

PLAYBOY

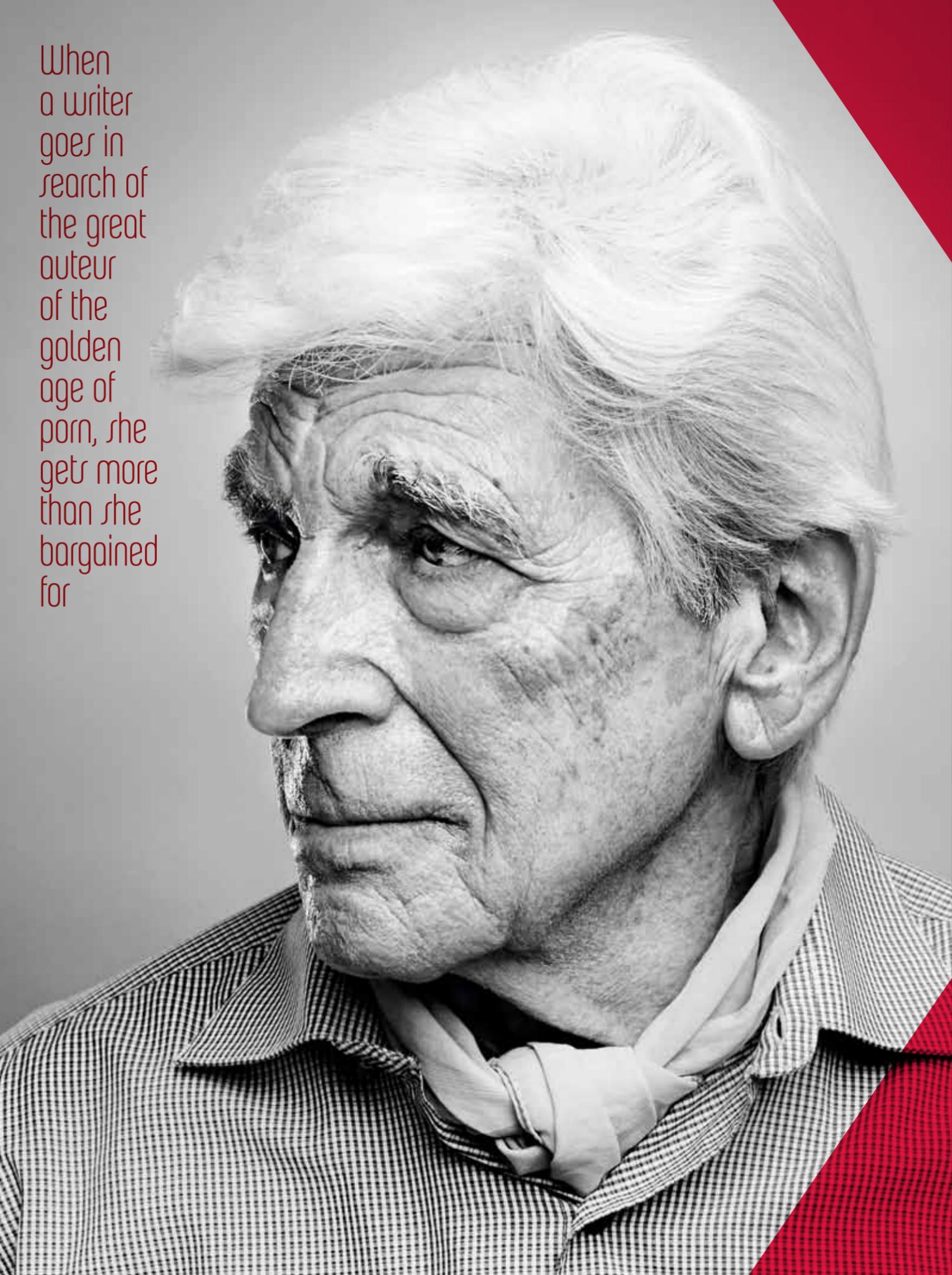
ENTERTAINMENT FOR MEN

JUNE 2014

RED SOX
NATION: AN
ORAL HISTORY
PART II OF
DON WINSLOW'S
EXCLUSIVE
NOVELLA
THE INTERVIEW:
JONAH HILL
INSANE
BACHELOR PADS
THE GUIDE
TO GOURMET
BATHING
THE PIONEERING
EROTIC AUTEUR
PUNK ROCK
IN IRAN
20Q WITH
KEVIN HART

