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14th Annual ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York Announces Lineup and Special Events

Celebrating Stories of People with Disabilities through Film at
the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan and throughout the City

Highlighting Themes of Inclusion, Accessibility,
and Responsible Representation

Including the first ever ReelAbilities Accessibility Summit

Tickets on Sale March 8; Festival Runs April 7- April 13

NEW YORK (March 2, 2022) – The Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan’s (MMJCCM) ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York announces the full lineup of films and select special events for its 14th annual festival, which returns as a hybrid event in person and virtual from April 7th through April 13th. Tickets go on sale March 8th and can be purchased at reelabilities.org/newyork.

ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York is the largest festival in the U.S. dedicated to promoting awareness and appreciation of the lives, stories, and artistic expressions of people with disabilities. Initiated in New York at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan in 2007, the festival has grown to present international and award-winning films by and about people with disabilities in multiple fully accessible locations throughout the New York Metro Area. At the 2022 festival, post-screening discussions, presented by Pfizer, and other engaging programs will bring together the community to explore, discuss, embrace, and celebrate the diversity of our shared human experience.

The 14th Annual ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York will feature in-person screenings and virtual access of a dozen feature films and over twenty-five shorts, plus panels and Q&As with filmmakers and artists. The festival’s **Opening Night** selection will be Olivier Nakache and Éric Toledano’s acclaimed film **THE SPECIALS**, starring Vincent Cassel, Reda Kateb, Helene Vincent, and Brian Mialoundama. It will screen **April 7th**, at **7 pm** at the IAC Screening Room, co-presented by Vimeo and followed by a Q&A with special guests from the film.

The **Closing Night** film will be the New York premiere of Brian Malone and Regan Linton’s documentary **IMPERFECT**, which follows an award-winning theater group consisting of actors who live and perform with the uniqueness of disability as they set out to claim their place in the spotlight with a production of the beloved musical *Chicago*. Following these actors’ lives inside

and outside the theater, curtains are drawn open to overlooked talent and the power of the human condition in its many forms. It will screen on **April 13th at 7 pm** at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan.

As a part of the 2022 festival, ReelAbilities is proud to launch an exciting initiative: **The Film and Television Accessibility Summit** on **April 11th and 12th**. The hybrid summit will discuss accessibility as a creative asset at all phases, development through exhibition, and explore beyond the basics into progressive best practices. Industry leaders including disabled creatives will share knowledge and experience, providing participants with the tools to elevate accessibility and open pathways to deeper inclusion. Available both in person and virtually provided by Eventive. reelabilities.org/reelabilities-accessibility-summit-2022/

ReelAbilities is also proud to launch a groundbreaking streaming site with access to some of the best films from past festivals. Launching April 13th, many of the festival's past films will now be available nationwide, with unprecedented accessibility aids. Coming soon to: reelabilitiesstream.org

"This year's lineup of films is our largest and most diverse program to date," says **Isaac Zablocki**, Director and Cofounder of ReelAbilities, and Senior Director of Film Programs at MMJCCM. "We always look for authentic stories, but this year, we put an extra focus on stories in first person, that are actually told by people with disabilities."

The festival is presented with full accessibility including Captions and Audio description for all films, and CART for all conversations as well as ASL.

This year's New York partner venues include the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan's newly renovated Goldman Sonnenfeldt Auditorium, The IAC Building, The Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum, The Maysles Documentary Center, The Museum of the Moving Image, The Jacob Burns Film Center, and David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center, among others. All films will be presented virtually as well.

This year, lead sponsors for ReelAbilities includes: Pfizer, sponsoring the accessible conversations; AMC Networks, sponsoring the short film selections and accessibility; as well as Eventive, sponsoring the virtual elements of the summit. Support from the community and major corporations allows ReelAbilities to raise the bar on accessibility and shine a spotlight on the underserved.

FESTIVAL LINE UP:

AMAZING GRACE

Dir. Lynn Montgomery

United States | 55 min | Documentary

Talented young musician Gracie Smith, proficient in three instruments, was on her way to the world famous Berklee College of Music. On her 17th birthday, she developed Acute Flaccid Myelitis (AFM), a rare polio-like disease. Determined to persevere, Gracie set out to find new ways to create art, driven by her philosophy: "My only limitation will be my imagination."

Featuring Justin Hurwitz, Academy Award-winning composer of *La La Land*.

Disabilities Represented: Acute Flaccid Myelitis/Quadriplegia, Guillain-Barre syndrome/Paraplegia

ANY GIVEN DAY

Dir. Margaret Byrne

United States | 93 min | Documentary

Filmmaker Margaret Byrne documents the lives of three defendants with mental illness going through a specialized probation program designed to focus on mental health. Byrne's own mental health condition becomes tied in to the larger picture of family relationships, struggles, and triumphs.

