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 Maloundama. 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
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

**DWARFOS-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 Wawel 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
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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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