

What to Watch at the 2023 Festival: Documentaries on Real People Who Changed the World

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“It’s Only Life After All” tells the story of the Indigo Girls, Amy Ray and Emily Saliers, who broke new ground in folk-pop and celebrity activism.

By Peter Jones

Some of the most influential figures of the post-war era — from feminist sex researcher Shere Hite to rock ‘n’ roll pioneer Little Richard — are profiled in new documentaries showcasing this month at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival.

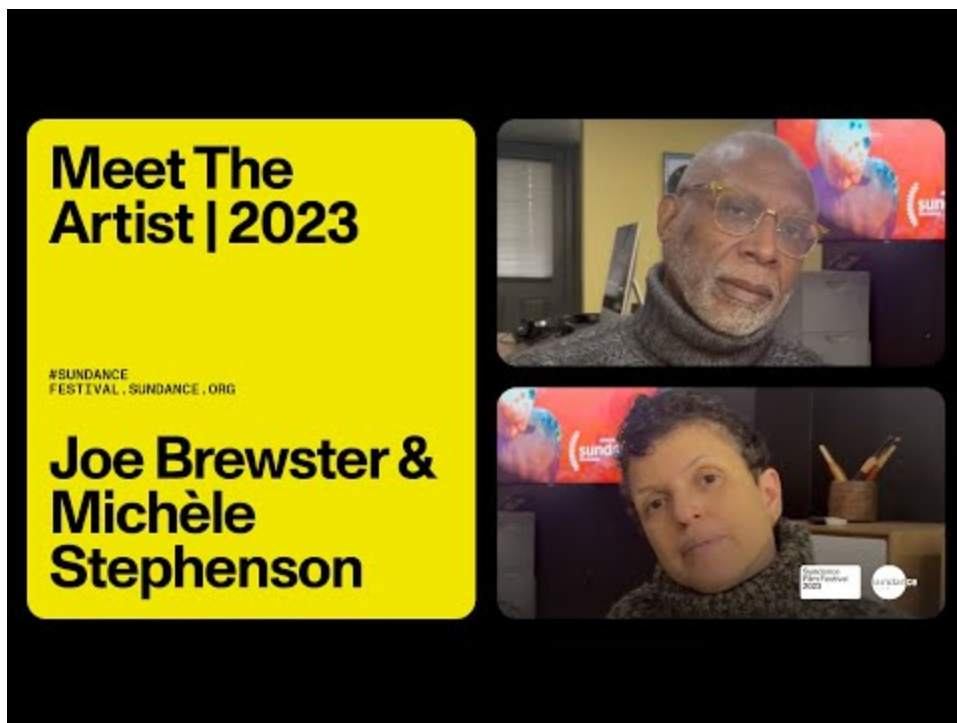
The films are often revelatory, even when it comes to people we thought we knew. Although Brooke Shields and Michael J. Fox may have received more than their share of media attention in the 1980s, these new thought-provoking docs manage to shed fresh light — not just on the actors, their work, and struggles, but also on the often-harsh Hollywood they inhabited.

This year’s roster of biographical docs will be an opportunity to gain insight into creatives and thought leaders who helped shape the second half of the 20th century and beyond. Groundbreaking video artist Nam June Paik and Black model-activist Bethann Hardison are

both given their long-awaited due in nonfiction films that are as edifying about our culture as they are about the subjects themselves.

Whether your interests are in sports, literature, or music, the Festival will be a chance to get to know a number of the fascinating people who helped shape the ever-changing world we live in.

The Disappearance of Shere Hite (U.S. Documentary) — A doc that doubles as a kind of mystery: How does a groundbreaking *Playboy*-model-turned-feminist-sex-researcher and bestselling author go missing from collective memory in the aftermath of the sexual revolution? Was it Hite's controversial methodology — or is a woman's sexual pleasure still a cultural turn-off? *Available in person and online.*



Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/-smf_d2Y2Mo

Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project (U.S. Documentary) — A lyrical film is the perfect way to understand one of the greatest living American poets. Award-winning Nikki Giovanni is among the foremost writers to emerge from the Black Arts Movement, and her unique vision for a future of true equality — the reality and metaphor of space travel — inspired everyone from Oprah Winfrey to the scientists who named a bat species, the *micronycteris giovanniae*, after her. *Available in person and online.*