2014
Playmate
of the
Year
KENNEDY
SUMMERS

When a writer goes in search of the great auteur of the golden age of porn, she gets more than she bargained for



The
LEGEND
of

HENRY

PARIS



BY TONI BENTLEY

Photography by Marius Bugge

A

As a professional ballerina, I barely finished high school, so my sense of inadequacy in all subjects but classical ballet remains adequately high. In the years since I became a writer, my curiosity has roamed from classic literature to sexual literature to classic sexual literature. A few months ago, I decided to take a much-needed break from toiling over my never-to-be-finished study of Proust, Tolstoy and Elmore Leonard to bone up on one of our most interesting cultural phenomena: pornography. I had heard of this long-ago era called the “golden age,” so I thought I would start my education at the beginning, often—though not always—a good place to start.

The golden age of porn has an undisputed point of entry: *Deep Throat*. It’s 1972 and Linda Lovelace—God rest her unhappy soul—has her clit in her throat,

In 24 months, Metzger made five hardcore Henry Paris films, of which *Misty Beethoven* is the crown jewel.

giving an absurdist, and pernicious, feminist veneer to an entirely chauvinist story. While the film’s premise is a frustrated woman’s search for pleasure, it is in reality the ultimate fellatio fantasy. The film was the career-defining effort of a horny hairdresser, Gerard Damiano. (Years later even he admitted, rather endearingly, “No, I don’t think it’s a good movie.”)

I proceeded to Damiano’s second hit and far more imaginative feature, *The Devil in Miss Jones*, starring Georgina Spelvin. Unlike Lovelace, Spelvin manages to inject considerable style into her effort; she appears to actually be turned on.

On to *Behind the Green Door*, made by the notorious flesh peddlers the Mitchell brothers. (Jim eventually murdered cokehead brother Artie.) Starring Marilyn Chambers, who had previously modeled as a young mother on the famous Ivory Snow detergent box, this film sports the conceit of a normal and respectable young woman who becomes the centerpiece of an orgy (she is devoured) in front of a sizable audience; the Ivory Snow girl is eventually coupled with an African American man, boxer Johnnie Keyes. This film is the first notable porn flick to feature an interracial fuck—every thrust a bona fide civil rights movement.



What’s next? The fourth title that kept showing up on best-of lists of the golden age was *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* by Henry Paris. Who? Searching my favorite porn site, Amazon.com, I found that this 1975 film was just rereleased in 2012 on DVD with all the bells and whistles of a Criterion Collection *Citizen Kane* reissue: two discs (remastered, digitized, uncut, high-definition transfer) that include director’s commentary, outtakes, intakes, original trailer, taglines and a 45-minute documentary on the making of the film; plus a magnet, flyers, postcards and a 60-page booklet of liner notes.

When *Misty* arrived in my mailbox days later, I placed the disc in my DVD player with considerable skepticism, but a girl has to pursue her education despite risks. I pressed PLAY. Revelation.

First off: *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* is an actual movie, not an extended loop of in-and-out close-ups. In fact, the film is so good, so funny, so sexy, that you will not be tempted to press PAUSE after the usual 12-minute-to-orgasm, time-for-a-beer routine that porn reliably delivers. This may be a downside, depending on your expectations, but more likely you will be delighted as you realize this is hardcore like no other—the hardcore we never knew to desire, Howard Hawks hardcore.

