



CALIFORNIA
ZEPHYR

Zephyrettes

THE SHOW

THE SHOW

THE AMERICAN DREAM ON RAILS



1957. THE CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR. AMERICA'S MOST GLAMOROUS TRAIN.

A group of smart, stylish, and sharp-witted train stewardesses, known as ZEPHYRETTES, navigate their own ambitions, loves, prejudices, and dreams alongside those of the passengers aboard as the train carries America into a new era.

Every journey introduces new landscapes, new faces, and a different corner of the country, as the lives of the passengers briefly intertwine with those of the crew.

THE SERIES ENGINE

ZEPHYRETTES is a 45–60 minute serialized period drama.

Every journey introduces a fresh mix of passengers, bringing new conflicts, romances, mysteries, and misadventures.

Alongside these self-contained stories, the lives of the Zephyrettes and crew continue to unfold against an ever-changing backdrop of people, places, and America itself.

THEMES

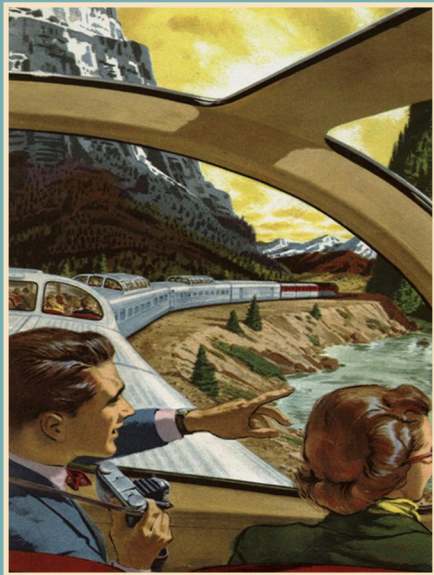
At its heart, ZEPHYRETTES is about ordinary people searching for extraordinary lives.

It explores the pursuit of the American Dream through friendship, ambition, love, race, class, identity, and women's independence.

TONE

Rich in period detail and emotional depth, ZEPHYRETTES is a stylishly crafted drama that balances warmth, humor, romance, suspense, and high-stakes drama, with just enough soap to keep things deliciously unpredictable.

The series combines the character-driven sophistication of *Mad Men* with the sweeping ensemble storytelling of *Downton Abbey*, creating a world that is both intimate and epic in scope.





THE CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR

Promoted as “A Vacation Unto Itself,” the Zephyr featured revolutionary Vista Dome cars, elegant dining rooms, cocktail lounges, sleeping compartments, and impeccable onboard service. The journey became every bit as important as the destination.

For three unforgettable days, Hollywood stars, politicians, musicians, honeymooners, businessmen, drifters, and dreamers all traveled together beneath the same silver roof. It wasn't simply a train. It was America in motion.

“The Most Talked About Train In America”

THE ZEPHYRETTES

Aboard the California Zephyr from its inaugural run in 1949, the Zephyrettes were among America's pioneering onboard hospitality professionals.

Handpicked from hundreds of applicants, they combined the warmth of a hostess, the intuition of a concierge, and the composure of a diplomat.

Far more than stewardesses, they welcomed passengers, managed itineraries, solved problems, soothed nervous travelers, entertained children, cared for the elderly, assisted celebrities, and ensured every journey felt effortless. Whatever happened aboard the train, the Zephyrettes were expected to handle it with grace.

But behind the polished service and impeccable smiles were ambitious young women with dreams of their own. Away from the passengers, friendships were tested, romances ignited, rivalries simmered, and secrets unfolded behind cabin doors and hastily drawn curtains.

This is an extraordinary story and a forgotten part of America's past waiting to be told.



California Zephyr Zephyrettes and supervisor Velma McPeck, 1951. Original image colorized.

THE PULLMAN CREW

The Pullman Porters, attendants, and stewards were the quiet professionals who kept America's great streamliners running. Aboard the California Zephyr, they made the berths, shined shoes, carried luggage, and delivered impeccable service from Chicago to San Francisco.

Predominantly Black men, they performed an essential service role while enduring long hours, segregation, and routine discrimination. Many passengers addressed them simply as "George," after Pullman Company founder George Pullman, a reminder of the prejudice they faced despite their professionalism. Yet they carried themselves with dignity and became a vital part of America's growing Black middle class.

Respected by the Zephyrettes and their fellow crew members, they nevertheless occupied the lower rungs of the railroad's social hierarchy. Living and working alongside one another, they forged deep friendships, but also the rivalries, gossip, and tensions of a close-knit traveling family.

Long before information could travel instantly, the Pullman Porters became an informal communications network, carrying news, ideas, opportunity, and conversation between African American communities across the country. Historians have since described them as a "Black Internet."

They carried far more than luggage. They carried the stories of a changing America.



Pullman crew at work. Original image colorized.

THE PASSENGERS

Every journey brings new passengers. Every passenger brings a new story.

While the lives of Sally and the crew unfold across the seasons, the passengers provide an ever-changing stream of self-contained drama, colliding with our characters before the Zephyr carries them on to their destination.

Boarding the Zephyr in Season One...