Disabilities Represented: Mental illness

HERE. IS. BETTER.

Dir. Jack Youngelson

United States | 95 min | Documentary

In this personal documentary, the intimate lives of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are shared inside hopeful therapy sessions. From men to women, from the Vietnam War to the present day, stories are unlocked that dispel myths about PTSD and place focus on veterans' journeys to a place of healing. Featuring former presidential hopeful Jason Kander.

Disabilities represented: PTSD

IMPERFECT

Dir. Brian Malone, Regan Linton

United States | 78 min | Documentary

An award-winning theater group consisting of actors who live and perform with the uniqueness of disability sets out to claim their place in the spotlight with a production of the beloved musical *Chicago*. Following these actors' lives inside and outside the theater, curtains are drawn open to overlooked talent and the power of the human condition in its many forms.

Disabilities represented: Paralysis, Cerebral Palsy, Blindness, Autism, Multiple Sclerosis, Polio

ME TO PLAY

Dir. Jim Bernfield

United States | 72 min | Documentary

When faced with growing symptoms of Parkinson's disease, two professional actors set forth to put on an off-Broadway production of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, a play Beckett wrote as a metaphor for living with a disease. Through the artistic process, these actors find humor in struggle and power in the soul.

Disabilities represented: Parkinson's disease

MOVE ME

U.S. DISTRIBUTOR: PBS POV

Dir. Kelsey Peterson, Daniel Klein

United States | 81 min | Documentary

At age 27, dancer Kelsey Peterson dove into Lake Superior and emerged paralyzed. Now, she faces the opportunity to dance again, as she works to redefine who she is and rediscover hope in the body and spirit.

Disabilities represented: Spinal cord injury/disorder

NO BONE: SCARS OF SURVIVAL

Dir. Marc Schiller

UK | 90 min | Documentary

Marc Schiller, a communications expert with a long career promoting street art, music, and film, suffers a stroke that leaves him with aphasia and some cognitive deficits. With the help of family, Marc chronicles his career in the NYC art scene, his path toward recovery, and the love

that surrounds him.

Disabilities represented: Stroke victim

ONLY I CAN HEAR

Dir. Matsui Itaru

Japan | 54 min | Documentary

Synopsis: In search of a place between two disparate worlds, three teenage Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs), come of age in the vibrant, loud Deaf community. Grappling with issues of prejudice, leading double lives, and familial bonds, this documentary asks what it means to exist between different cultures and how you can define your sense of identity.

Disabilities represented: Children of Deaf Adults

POPPY

Dir. Linda Niccol

New Zealand | 98 min | Narrative

Poppy, a young woman with Down syndrome, is set on becoming a motor mechanic.

Unfortunately, her overly protective brother keeps jamming the wheel of that ambition. When an opportunity arises for Poppy, she sets out to prove her independence and achieve her dream.

Disabilities represented: Down syndrome

THE BLIND MAN WHO DID NOT WANT TO SEE TITANIC

SXSW 2022

Dir. Teemu Nikki

Finland | 81 min | Narrative

Jaako, a blind wheelchair user with multiple sclerosis, forges an active long-distance relationship with Sirpa over the phone, without ever meeting in person. When Sirpa reveals shocking news, Jaako decides to undergo a real-life odyssey to meet her. Jaako travels through five different locations, encountering strangers both helpful and harmful, on his way to the one he loves.

Disabilities represented: Multiple sclerosis, Blindness

THE OTHER TOM

DISTRIBUTOR: OUTSIDER PICTURES

Dir. Rodrigo Pla, Laura Santullo

Mexico | 111 min | Narrative

Elena is a single mother attempting to manage her son Tom's behavioral issues. When Tom is diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Elena becomes aware of the possible side effects of his medication. With Social Services threatening to remove him from her custody, Elena fights for the well-being of the only person she has.

Disabilities represented: ADHD

THE SPECIALS | OPENING NIGHT

Dir. Olivier Nakache, Éric Toledano

France, Belgium | 114 min | Narrative

Close friends Bruno and Malik have combined their nonprofits to train youth in underprivileged areas to be caregivers for autistic children and teens. However, the program lacks official certification and is under the watchful eye of the General Inspectorate of Social Affairs. Despite this looming threat and internal conflicts, the power of unity, compassion, and acceptance within the program prove exceptional.