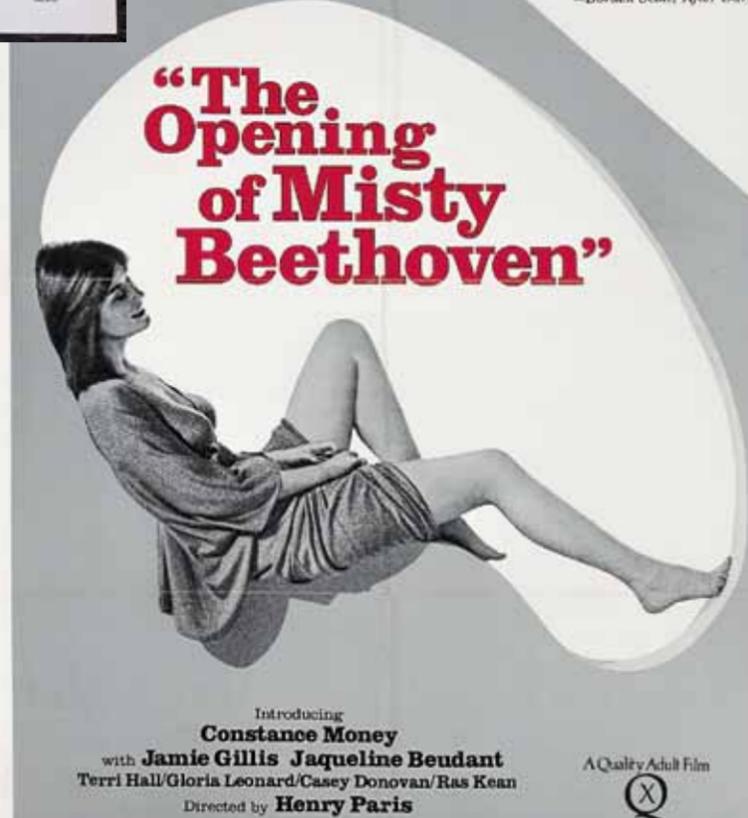
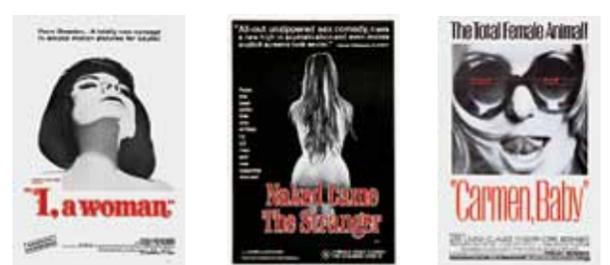
We are in Paris, the real one, nighttime in a sodden Pigalle, and a handsome chap in a trench coat—porn legend Jamie Gillis, a rich man’s Elliott Gould—is meandering around looking serious. He is renowned sexologist Dr. Seymour Love, a modern-day Kinsey, his latest best-seller called *The Anals of Passion*. He enters a dirty-movie theater and encounters a cute, \$5-hand-job gal played by Constance Money, née Susan Jensen. This young woman’s bright pink lipstick is painted so far beyond her lovely lips that it all but meets the mound of blue eye shadow drowning her sparkling blue eyes. The good doctor is both intrigued and appalled by this “sexual civil-service worker.” He books a session with her at a nearby *maison*. As they walk, Dr. Love asks her name. “Misty Beethoven.”

“Is that your real name?”
 “No, I changed it to make myself seem more important.”
 “What was it before?”
 “Dolores Beethoven.”
 And so (continued on page 142)

TOP: RADLEY METZGER IN HIS PRIME, CIRCA THE LATE 1960S. MIDDLE: A SCENE FROM METZGER’S 1970 MOVIE *THE LICKERISH QUARTET*. FILMED IN ROME IN A STUDIO MADE FAMOUS BY FELLINI, THIS SHOT FEATURES TWO LOVERS IN A LIBRARY, THE FLOOR A GIANT BLOWUP OF A DICTIONARY PAGE WITH DEFINITIONS FOR WORDS SUCH AS *FORNICATE* AND *ECSTASY*. BOTTOM: A SCENE FROM METZGER’S “LOVE STORY,” *THERÈSE AND ISABELLE*. RIGHT: A COLLAGE OF METZGER MOVIE POSTERS.



“Brilliant new porn film. No other film is going to equal this one. It simply has to be the best film of 1976. 100%”
 —Al Goldstein *Midnight Blue*
 “A classic piece of erotica . . . it’s the finest blue movie I’ve ever seen. Director Henry Paris keeps the action fast, fun and furious. It is inventive, opulent, and highly erotic.”
 —Borden Scott, *After Dark*





THE LEGEND OF HENRY PARIS

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begins the great ride that is *The Opening of Misty Beethoven*. Wearing a T-shirt with American Express and MasterCard logos on its front, Misty states her rules: “I do a straight fuck. I don’t take it in the mouth, I don’t take it in the ass, and I don’t take it in the bed.” Dr. Love makes a bet with a friend: He will train Misty at his school of love to become not only the hottest girl of the season but to reach the ultimate—being named the Golden Rod Girl by famed sex-magazine tycoon Lawrence Lehman. *Misty Beethoven* proceeds to retell the enduring *Pygmalion/My Fair Lady* story, but instead of teaching a vulgar street urchin to enunciate, she is taught to fuck.

