

## Interview: Alexandra Dean of 'Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story'

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CHICAGO – Hedy Lamarr was tagged as “the world’s most beautiful woman” in movies during her brief run as matinee idol during the 1940s. While taking that on, she was also co-inventing a wireless guidance system during World War II. Director Alexandra Dean contrasts that double life in “Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story.”

The documentary film – an impressive look at a somewhat famous woman both in her time and ahead of it – explores how an extraordinarily beautiful immigrant from Vienna became an American movie star, and in her spare time co-invented a wireless “frequency hopping” system that was the root of GPS, wi-fi and other technological marvels of our age. Dismissed in her era, and finally recognized when she well past her prime, Hedy Lamarr is a fascinating both as a film star and as an innovator. The documentary opens Friday, January 19th, 2018, at the Music Box Theatre in Chicago.



Director Alexandra Dean of 'Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story'

Photo credit: Alexandra Dean

Lamarr was born Hedwig Eva Maria Kiesler in Vienna, Austria. Her father was a successful banker and part time tinkerer, and passed that curiosity to his only child. She made her film debut at age 16 in the German/Austrian film "Money on the Street." Three years later, still in her teenage years, she was featured in the notorious "Ecstasy" (1933), a Czech/Austrian film that had nude scenes of Lamarr, long before that was permitted in American cinema.

The film generated attention for her in the United States, as well as a contract from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and the new name Hedy Lamarr. She appeared with the famous male leads of the era (Jimmy Stewart, Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable), and was in classic films like "Algiers," "Ziegfeld Girl" and "H.M. Pulham, Esq." Eschewing the Hollywood party scene, she would stay home and continue to tinker. Her desire to get her mother to the United States during the war years motivated the wireless technology co-invention (with George Antheil) that would eventually change the world.

Alexandra Dean makes her directorial debut with "Bombshell..." and is an Emmy Award-winning journalist and producer, working for PBS and Bloomberg television (where she produced "Innovators, Inventions and Pursuits"). She also was a founding partner of Reframed Pictures. She spoke to HollywoodChicago.com via phone from New York City, in the following transcript and audio.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Vaguely, people somehow do remember that Hedy Lamarr was an inventor of note. So what was the goal of the film, as far as celebrating both who Hedy was as a public figure, and how her inventions eventually contributed to society?

**Alexandra Dean:** I really wanted people to have another look at this woman, who I felt had been vastly misunderstood, and tended to be reduced to a couple dimensions... as a poster child for classic Hollywood, and in some ways a poster child for STEM [Science Technology Engineering Math].

She was so completely complicated and fascinating, and traveled 360 degrees as a woman. Her struggle for power and making a mark on the world really expressed something about women today, so it didn't feel like her story was the past.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** In your research in the beginnings of the documentary, you discovered some unpublished audio tapes of Hedy Lamarr telling her story in the 1990s. What were the circumstances of that discovery and how did it formulate the structure of the documentary?

**Dean:** We were six months into the development of the documentary, and at that point I felt like a fraud, because I wanted to tell the world a story of a woman who took the reins, but had not been recognized or understood for doing it. Now we were in a time where she could be understood, and I wanted to tell that through her. The problem was she hadn't told the story herself publicly. I would lay up at night, wondering where her story could be. Could she have left the world without telling anyone?

I started making lists of anyone who could possibly have a link to that story, but nothing came of it. But I kept checking it again, and suddenly I realized I had the wrong email for Fleming Meeks, who had interviewed Hedy for a feature in Forbes magazine in the early 1990s, but had since gone to Barron's Magazine. The production located him, and he got back to us immediately. 'I've been waiting 25 years for you to call me,' is the first thing he said. I just thought, 'What? Wow!' For awhile we thought we wanted to cut that story into the film, but we also realized it wasn't the film.



Typical Publicity Photo of Hedy Lamarr During Her Hollywood Years

Photo credit: File Photo

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Besides the scandalous 'Ecstasy,' in which Lamarr became the only early female movie star 'name' to do a nude scene, what do you find most interesting about her early film career before she came to America, and what type of role defines it?

**Dean:** The Austrian and German films? [laughs] They are so quirky, they're like a window into another time. As a teenager, her film career was about being the beautiful girl next door, who astonishes people with her looks and personality. But in typical Hedy fashion, she wanted more.

**In the audio portion of the interview, Alexandra Dean talks about the notoriety of the film "Ecstasy," how it affected Hedy Lamarr's film career, and how a 1940s movie star figures into today's discussion about women's contributions to society at large.**

*"Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story" opens January 19th at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 North Southport in Chicago. Written and directed by Alexandra Dean. Not Rated.*



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