Hasidic Women Upend Tradition by Forming An All-Female EMT Corps in ‘93QUEEN,’ Airing September 17, 2018 on POV

Paula Eiselt's film portrays the challenges and eventual triumph of Hasidic Jewish women creating space for a new profession

When Rachel “Ruchie” Freier introduces us to Borough Park, Brooklyn, one of the world’s largest enclaves of Hasidic Jews, she acknowledges the community’s prevailing view of a woman’s role: “The focus of a woman is being a mother. Any profession, or extra schooling, is discouraged.” In Paula Eiselt’s debut feature documentary, 93Queen, America’s first all-female EMT corps is born against this unlikely backdrop.

93Queen, directed by Paula Eiselt and produced by Eiselt and Heidi Reinberg, makes its national broadcast premiere on the PBS documentary series POV and pov.org on Monday, September 17 at 10 p.m. POV is American television’s longest-running documentary series now in its 31st season. The documentary is a co-production of American Documentary | POV and ITVS.

As a practicing lawyer, Freier is already a member of the small subset of women in the community with professional degrees. She sees a need to rethink entrenched gender roles further when it comes to emergency services.

Traditionally, all EMTs serving Brooklyn’s Hasidic neighborhoods come from the exclusively male volunteer organization Hatzolah. Although the rules against contact between unmarried men and women are waived during medical emergencies, Freier explains, “Most Hasidic women want a woman to help them.” Hence the name of the new EMT organization she begins building, Ezras Nashim (women who help).
The backlash is immediate. An anonymous Hatzolah interviewee says, “The community itself will rebel against any organization trying to do things against [us]. In reality, there are gender specific roles. We’ve never had a woman president. Most CEOs are still men. Sometimes it’s just the way it is, whether you like it or not.” A flood of more openly hostile online comments and memes evinces a desire to stop the new organization.

Despite this, the first group of volunteers assembles. A series of vignettes shows the women training, obtaining the necessary medical supplies and setting up their emergency dispatch system. When they connect to the official New York City Fire Department radio, the chief assigns them the call sign 93Q, read aloud as “93-Queen.”

The film spends time with several other members of Ezras Nashim: co-founder Yocheved, a recent convert with more than 20 years of EMT experience in the secular world; Yitty, a young mother who had childhood dreams of being a doctor; and Hadassah, a recently divorced woman who joins, she says, because “no woman should ever be too embarrassed to call for help.”

These women share Freier’s belief in the organization’s core mission, though tension rises over just how far Ezras Nashim should go in challenging the patriarchy. A rift emerges when unmarried recruits are barred from working in the field due to Freier’s decision to allow only married women to go out on calls.

Freier reiterates her commitment to keeping within religious boundaries while she also acknowledges her role in cracking the glass ceiling: “Obviously I couldn’t achieve this position if the women who have been trailblazing for women’s equality hadn’t made it possible, so my connection with secular feminism, I think, is very obvious. But you can’t just in one sentence narrow me down to a few specific words.”

“No one embodies the confounding dichotomy between tradition and modernity quite like Ruchie Freier. While toeing the blurred line between redefining traditional roles and merely updating them, Ruchie takes matters into her own hands to move her community forward,” said director Paula Eiselt. “93QUEEN neither demonizes nor sanitizes the Hasidic community, but rather introduces viewers to the type of complex and nuanced Hasidic human beings many don’t believe exist.”

“By bringing us vivid portraits of the women behind this groundbreaking organization, 93QUEEN shows us that identity and beliefs are never simple,” said Justine Nagan, executive producer/executive director of POV/American Documentary. “All at once, religious women grapple with questions about patriarchy, feminism, fairness and religious observance, and this film insightfully explores these themes.

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About the Filmmakers:
Paula Eiselt, Director/Producer/Cinematographer
Paula Eiselt is an independent filmmaker and graduate of New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts with a double major in film production and cinema studies. 93Queen is her feature directorial debut. Eiselt’s work has been supported by ITVS; Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program; Gucci Tribeca Documentary Fund; Picture Motion; Abigail Disney’s Fork Films; New York State Council on the Arts; International Documentary Association; Independent Filmmaker Project; Women Make Movies; and the Hartley Film Foundation. In 2017, 93Queen won the top inaugural First Look Pitch Prize at the Hot Docs Forum. Eiselt was a creative producing fellow at the 2017 Sundance Creative Producing Program and a 2016 Independent Filmmaker Project Documentary Lab fellow. She is currently developing a New York Times Op-Doc on Jewish identity.

Heidi Reinberg, Producer
Heidi Reinberg’s film work spans the breadth of the nonfiction realm, from producing long-form documentaries for PBS, HBO and Logo to directing reality series for HGTV to developing series for branded-content powerhouse Cinelan. Prior to partnering with director Paula Eiselt on the ITVS-funded 93Queen, Reinberg worked with some of today’s most talented nonfiction directors. She developed the nonfiction series War Photographers/Exposure with Oscar winner Ross Kauffman for NBCUniversal and
produced Oscar winner Cynthia Wade’s first two films, *Grist for the Mill* and *Shelter Dogs*, for Cinemax and HBO, respectively. Reinberg is developing a documentary series set on the southern border of Texas with *Jackson* director Maisie Crow. This as-yet-untitled project was awarded an inaugural IDA Enterprise Documentary Fund development grant in 2017.

**Credits:**
- **Director:** Paula Eiselt
- **Producers:** Paula Eiselt and Heidi Reinberg
- **Editors:** Sunita Prasad and Rebecca Laks
- **Music:** Laura Karpman
- **Executive Producer:** Marco Williams
- **Executive Producer for ITVS:** Sally Jo Fifer
- **Executive Producers for POV:** Justine Nagan, Chris White

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*93Queen* is a co-production of ITVS, a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films and then airs them for free on public television through weekly series and stand-alone specials and through its digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. For more information, visit itvs.org.

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Produced by American Documentary, Inc., *POV* is public television’s premier showcase for nonfiction films. Since 1988, *POV* has been the home for the world’s boldest contemporary filmmakers, celebrating intriguing personal stories that spark conversation and inspire action. Always an innovator, *POV* discovers fresh new voices and creates interactive experiences that shine a light on social issues and elevate the art of storytelling. With our documentary broadcasts, original online programming and dynamic community engagement campaigns, we are committed to supporting films that capture the imagination and present diverse perspectives.

*POV* films have won 37 Emmy® Awards, 21 George Foster Peabody Awards, 12 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards®, the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award and the Prix Italia. The *POV* series has been honored with a Special News & Documentary Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, three IDA Awards for Best Curated Series and the National Association of Latino Independent Producers Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity. Learn more at www.pbs.org/pov/.

**POV Engage** ([www.pbs.org/pov/engage/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/engage/))
- *POV*’s Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 800 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

**POV Spark** ([www.pbs.org/pov/](http://www.pbs.org/pov/))
- Since 1994, *POV Spark* has driven new storytelling initiatives and interactive production for *POV*. The department has continually experimented with web-based documentaries, producing PBS’ first program website and the first Snapchat-native documentary. It has won major awards for its work, including a Webby Award and over 19 nominations. Now with a singular focus on incubating and distributing interactive productions, *POV Spark* continues to explore the future of independent nonfiction media through its co-productions, acquisitions and the *POV* Labs, where media makers and technologists collaborate to reinvent storytelling forms.

**American Documentary, Inc.** ([www.amdoc.org](http://www.amdoc.org))
- American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content.
on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

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