Director Henry Paris is a parodist of considerable wit and balls, though with an affectionate, light touch. Within a few frames of the film’s opening, we realize we are in the capable hands of a master of self-referential humor, elegance and killer one-liners, whose tongue is planted firmly in his cheek—and soon will be in yours. This is no basement production. We are in black-tie and gowns at operas in Paris and Rome, at vast country estates with multiple uniformed servants (who give head to everyone, male and female, nonstop). Everyone is beautiful. We are, in other words, in a sexual nirvana where reality—the great enemy of the erotic—is nowhere to be found.

The film premiered in 1975 to rave reviews and huge audiences and garnered multiple awards over the years. It opened at a first-run theater in Washington, D.C. and did not close for seven years. Lovely star Constance Money was invited to do a July 1978 PLAYBOY pictorial. The movie made a fortune and even added a phrase to our pop-culture lexicon. As one character goes down on her lover, she says, “I’m going to suck your cock like the inside of a ripe mango.” A little later, she descends again: “Ripe mango, take two.”

I’ll take four.

Charmed out of my thong, I began to investigate this “Henry Paris” and discovered he directed only five hardcore films—all shot within two years in that brief bubble of porn’s golden age in the 1970s—of which *Misty Beethoven* is the crown jewel. This small collection of films (all newly available in high-definition digital transfers) includes *The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann*, *Naked Came the Stranger*, *Barbara Broadcast* and *Maraschino Cherry*. (This last work contains a noteworthy scene featuring a young Spald-

ing Gray as one of two men in an energetic three-way.) The Henry Paris films constitute an anomaly in the history of pornographic pictures. They are hardcore satires, screwball porn with magnificent allusions to the French and Italian New Wave masters. Each film has unexpected attributes: original music, actual scripts and stories that go from A to B to XXX.

I became obsessed. Who was Henry Paris? Was he dead, as are his unlikely contemporaries Damiano and the Mitchell brothers? Or perhaps he didn’t exist at all and was a stand-in for several now dead people? I even thought perhaps he was a woman, so advanced were his sexual politics and so beautiful his aesthetic.

Henry Paris is in fact the “nom de fuck” of Radley Metzger—director, producer and writer (under the moniker Jake Barnes, a sly nod to the castrated hero of Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*) of more than 10 other films shot in the 1960s and early 1970s under his real name. And according to Wikipedia, he was not dead. So where was Metzger? He had no website, no LinkedIn listing.

Some time later, something remarkable happened. I received a query from someone on behalf of one Radley Metzger, who had “made a number of well-received erotic films in the 1970s and 1980s.” He wanted to know if the film rights to my erotic memoir *The Surrender* were available. A bizarre coincidence? Absolutely. And a brilliant one. The next thing I knew, I was on a flight to New York to meet the creator of Dolores “Misty” Beethoven himself.

We arrange to have a drink at a sophisticated, dimly lit bar on New York City’s Lower East Side. I am late, unable to decide what to wear to meet the man who has become, to me, the king of cinematic sex. Entering the bar, I see no one. I walk around a corner and there, at a cozy circular table, sits a disarmingly handsome man, arms lazily outstretched along the curve of the red-velvet booth. He rises to greet me; he is very tall.

Metzger, now 85, remains impossibly elegant, gray silk cravat around his neck à la Fred Astaire. With his twinkling blue eyes and great head of wavy silver hair, he looks like a cross between Leonard Bernstein and Samuel Beckett. And so we chat. He has a mind like a steel trap, a razor-sharp wit (no surprise there) and a knowledge of film—from *The Birth of a Nation* on—to go head-to-head with Martin Scorsese. Over several days we meet again and again, and the true story behind the legend of Henry Paris unfolds—as strange and dramatic as any of his films.

