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15th Annual ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York Unveils 2023 Lineup of Premiere Feature and Short Films

*Celebrating the Stories and Artistic Expressions of People with Disabilities through Film at the
Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan and throughout the City from April 27 to May 3*

Opening Night Tickets on Sale NOW; Festival Tickets on Sale March 30

Festival to present the ReelAbilities Spotlight Award to Academy Award winning actor Troy Kotsur

New York, New York (March 15, 2023) – The [15th Annual ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York](#), the largest festival in the United States dedicated to promoting awareness and appreciation of the lives, stories, and artistic expressions of people with disabilities, announced today its selection of award-winning and premiere feature and short films that will be presented at this year's festival. Showcasing diversity through film during a weeklong celebration, ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York will mark its 15th anniversary from April 27 to May 3 at the [Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan](#) and multiple venues across New York City, as well as virtually. All presentations bring groundbreaking accessibility, raising the bar on inclusive film screenings and events. Opening Night tickets are now on sale [here](#), and festival tickets and passes will be available for purchase on March 30.

Co-founded by [Isaac Zablocki in 2007](#), ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York puts disability in the spotlight by bringing the community together to explore and celebrate the diversity of the shared human experience through film and conversations that engage the public in promoting inclusion and diversity in film and beyond. This year's acclaimed film selections highlight a variety of important topics such as disability inclusion, human rights, and other social issues that push the limits of creativity and imagination and offer insightful reflections on the complexities of life with disability.

The weeklong festival will open on Thursday, April 27 with a screening of Juan Felipe Zuleta's indie narrative **UNIDENTIFIED OBJECTS**, starring Matthew August Jeffers and Sarah Hay. **UNIDENTIFIED OBJECTS** is the quirky yet moving story of Winona, a free-spirited sex worker who pays Peter, a sharp-witted loner, to share his car on a border-defying road trip, which turns into a search for their place in the universe. The festival's Opening Night will honor 2022's Academy Award winner for Best Supporting Actor, **Troy Kotsur (CODA)** as the recipient of the **ReelAbilities 2023 Spotlight Award**.

The Closing Night feature film will be the East Coast premiere of Mark Bone's **OKAY! (THE ASD BAND FILM)**, which follows the story of four talented autistic musicians who come together to form the ASD Band and write, record, and perform their first album. Through their shared love of music, Rawan, Jackson, Spenser, and Ron shatter stigmas about people with autism, coming together to find strength in each other and express themselves through song. The Closing Night screening on Wednesday, May 3 will be followed by a live performance by the Toronto-based ASD Band.

"ReelAbilities believes in highlighting impactful and creative storytelling as a powerful tool to engage and create change for both those who know nothing about the disability community and those who live it every day," says **Isaac Zablocki**, Director and Cofounder of ReelAbilities, and Senior Director of Film Programs at MMJCCM. "We are proud to feature authentic and first-person stories that bring these underserved images to the surface in the most responsible and engaging manner."

The festival slate announced to date includes 10 features and 24 shorts in the film lineup, of which 70% are US and NY premieres, featuring works from 9 countries, and almost 50% are made by women filmmakers.

ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York will continue to host its annual **Industry Accessibility Summit** on May 1 and 2, expanding its purview this year to highlight film and performing arts in partnership with The NYC Mayor's Office for Media and Entertainment. The festival will also bring additional special events and conversations relating to disabilities throughout the week of the festival including a Comedy Night at Gotham Comedy Club, Accessible beauty panel, and more.

This year's partner venues include the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan (MMJCCM), Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (LC), DCTV Firehouse Cinema (DCTV), Maysles Documentary Center (Maysles), Museum of the Moving Image (MOMI), Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Cinema Arts Centre (CAC), Manhattan College (MC), JCC Staten Island (JCC SI), and Jacob Burns Film Center (JBFC).

This year, lead sponsors for ReelAbilities include Pfizer, The Loreen Arbus Foundation, F.Y.Eye, J.E.&Z.B. Butler Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, Nielsen Foundation, Mayor's Office for Media & Entertainment, Vimeo, Amazon, AMC Networks, Warner Bros. Discovery, and more. For a full list of sponsors and partners, visit: reelabilities.org/newyork/partners.