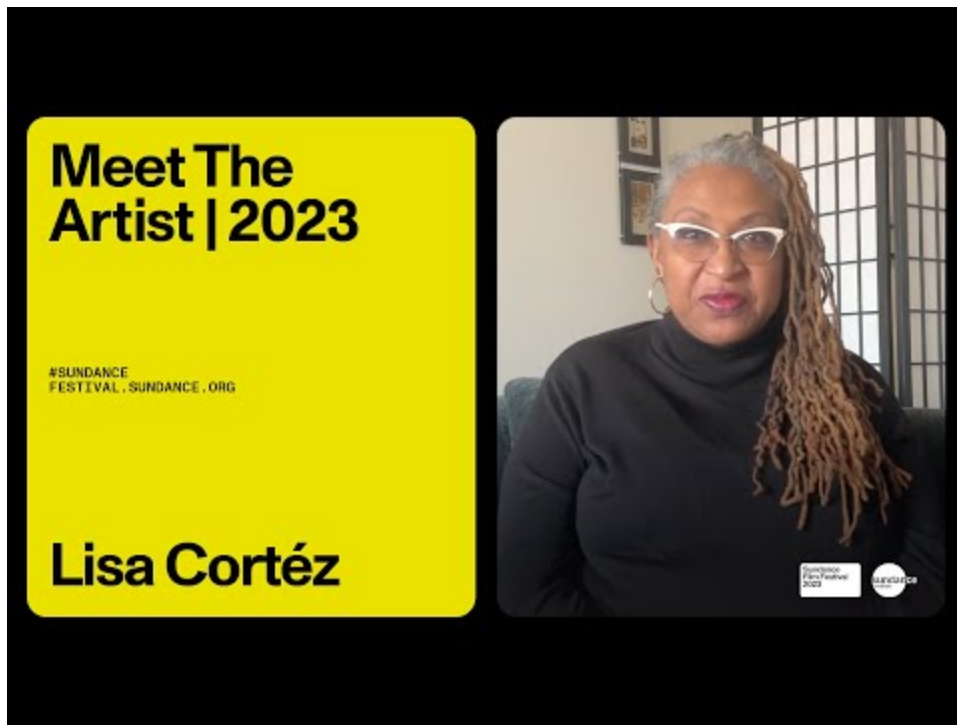


Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/IeJFzc6XsnQ>

Invisible Beauty (Premieres) — During an era in which models were seen but not heard, Bethann Hardison was determined to be more than a pretty face. In the 1970s, the first Black model to gain a national reputation broke ground with an unencumbered style that defied then-conventional standards of “beauty.” True to form, Hardison, who directed, serves as her own storyteller in this first-person documentary, tracing her life, from her modest roots in Brooklyn to her personification of “Black is beautiful.” *Available in person.*

It's Only Life After All (Premieres) — The Indigo Girls burst onto the music scene of the late 1980s with catchy folk-pop harmonies that crossed over musical as well as social boundaries. Friends since their school days in Athens, Georgia, Amy Ray and Emily Saliers virtually reinvented the singer-songwriter genre, mixing radio-friendly hits with social activism, not just for LGBTQ+ rights, but also animal welfare, environmental justice, and more. This aptly titled, honest, and ultimately fun documentary is an opportunity for the longtime musical partners to reflect, laugh and sing! *Available in person.*

Judy Blume Forever (Premieres) — Once upon a time, authors of children’s and young-adult fiction were as bland as the library wallpaper. But Judy Blume changed all that — arguably forever — with honest and provocative titles like *Are You There God? It's Me*, *Margaret* and *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. This humorous, yet sensitive, documentary profiles the sometimes-controversial author who dared suggest that menstruation was natural and teens could survive premarital sex. *Available in person.*