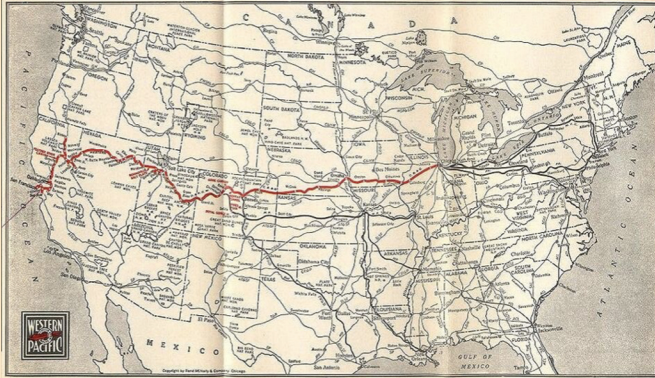
- * An out-of-control bachelor party.
- * A missing five-year-old girl hiding aboard the train.
- * Joe DiMaggio and Miss America.
- * First Lady Mamie Eisenhower and a sophisticated jewel thief.
- * Card cheats fleecing wealthy passengers.
- * A transported convict looking to escape.
- * Uranium prospectors chasing their fortunes.
- * Sixty-five Marines heading west.
- * A Chicago mob associate with unfinished business.
- * A pair of Cold War spies with secrets worth killing for.
- * A powerful Chicago newspaper magnate accustomed to getting whatever he wants.

With every departure comes fresh drama, danger, and thrills galore, as new passengers captivate us and the lives of our regulars continue to unfold across the seasons.



TAKE THE TIME TO LIVE A LITTLE.....TRAVEL BY TRAIN

See the wonders of America . . . at eye-level. Avoid highway hazards by dependable "All-Weather" train travel in relaxed comfort.



THE ROUTE

Nearly 2,500 miles of shining rail stretched between Chicago and San Francisco, carrying the California Zephyr through the heart of America, from bustling cities and endless plains to towering mountains, winding rivers, and vast deserts.

Between journeys, the cities at either end became home, playground, and the backdrop to the Zephyrettes' lives beyond the train.

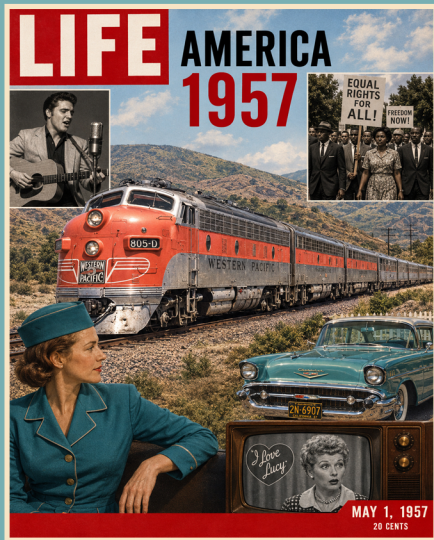
AMERICA, 1957

The first season begins in 1957, when the California Zephyr was at the height of its popularity and America stood on the brink of profound social and cultural change. It was an era of postwar optimism, rock 'n' roll, television, and economic prosperity, but also one of segregation, rigid social expectations, and deep inequality.

The Zephyrettes occupied a unique place in that world. At a time when most women were expected to marry or work behind a desk, they traveled the country, earned their own living, and enjoyed a level of independence that was extraordinary for the era.

Beyond the windows, the civil rights movement was gathering momentum, old traditions were being challenged, and a new generation was beginning to redefine America. Behind the cocktails, evening wear, and polished service lay a country wrestling with race, class, gender, and identity.

The future was arriving... but not everyone was ready to climb aboard.



"I know why"

the California Zephyr is the most talked-about train in the country!"



"Like my dinner? I like every meal on the Zephyr! Thank goodness my wife isn't here to count the calories when the Steward comes around with one of those wonderful menus!"



"Having fun? You bet we are! This is the first time the whole family has made the trip. Got lots of room in this Bedroom Suite, and we're saving money by using Family Fares."



"Signal green? Sure it is! Up here in the Vista-Dome I can see way ahead just like the engineer does. And right after we left Moffat Tunnel I saw a whole herd of deer right down near the track!"



"Why do I know? Because I'm a Zephyrette (the name's Nellie O'Grady) and I've made over a hundred round trips aboard this Vista-Dome streamliner. As the California Zephyr's official 'hostess', I naturally have a chance to chat with just about every passenger on every trip. And believe me, they do talk about this wonderful train!"



"Any good shots? If not, it's my own fault! What could be more scenic than the Rockies and Feather River Canyon! No wonder this train was picked to star in 'Cinemas Holiday'!"



"Enjoying myself? It's the most fun I've ever had on a trip to the Coast! There's so much to do and see... all those Vista-Domes, Lounge Cars, and soon. And you meet such nice people!"

"Comfortable? Young lady, I'm always comfortable when I travel in these Vista-Dome Chair Coaches. Fact is, I'd like to have this reclining chair in my living room at home!"

THE VISTA-DOME *California Zephyr*

The most popular train between Chicago and Oakland - San Francisco via Denver and Salt Lake City

WESTERN PACIFIC

Include Southern California via San Francisco without additional rail fare • **PULLMAN** • **CHUR CHES**



Write to Jern. G. Wheeler, Dept. No. 1, Western Pacific, 510 Mission St., San Francisco 5, for 16-page illustrated California Zephyr booklet.

TICKETS PLEASE!

"Before the trains pull out, I stand by the rear car, greeting and sizing up the passengers as they board. It's like being hostess to a house party of three hundred self-invited guests whom you don't know.... I think I can pick the big shippers, the lounge lizards, the know-it-alls, the busybodies, the gadgeteers, the honeymooners, the tipsters and the card hounds...."

Nellie O'Grady, Original Zephyrette

ABOARD THE VISTA-DOME *California Zephyr*



Thank You

ZEPHYRETTES CREATED BY
Wade Thomas Crescent
& Stanley McHale

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WESTERN PACIFIC • RIO GRANDE • BURLINGTON