Radley Henry Metzger was born in 1929, the year of the stock market crash, on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, second son of Jewish parents who were hard hit by the Great Depression. “My first word was not *mama* but *dispossessed*,” says Metzger, smiling. Plagued by severe allergies, he found the only sure cure: air-conditioned movie theaters, where, as a youngster, he would often take in three or four films a day. His apparently even handsomer brother (now

deceased) went on to medical school and became an ob-gyn; as adults they joked about ending up in related professions.

Metzger attended Columbia University but dropped out during the Korean War to sign up for the Air Force, where he opted for training as a film editor for military propaganda films. After the war he joined Janus Films, where he began editing and occasionally dubbing the American trailers for the A-list foreign films that were at the time making cinema history—Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Avventura*, François Truffaut’s *Jules and Jim* and the films of the great Dane Ingmar Bergman.

“One of the best compliments I ever got,” recalls Metzger, “was from Bergman, who liked the trailer I did for *Through a Glass Darkly*.” He also remembers sitting alongside Jean Renoir in an editing room in New York, doing the cuts and dubbing for the U.S. release of *Can-Can*. “Renoir said something to me that I have never forgotten,” says Metzger. “There is always just one moment in a film that everyone remembers,” he said. “And that is enough.”

By his mid-20s Metzger had raised just enough money—“If we’d had twice as much it would have qualified as a shoestring budget”—to make his first film. *Dark Odyssey*, a Kazan-like story of a Greek immigrant honor killing, contains some stunning shots of the 1950s New York skyline, including the George Washington Bridge before it had a second level. Although Howard Thompson gave the film a good word in *The New York Times*, it was a box-office bust.

“Even my relatives didn’t want to see it,” Metzger has said. “I’ve heard *art film* defined as a foreign film nobody wants to see, and this was an American art film. I don’t know if there’s a word in English, in any language, that sums up the flop this thing was. I don’t like to blow my own horn, but I believe it holds the record for the lowest gross of any film ever made.”

The humiliation Metzger suffered (not to mention the debts he amassed) was the catalyst for his future career. He, like many achievers, finds failure both more useful and more interesting than success. “The one thing people are defenseless against in this business is success,” he says. “It’s the single most corrupting influence.”

Heavily in debt, Metzger took the leap from young artist to pragmatist, quickly noting what sold a film and lured an audience: sex. He had been involved in dubbing the sensational 1957 French import *And God Created Woman*, which had turned an unknown young actress named Brigitte Bardot into a superstar. Metzger had watched the bombshell effect on an American public delighted by breasts—and hungry for more. Metzger pounced.

In the early 1960s he formed his own production and distribution company, Audubon Films (named after the first movie theater he attended), with a colleague named Ava Leighton (who also worked at Janus Films), and while Leighton set up the business in New York, Metzger set off for Europe to seek their fortune. He screened hundreds of films, and over the next decade Audubon became the premier distributor of

sexy foreign films in the U.S. In the 1960s this meant an occasional naked bosom or veiled body shot accompanied by a risqué story and always a beautiful ingenue.

Audubon had a secret weapon, something no other distributor had: Metzger’s expert skills as an editor. Typically he would buy a European film cheaply and then rework it, editing the story for speed and accessibility, dubbing it into English, occasionally shooting nude inserts to help the narrative along and adding sparkling taglines for the ad campaign. It was a winning formula at just the right time: pre-hardcore, with the pill and the age of Aquarius in full swing.

Audubon made a lot of money.

The Twilight Girls (tagline: “Dangerous love!”) stars the gorgeous Agnès Laurent and Catherine Deneuve in her first screen role. Metzger added a five-minute sequence of two girls kissing and some flashes of naked breasts, and the film was off and running. Other releases included *Warm Nights and Hot Pleasures* (“Where sex goes skin deep”), *The Weird Love Makers* (“They do everything!”), *The Fourth Sex* (“Is she or isn’t she? Only her lover knows for sure...”) and *Daniella by Night*, which introduced Elke Sommer to American audiences (she later had big roles in everything from Peter Sellers’s second *Pink Panther* movie to *The Love Boat*).

Metzger learned to walk that undefined, thin line when it came to the obscenity laws. “I always stayed five miles ahead of the speed limit,” he explains. Nevertheless, Audubon was never not in court—for more than two years with *The Twilight Girls*.