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/hEyF41mFClk>

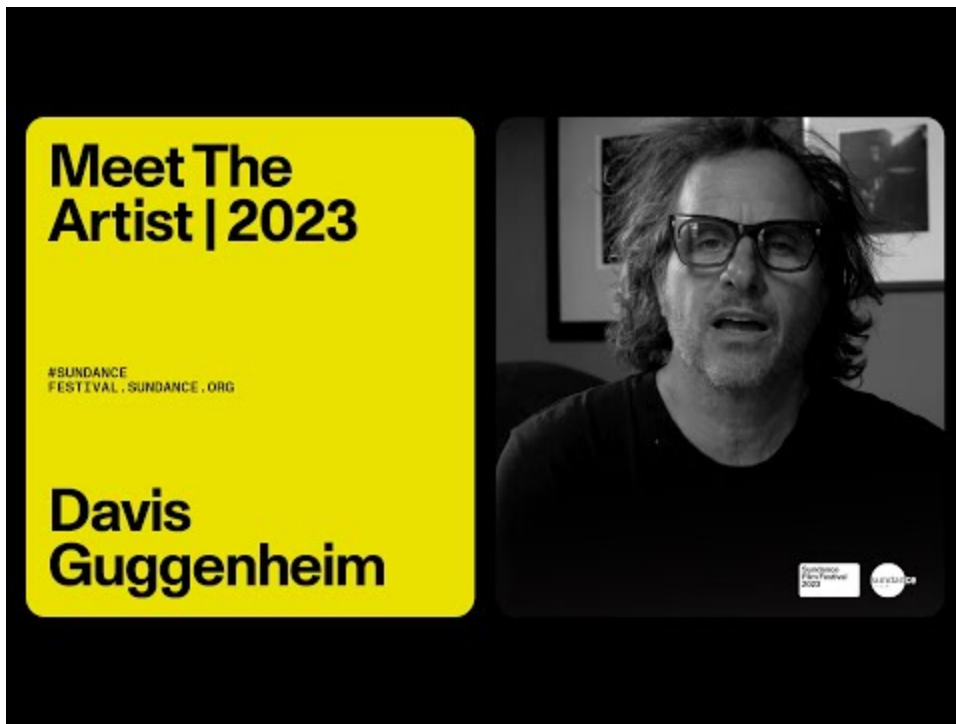
Little Richard: I Am Everything (U.S. Documentary) — Richard Penniman was indeed a bit of everything — a hyper-sexual rock 'n' roll wild man, an ordained evangelical minister, and a sometimes-reluctant gay icon. This comprehensive documentary follows the legendary Little Richard through all of his seeming contradictions, his gospel roots in Macon, Georgia, the birth of rhythm and blues, and a style and catalog seized — or sometimes cynically appropriated — by everyone from Pat Boone and the Beatles to James Brown, Prince, and David Bowie. A-wop-bop-a-loo-mop-a-lop-bam-boom! *Available in person and online.*

Nam June Paik: Moon is the Oldest TV (U.S. Documentary) — What Little Richard was to early rock 'n' roll, Nam June Paik was to experimental video art. When the internet was still a gleam in technology's eye, Korea-born Paik coined the term “electronic superhighway” and proved a television camcorder could be used in ways Milton Berle could not have imagined. This documentary profiles an artist so ahead of his time that his work still seems groundbreaking more than a decade after his death. *Available in person and online.*

Pretty Baby: Brooke Shields (Premieres) — This two-part documentary turns the title of Louis Malle's film on its head. *Pretty Baby* catapulted its 12-year-old co-star to fame as well as controversy as the movie and Brooke Shields' Calvin Klein-led modeling career begged uncomfortable questions about the sexual exploitation of young girls in Hollywood. This documentary takes a few steps back, with decades of perspective, to find some answers — from Shields herself. *Available in person.*

Stephen Curry: Underrated (Special Screenings) — The NBA superstar profiled in this new documentary has been called one of the greatest basketball players of all time — and with good reason. The 34-year-old eight-time All Star has twice been named the League's

Most Valuable Player and has won four NBA championships, among other accolades. This action-filled nonfiction film takes an intimate look at Curry's improbable story of an underdog turned champ. *Available in person.*



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/mx3XWV8Ho8Y>

Still: A Michael J. Fox Movie (Premieres) — As implied by its subtitle, this documentary is at its heart just what it says it is — a Michael J. Fox movie — but this time, it is Fox's own story as *An Inconvenient Truth* director Davis Guggenheim turns his lens on the actor, his unlikely rise to stardom, and his eventual advocacy for Parkinson's disease. The doc follows Fox's wildly happenstance rise to TV and movie stardom and culminates in his brave battle against the illness that derailed it. *Available in person.*

Twice Colonized (World Cinema Documentary) — Colonization of Indigenous land — and people — has been so normalized that when someone holds a mirror to it, the result can be enlightening to both the victims and beneficiaries of white dominance. Enter Aaju Peter, a Greenlandic Inuit lawyer, a tribal musician, and a tirelessly fierce advocate for the human and land rights of Native people. In this stirring documentary, Peter fights for justice — but also for personal reckoning and lasting inspiration. *Available in person and online.*