Disabilities represented: Autism

SHORT FILMS

6,000 WAITING

Dir. Michael Joseph McDonald

United States | 29 min | Documentary

Synopsis: Three Georgians with cerebral palsy fight to live life on their own terms. But as their families bond, state policy tries to tear them apart.

Disability represented: Cerebral palsy

A CRITTER FABLE

Dir. Grace Fisher

United States | 8 min | Animation

A caterpillar who can't become a butterfly discovers he can still add color to the world in his own special way. Featuring music and artwork by *Amazing Grace* star Grace Fisher, with critters created by children with disabilities in Santa Barbara.

Disability represented: Down syndrome, Autism

A MORNING WITH AROHA

Dir. Nicholas Riini

New Zealand | 11 min | Narrative short

Aroha, an imaginative young girl with Down syndrome, sets out to share her creativity with her neighbors.

Type of disability: Down syndrome

HOLD ON TO ME

Dir. Luca Arcidiacono

Italy | 20 min | Narrative short

Filippo did not expect to have to spend the day with Alice, a charming young girl with Down syndrome he meets on a train. On their journey, an unexpected bond forms between the two.

Disability represented: Down syndrome

AIMEE VICTORIA

Dir. Chrystee Pharris

United States | 11 min

On the day of their anniversary, a couple separated by lockdown finds their relationship tested.

A story about the power of love in the toughest of times.

Disability represented: Deafness

BEAT LINGO

Dir. Jose Navas

United States | 16 min | Narrative Short

Marcus, a reserved teenager with mutism, attends public school for the first time in his life.

Pushing through trials and prejudices of the past and present, Marcus uncovers a special gift he's been hiding from the world.

Disability represented: Mutism

BEAUTIFUL

Dir. Mulan Fu

United States | 6 min | Animation

A teenage girl undergoes transformative growth as she witnesses her mother's fight against

breast cancer.

Disability represented: Breast cancer

BORDERLINE COFFEE

Dir. Jeff Ayars

United States | 10 min | Short

A young woman overtaken by anxiety battles through her inner thoughts when she sets out to accomplish what would seem to be a simple task: buying a cup of coffee.

Disability represented: Borderline personality disorder

DAVEY'S LULLABY

Dir. Adam Douglas Deyoe

United States | 9 min | Animation

Davey, a cheerful and loving man with Down syndrome, finds his future thrown into uncertainty when his elderly mother passes away.

Disability represented: Down syndrome

DAWN

Dir. Timon Birkhofer

United States | 5 min | Documentary

Five unique individuals take us on a journey where their achievements shine beyond preconceived ideas of what is possible.

Disabilities represented: Five different physical disabilities

DWARFO-PSYCHOSIS

Dir. Maria DiDomenico

United States | 5 min | Narrative Short

As fraternal twins Peter and Pat celebrate their 40th birthday, a huge twist is revealed.

Disability represented: Dwarfism

FREEBIRD

Dir. Michael Joseph McDonald, Joe Bluhm

Canada | 5 min | Animation

A boy with Down syndrome learns to navigate the world with a loving mother, an absent father, a classroom bully, and a lifelong crush.

Disability represented: Down syndrome

ILLUSTRATING SAM NEWTON

Dir. Lily Drummond

United States | 28 min | Narrative short

A viral online photographer wants to remain anonymous in order to hide parts of their identity.

When a fan from the other side of the world makes a connection, they learn to accept themselves by sharing the universal language of art.

Disability represented: Deafness

LOUIS' SHOES

Dir. Théo Jamin, Kayu Leung, Marion Philippe, Jean-Géraud Blanc

France | 5 min | Animation

Louis, an 8-year-old autistic boy, introduces himself at his new school in this imaginative tale about difference and acceptance.

Disability represented: Autism

LOCKDOWN TALE

Dir. Cameron Carr, Marie Trudolubova

United Kingdom | 6 min | Animation

A behind-the-scenes documentary on the making of *Wavel Dragon*. When the pandemic forces his university's studios to shut down, animation student Cameron Carr sets to work creating his very own studio in his bedroom.

Disability represented: Autism

MY OWN LANDSCAPES

Dir. Antoine Chapon

United States | 19 min | Documentary

Taking the technology used for Virtual Reality military simulation, a veteran transforms the originally violent landscape into a space of nature and healing.

Disability represented: PTSD

NICK LIGHTNING

Dir. Pat Taggart

United States | 27 min | Documentary

At a young age, Nick Fergus found joy in creating rock star alter ego "Nick Lightning." Now diagnosed in a world of rising Autism awareness, Nick Lightning challenges ideas of what it means to live a happy, fulfilling life.

