chicago's South Side. She transitioned four years before Stonewall with the support of the women in her family, including her mother Alma, a former showgirl and *Jet* magazine centerfold, and her grandmother Mildred, a seamstress who sewed clothes for crossdressers and male strippers.

Never imagining that she would make it past 40, let alone 60 or 70, Gloria felt compelled to open a charm school for young homeless trans people in Chicago offering lessons on love, makeup and manners that she received from her mother and grandmother. Now, living alone in a building for LGBTQ seniors and surviving on social security and a house-cleaning job, Gloria continues to grow old with joy, dignity and grace.

*I am a good person. I'm a trans person.
And I have a beautiful spirit.*

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



I was introduced to Gloria because she was looking for someone to help her write her memoir. But after meeting her, I knew that her story would speak to people, because it spoke to me. I am the mother of a 16-year-old transgender daughter named Gia.

As a Black woman filmmaker raising a biracial transgender daughter, I see Gloria's story through a unique lens. For me, it's personal and it's urgent. One day while I was filming Gloria in Chicago, my daughter sent me a text saying that her life was "half way done." Gia had read online that the average life expectancy for a Black trans woman in Washington D.C., was 32. It was at that moment that I truly understood why I am making this film.

Over the course of a year, as I followed Gloria from her high school reunion to the hospital to her home in an LGBTQ senior building, I watched her grapple with the prospect of dying alone. And I saw her come to terms with aging – something we will all have to do, if we are lucky enough. For Gloria, who never imagined she would live past 40, aging is a gift.

It's a gift that I want to show my daughter and other young trans people – so they can imagine themselves growing old and having a long, meaningful life. Gloria is their connection to aging and to their future. She is their connection to the past and living proof that transgender people have always been part of our lives and our communities. She is a shining example of how family support – from birth families and chosen families – can impact life outcomes for transgender people.

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WHERE WE ARE NOW IN THE FIGHT FOR TRANS RIGHTS

Although the narrative that Black trans women have an average life expectancy of under 40 is false, it feels real to many of them because of the violence and discrimination that Black transgender women face. The American Medical Association calls the violence an “epidemic.” In 2019, at least 25 transgender people were killed in America, according to the Human Rights Campaign. Ninety-one percent were Black women, and 81 percent were under 30. In 2020, the number of transgender people killed in the first seven months has already exceeded the total number of deaths last year. And this comes at a time when the country is reckoning with a long history of racial injustice and inequality.

Hate crimes against transgender people have increased 34 percent during the Trump administration. And even while the country battles Covid-19, states such as Idaho are passing legislation that would ban everything from medical care for trans youth to trans girls participating in high school and college sports. The Supreme Court may have ruled in favor of trans people in the workplace, but the Trump administration still rolled back

health care protections for transgender Americans and is trying to keep them out of the military and homeless shelters.

Yet, according to GLAAD, only 20 percent of Americans actually know someone who identifies as transgender. That means the other 80 percent are learning about transgender people through the media or other sources.

That’s why it’s so important for me to make this film. I want everyone to meet Gloria. I believe audiences will embrace *Mama Gloria* both because of the specificity of its subject — a transgender elder — and the universality of its themes — family, self-acceptance, aging, resilience, faith and love.

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THE TEAM

Director/Writer/ Producer

LUCHINA FISHER (she/her) is an award-winning writer, director and producer. Her most recent film, the critically acclaimed feature documentary *Birthright: A War Story*, which she co-executive produced and co-wrote, appeared in more than 70 theaters nationwide, qualified for Oscar consideration and is currently streaming on Amazon Prime. Luchina is the director of two short films, including *Danger Word*, which was nominated for best narrative short by the Pan African and BronzeLens film festivals and has appeared on the Aspire network. Additionally, Luchina has written and produced several nationally broadcast documentaries as well as numerous segments for television. Her work has appeared on Discovery Health, A&E, ESPN, National Geographic Channel, ABC and in syndication. Luchina began her career as a journalist and has written for People, the Miami Herald, The New York Times, O, The Oprah Magazine and ABCNews.com. She is a Sisters in Cinema Documentary Fellow, and *Mama Gloria* is her feature directorial debut.

Producer

YVONNE WELBON (she/her) is Senior Creative Consultant at Chicken & Egg Pictures, an award-winning filmmaker and founder of the Chicago-based non-profit Sisters in Cinema. She has produced over 20 films including *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @100* – winner of ten best documentary awards. Her work has been screened on PBS, Starz, TV-ONE, Bravo, BET, HBO, Netflix, iTunes and in over 100 film festivals around the world. Welbon received a B.A from Vassar College, a MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a Ph.D. from Northwestern University, and is a graduate of the American Film Institute's Directing Workshop for Women.

Producer

ZAINAB ALI (she/her) is a producer of independent film with a background as a senior recruiter for major corporations including Gap Inc., Charles Schwab, and Lucasfilm. A lifelong film enthusiast, her credits include: executive producer on *Sugarcoated*, line producer for the horror short *Danger Word*, and executive producer of *Death In The Family* (earned the Silver Award at the Philadelphia International Film Festival).