“They said, ‘It’s a dirty picture,’” recalls Metzger, “and I said, ‘No, it isn’t dirty,’ and they said, ‘Well, it’s a lousy picture,’ and I said, ‘That’s like saying a rich man deserves more justice than a poor man.’ We finally won.” It was one of the last big cases tried by the New York State Censorship Board before it was permanently dismantled. Sexy films were here to stay. The only question that remained was, How explicit could they get?

In 1965, having read a small notice in *Variety* about a Swedish film called *I, a Woman*, Metzger flew to Denmark—“It wasn’t even a screening room”—to see

the film. He bought it for \$5,000, and after his usual dubs and edits, the film was released in 1966 with the tagline “It is entirely possible to make excitation a way of life.” By 1966 standards it was hot and edgy. It became a sensation, pulling in an unprecedented female audience to a “dirty” picture. “It touched something in women. It was probably the first feminist erotic film released in the 1960s, and it pushed a button with every woman in America,” says Metzger.

“A door opened,” he recalls, “and I walked right through it.”

Beginning in 1963, as the Audubon coffers started to fill, Metzger started to make his

own movies again, turning out in fast succession a series of playfully erotic (though not yet pornographic) films.

First came *The Dirty Girls*, the story of two prostitutes—one a streetwalker, the other a high-class call girl—exquisitely photographed in various stages of nudity and activity. Next was *The Alley Cats*, which features the only cameo of Metzger himself, jumping into a swimming pool in full evening dress—“The guy for the scene didn’t show, so I filled in.” And *Carmen, Baby* (“The total female animal”), which became Audubon’s highest-grossing film, netting Audubon \$3 million.

Lickerish Quartet includes a stunning sex scene—shot at Cinecittà studios in Rome, home of Federico Fellini—with a couple

on a library floor that is a giant enlargement of a dictionary page, the definitions for *masturbate*, *fornicate*, *ecstasy* and *copulate* as their literary backdrop. *Score*, an exploration of bisexuality, was Metzger’s first foray into pushing-the-envelope soft-core. The film has real erections and is based on a sexy off-Broadway play (in which an unknown Sylvester Stallone played a randy telephone repairman).

By this time, however, *Deep Throat* had arrived, and the entire landscape for erotic films changed virtually overnight. After weak box-office receptions for his previous two films, Metzger felt forced—“We tried to resist”—by the market demand (and bill collectors) to venture into the hardcore arena. And so Henry Paris was born.

Henry is Metzger’s middle name, and, he explains, “someone named Paris was very helpful to me at one point in my life.” What a way to repay a favor.

Over 24 months, Metzger, as Henry Paris, made his five hardcore “fuck films,” as he calls them, all released in the next few years. It is these films on which his reputation now, rather erroneously, is based.

The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann was shot over six and a half days in New York. Its premise involves a rich husband who hires a (horny) private eye to spy on his beautiful, cheating wife. The first scene: lovely Barbara Bourbon, a mainstream actress in her first (though not last) hardcore film, blowing a fortunate young man on a park bench on the East River

walkway. She takes down Marc “10½” Stevens’s humongous cock with such smooth and slow plunges that she makes Linda Lovelace’s *Deep Throat* efforts of the previous year look sophomoric. It is positively poetic, with a massive payoff.

Naked Came the Stranger is based on the best-selling book by Penelope Ashe, who was, in fact, no fewer than 24 authors, masterminded by New York *Newsday* columnist Mike McGrady (who later co-wrote Linda Lovelace’s memoir *Ordeal*). The film contains extraordinary sequences, such as one in which a reluctant chap gets head on the top of a red double-decker bus as it drives down Fifth Avenue. One can see all the familiar storefronts pass by, as well as the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center.

Shooting on a Sunday morning—"Every independent filmmaker's best friend," says Metzger—the crew, director and actors were onboard for hours as the bus cruised up and down the avenue, the tourists below oblivious to the events on the top deck.

Within two years, however, Metzger abruptly stopped making hardcore. "I'd done everything I wanted to do. I was done," he says. Shortly thereafter he stopped making films altogether. He cites one factor that played a role in his filmic disappearance: the long, painful death from cancer of his production partner at Audubon Films, Ava Leighton, who had been with him from the beginning. By then, the mid-1980s, the industry had changed, Metzger says. "And when she died, all the fun went out of it. Her death left a great void."