Disability represented: Autism, ADHD

PROSOPAGNOSIA

Dir. Steven Fraser

United Kingdom | 10 min | Animation, Documentary

Unraveling sketchbooks, photographs, and diaries with unique animation, *Prosopagnosia* explores what it means to live with face blindness and Autism, and investigates concepts of intimacy, communication, and memory.

Disability represented: Face blindness, Autism

SEE THROUGH

Dir. Eyal Resh

United States | 9 min | Narrative Short

Tensions rise between a young deaf couple discovering they are about to become parents.

Featuring 2018 Tony nominee and *Eternals* star Lauren Ridloff.

Disability represented: Deafness

SIGNS AND GESTURES

Dir. Itandehui Jansen

United Kingdom | 12 min | Narrative Short

Clara, a blind florist, has been chatting with Simon through a dating app. They arrange to meet in person. However, during their first date, an unexpected misunderstanding arises.

Disability represented: Blindness, hearing impairment

SILENT WORLD

Dir. Charlie Dennis

United Kingdom | 10 min | Narrative Short

When threatened by a deadly gas, humanity is forced to live underground. While everyone else adjusts to their new way of life, deaf rapper Signkid struggles with loss and isolation in an

increasingly inaccessible world.
Disability represented: Deafness

THE BODY IS A HOUSE OF FAMILIAR ROOMS

Dir. Eloise Sherrid, Lauryn Welch

United States | 10 min | Animation, Documentary

A magical-realist exploration of the life of a man with chronic illness through footage and paintings.

Disability represented: Ehlers-Danlos syndrome

THE MULTI

Dir. Storm Smith, Natasha Ofili

United States | 18 min | Narrative Short

An isolated deaf woman fights to maintain control when past demons threaten to destroy the world of order she has built.

Disability represented: Deafness

TRYING

Dir. Juan Manuel Montilla "Langui"

Spain | 15 min | Narrative Short

Every day, Santiago walks with his son Diego to and from school. But today is different. Diego is no longer a boy, walking is difficult for Santiago, and father and son will need to have a truthful discussion that both hurts and heals.

Disability represented: Physical disability

WAWEL DRAGON

Dir. Cameron Carr

United Kingdom | 6 min | Animation

An animated retelling of the classic Polish folktale by Cameron Carr (*Strange*), *Wawel Dragon* features a dragon, knights, and the unexpected heroism of a simple shoemaker.

Disability represented: Autism

WHEELS

Dir. Smari Gunn

Iceland | 6 min | Narrative Short

When a homeowner and master burglar become aware they are in separate parts of the house, a frantic game of cat-and-mouse ensues.

Disability represented: Muscular Dystrophy/Wheelchair user

About ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York

ReelAbilities Film Festival is the largest film festival in the world dedicated to promoting awareness and appreciation of the lives, stories, and artistic expressions of people with disabilities. Founded in New York in 2007 by the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan, the festival presents award-winning films by and about people with disabilities in multiple locations throughout the city. Post-screening discussions and other engaging programs bring communities together to explore, discuss, embrace, and celebrate the diversity of our shared human experience.

The New York festival is the launching pad for an international program and its selections run satellite ReelAbilities festivals in over 20 cities worldwide. Learn more at ny.reelabilities.org.

ReelAbilities encourages inclusive language that acknowledges people's personal preferences. We support:

- Person-first language (a person with a disability, not a disabled person).
- Asking people for their preferences and if they require assistance.
- Creating an inclusive environment welcoming to people with and without disabilities.

ACCESSIBILITY NOTICE:

ReelAbilities strives for inclusion of all people. All films are screened with open captions and all venues are wheelchair accessible. ASL interpretation, CART, Audio Description, and information in Braille are available upon advance request. Individuals needing accommodations to participate should contact the screening venue directly at least two weeks in advance of the event.

About the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan

Together with its community, the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan creates opportunities for people to connect, grow, and learn within an ever-changing Jewish landscape. Located on 76th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, the JCC is a vibrant non-profit community center on the Upper West Side. It also presents a robust slate of virtual programming, serving an even wider community. The JCC serves over 55,000 people annually through 1,200 programs each season that educate, inspire, and transform participants' minds, bodies, and spirits. Throughout COVID-19, the JCC has pivoted to meet the community online, exceeding 102,000 registrations to over 3,000 virtual classes and programs in the earliest part of the pandemic. Since its inception, the JCC has been committed to serving the community by offering programs, classes, and events that extend beyond neighborhood boundaries, reaching people at all stages of their lives. Learn more at mmjccm.org

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