THE TEAM

Director of Photography

STEPHEN J. LEWIS (him/his) is an Emmy Award-winning producer with more than two decades of experience in journalism and video production. In addition to his time in a newsroom, Lewis founded a boutique production company, SouthPaw Video Productions, where he focuses on short form storytelling. In 2015, Lewis and SouthPaw Video teamed with CAMRA at Penn in the Annenberg School for Communication to co-produce the feature documentary, *Making Sweet Tea*, chronicling the lives of gay black men. Lewis is also the Senior Media Specialist at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

Editor

CAROLINE BERLER (she/her) is a documentary editor based in New York City with over 10 years of experience working on non-fiction projects that have screened widely in festivals, broadcast nationally, and have been theatrically released. Her debut feature film *Dykes, Camera, Action!* won the Emerging Talent Award at Outfest in 2018 and screened at over 70 festivals around the world. She holds an MFA in Social Documentary Film from the School of Visual Arts and a BA in Sociology from New York University.

Associate Producer

ILIANA HAGENAH (she/her) is a journalist and filmmaker. She was a news producer for CBS News's streaming channel and the Foreign Desk. At BBC, she produced several shorts for the English, Arabic, and Persian services. She regularly freelances for publications such as POLITICO, Teen Vogue, Elle Magazine. A lover of complexity above duality, she is currently working on her first feature documentary about Eritrean musicians in exile, using rare archival footage and musical scenes to visualize war and trauma without relying on typical images of affliction.

Associate Producer

LORNA GRISBY (she/her) is an award-winning journalist, a former deputy bureau chief for People magazine and morning, drive-time talk radio executive producer at WVON in Chicago. She also has been communications manager for the nonprofit Action for Healthy Kids. Early in her career, Lorna was a staff writer for the Poughkeepsie Journal and New Haven Register before landing at Time Inc.'s People. She has earned a first place Los Angeles Press Club award for her reporting which also has been recognized by the Associated Press.



ABOUT GLORIA ALLEN

GLORIA ALLEN (she/her) is an elder transgender advocate and community activist. Known as Mama Gloria, she founded and ran a charm school for homeless trans youth at Chicago's Center on Halsted. The play *Charm* was based on Gloria's life and school and premiered at Steppenwolf Garage Theater before traveling to Minneapolis, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and New York. For her work with the charm school, Gloria was awarded the Living Legend Award by Janet Mock and Precious Brady-Davis at the 2014 Trans 100 Awards. She is the star of the new documentary, *Mama Gloria*, premiering this fall.

Gloria grew up in Chicago amid the legendary drag balls on the city's South Side and transitioned before Stonewall with the love and support of her mother and grandmother. She earned a LPN and worked at the University of Chicago Hospital and in private homes as a nurse's aide. Now retired, Gloria lives in the LGBTQ-friendly senior residence Town Hall Apartments and continues to speak to youth and others about the transgender community.

THE MUSIC

ORIGINAL SONG

Presence of a Legend
by Shea Diamond and
Justin Tranter

Composer

JOCELYN C. CHAMBERS

(she/her) owes her musical genes to her grandfather, Robert O. Chambers, a self-taught jazz and Gospel pianist. Chambers began taking piano lessons at age 7 and studying composition at age 13. At 17, she enrolled in the music composition program at the University of Texas's Butler School of Music, where she produced *The Gospel According to Jocelyn*, an original three-fold work of music, poetry and film in collaboration with the Cohen New Works Festival. *Mama Gloria* marks Chambers' debut original feature film composition, which she is writing while earning a film scoring certificate from UCLA.

Singer/Songwriter

SHEA DIAMOND (she/her)

is a singer-songwriter who mixes everything from R&B, rock and hip-hop to blues, folk and gospel, to make music that speaks to the universal experience while sharing from her very personal one. "As early as I can remember, I always identified as being a girl," Diamond says. In 1999, desperate to get money for gender confirmation surgery, Diamond committed armed robbery and consequently served 10 years in the men's prison system.

During her incarceration, Diamond found her voice as an artist, writing the song *I Am Her*. An a cappella performance of the song at a Black Trans Lives Matter event caught the attention of singer-songwriter Justin Tranter, who became the executive producer of Diamond's debut EP, which also features the song *American Pie*. Since the release of the GLAAD Media Award-nominated EP, Shea and Tranter have co-written two new stand-alone singles – the ever so timely *Don't Shoot* and *I Am America*.

Singer/Songwriter

JUSTIN TRANTER (they/them) is one of the most in-demand songwriters and collaborators in music today, with over 40 million single sales, 7 billion streams and dozens of honors including GRAMMY® and Golden Globes® nominations, 13 total BMI Pop Awards and a recipient of two consecutive "Songwriter of the Year" titles at the BMI Pop Awards. Tranter has written on several of the most significant albums in recent memory, including Ariana Grande's *Thank U, Next* (2019), The Jonas Brothers' *Happiness Begins* (2019), Lady Gaga's *Chromatica* (2020), The Chicks' *Gaslighter* (2020) and Selena Gomez's *Rare* (2020).

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