Unlike so many of the players in the early days of hardcore who sold their films for a pittance, losing out on future millions, Metzger retained full ownership of his. (Distribpix currently distributes all the Henry Paris films in remastered form.) Since that time, he has played on the fringe with ideas and scripts and insists he may have another movie in him. Who knows?

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There is a common theme to Metzger's films, both hard and soft, uncommon in a genre designed to sexually excite: classic love stories of separation and reconciliation. *The Dirty Girls*, *The Alley Cats*, *Score*, *The Image*, *The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann*, *Naked Came the Stranger* and of course *Misty Beethoven* all feature this conceit. Unlike most Hollywood love stories, the journey of separation in Metzger's oeuvre inevitably involves sexual adventures that not only are given full play but, more often than not, are the actual catalysts for the couple's reconciliation. All the fun and games take place in sophisticated, rich (no one works for a living in Metzger's world) and exotic settings. "Who wants to see sex in Queens?" Metzger says. Sex is portrayed as a unifying, guiltless, happy indulgence—the utopian dream that was the promise of the sexual revolution before the unforeseen consequences of the 1980s sent fornication to condoms and fear.

Although Metzger is best known for *Misty Beethoven*, I believe his masterpiece came earlier, with his 1968 film *Thérèse and Isabelle*, in which love and sex meld so deeply and cling so close to the bone that even Metzger the master jokester surrendered to the only serious tagline of his career: "A love story." And so it is.

In keeping with his usual practice of basing films on works of literature—"I came from the editing room, and I wasn't very secure in creating narrative story structure"—Metzger bought the rights to a novel by the cult French writer Violette Leduc. He remembers the one thing she said to him before he made the movie: "Don't make a dirty picture." And he didn't—and in doing so, Radley Metzger (*not* as Henry Paris) made his most erotic film ever.

Shot outside Paris in somber, velvety black-and-white by the great Hans Jura,

with an evocative original score by Georges Auric, the film is a haunting, lyrical tone poem starring the luminescent Essy Persson as Thérèse and Anna Gaël as the delicate but rebellious Isabelle. When I ask Metzger what he wanted most in a female lead, he doesn't miss a beat: "Innocence." He found it in spades in these two young actresses. Using an abandoned monastery as a boarding school, the film tells the story of beautiful schoolgirls who fall in love under the scrutinizing gaze of parents, schoolmistresses and, most critically wicked of all, their own peers.

Thérèse and Isabelle make scrambling, passionate love in a bathroom stall, on the stone floor of the stark sanctuary with a crucifix looming above them and, finally, outside the school walls, alone at last, at twilight on the shore of a river, their naked bodies gliding into each other like merging shadow selves.

Metzger's allegiance to his source had him layer Leduc's exact prose over the lovemaking scenes, a risky cinematic convention, as so often words detract from erotic effect. But it works. Leduc's stark text evokes the intense, dreamlike, anarchistic experience of discovering sexual pleasure as a foreign land. It seems only fitting that it was during the shooting of *Thérèse and Isabelle* that Metzger fell in love himself, married and had a daughter.

Called the "finest commercial feature about adolescent lesbian love," the film was popular at drive-ins—but only with an added-on ending (not in the book) that Metzger despises. The entire film is a flashback told by Thérèse, who visits her childhood school as a woman; in the drive-in version, at the close of the film she is seen climbing into a waiting car with her...husband. What a relief—not a lesbian after all.

"A 100 percent gay story was a very frightening concept in 1968," says Metzger. But in the intervening years, he has located every single print with the heterosexual ending and, he says with considerable satisfaction, they are "buried in an unmarked grave."

For me the film stands alone in Metzger's oeuvre—and in the ever-evolving genre that attempts to depict the complexity of female eroticism. He miraculously melded an unapologetic, graphic depiction of female sexual excitement with that most underrated erotic component of all, the thing that sexually explicit films refuse in their headstrong prurience: love.

And there it is, that one memorable moment—as Jean Renoir pointed out to Metzger—that makes a film. I remember the absolute wonder of Thérèse's face, close up, bursting beyond the edges of the giant screen, as she endures Isabelle's relentless lower ministrations. It is one of the most beautiful, intimate extended images I have ever seen on film. And somehow, miraculously, the more pleasure Thérèse inherits, the more innocent she becomes, and the beauty and pain that is the deepest pleasure a woman can know is revealed.

Thanks, Radley.

