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Greta Schiller is the director of the landmark documentary *BEFORE STONEWALL*, in which she outlined the beginning of America's gay and lesbian subculture. In collaboration with Andrea Weiss, she made *INTERNATIONAL SWEETHEARTS OF RHYTHM*, which records the history of an interracial, all-woman jazz band which came to prominence during the nineteen forties.

In these films, Schiller and Weiss spotlight the stories of independent-minded individuals whose lives transcended social and sexual taboos. This spirit continues in their latest collaboration, *PARIS WAS A WOMAN*, directed by Schiller and researched and written by Weiss.

PARIS WAS A WOMAN opens with a declaration which sums up the film's content: "At the dawn of the twentieth century, creative women flocked to the Left Bank, responding not only to the beauty of Paris but even more to its promise of freedom. They created a community which made it possible for them to follow their passion into a life filled with art and literature. Neither mistress nor muse, Paris became a haven for a new kind of woman."

None of these women fitted into mainstream society. None were defined by their relationships to men. All rejected the conventional social and sexual roles of women. In fact, many were lesbian and bisexual. All became writers and artists, publishers and editors, poets and photographers, journalists and salon hostesses. And all lived fiercely independent lives, in an artistic community which flourished in the post-World War I years and ended upon the occupation of Paris by the German army in 1940.

Some of these women, like Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas and Janet Flanner, are all well-known today. Others have become cult figures. Into this category fits Djuna Barnes, a writer whose constitution, plight and fate are especially fascinating.

Still others have been obscured by the course of time, and it is the information on these women which makes *PARIS WAS A WOMAN* so illuminating. One was Adrienne Monnier, a bookshop proprietress who was to transform the business of bookselling into an artistic and intellectual pursuit. Another was Sylvia Beach, who opened a bookshop of her own, called Shakespeare and Company.

Then there was Natalie Barney, described as the "most notorious woman in the neighborhood"—and American heiress who rejected her debutante life in Washington D.C and fled to Paris.

These individuals, and others, formed a circle of creative women who, as the film's narration succinctly puts it, "evoked the female muse."

At the same time, the city of Paris is as much a character in the film as Gertrude Stein or Sylvia Beach or Djuna Barnes. Stein sums up the appeal of the city when she notes, about Parisians, "Their life belongs to them, so your life can belong to you."

The one flaw in the film is a technical one. On rare occasion, it is unclear who is talking on the soundtrack, or who is on camera. Nonetheless, *PARIS WAS A WOMAN* works as a history of a time and a place, chock-filled with vintage clips and information.

Especially revealing are the filmed footage and recordings of many of these women, all made between the nineteen thirties and nineteen fifties.

When Gertrude Stein's voice fills the soundtrack or Janet Flanner's impressive presence fills the screen, **PARIS WAS A WOMAN** becomes a living, breathing history.