ReelAbilities strives to include all people. All films are presented with open captions and all venues are accessible to mobility devices. At the MMJCCM, the main festival venue, ASL interpretation, CART, audio description, hearing assist and information in braille are available at all times. For specific accommodations at other festival venues, individuals should check the venue website, or contact the screening venue directly.

FESTIVAL LINEUP

Feature Films:

- **Opening Night: UNIDENTIFIED OBJECTS** - Dir. Juan Felipe Zuleta
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 - 100 min
 - **Logline:** Peter's isolated daily routine is interrupted when his free-spirited neighbor shows up at his door, forcing him out of his shell and on an impromptu road trip.
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Thursday, April 27 at 6:30 p.m. (MMJCCM) and Saturday, April 29 at 4 p.m. (MOMI)
- **BEING MICHELLE** - Dir. Atin Mehra
 - Documentary - American Sign Language/English - US - 2022 - 80 min
 - **Logline:** When an incarcerated deaf woman with autism meets a prison life coach who is blind, art becomes a path for healing.
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Saturday, April 29 at 1:30 p.m. and Monday, May 1 at 8:15 p.m. (MMJCCM); Tuesday, May 2 at 3:30 p.m. (MC)
- **JASMINE IS A STAR** - Dir. Jo Rochelle
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 - 60 min
 - **Logline:** In pursuit of her dream to become a professional model, a 16-year-old with albinism confronts societal norms and explores what independence and self-acceptance look like.
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Sunday, April 30 at 2 p.m. (MMJCCM) and Monday, May 1 at 7 p.m. (BAM)
- **NO ORDINARY CAMPAIGN** - Dir. Chris Burke
 - Documentary - English - US - 2022 - 82 min
 - *East Coast Premiere*
 - **Logline:** Following Brian's diagnosis of ALS, he and his wife Sandra embark on a journey to reclaim their future and create a patient-led revolution, empowering millions to find their voice in a broken system and become active participants in finding a cure.
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Friday, April 28 at 6 p.m. (MMJCCM)
- **PUSHING BOUNDARIES** - Dir. Lesia Kordonets
 - Documentary - Ukrainian - Switzerland - 2021 - 102 min
 - **Logline:** With the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian Paralympic team loses their training base overnight. Will they succeed in qualifying for the upcoming Paralympics under difficult conditions and amid political turmoil?
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Saturday, April 29 at 6:30 p.m. (MMJCCM) and Tuesday, May 2 at 7 p.m. (CAC)
- **THE QUIET EPIDEMIC** - Dir. Lindsay Keys and Winslow Crane-Murdoch
 - Documentary - English - US - 2022 - 102 min
 - **Logline:** After years of living with mysterious symptoms, a young girl from Brooklyn and a Duke University scientist are diagnosed with a disease said to not exist: Chronic Lyme disease. Their search for answers lands them in the middle of a vicious medical debate.

- **Date(s)/Location(s):** Friday, April 28 at 7 p.m. (Maysles); Tuesday, May 2 at 8 p.m. (MMJCCM); and Monday, May 1 at 7 p.m. (CAC)
- **SHADOW** - Dir. Bruce Gladwin
 - Narrative - English - Australia - 2021 - 57 min
 - **Logline:** Desperate to save the world from the threat of AI, a group of disabled activists hold a public meeting. As the assembly unravels, they discover the greatest threat to their future is already in the room.
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Monday, May 1 at 6:30 p.m. (MMJCCM) and Wednesday, May 3 at 7 p.m. (JBFC)
- **STRAIGHTEN UP AND FLY RIGHT** - Dir. Kristen Abate and Steven Tanenbaum
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 - 88 min
 - **Logline:** Kristen, a New Yorker with a severe form of arthritis, walks dogs for a living but dreams of being a writer. When her life starts to unravel, she must make a choice to fall apart or straighten up.
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Saturday, April 29 at 8:30 p.m. (MMJCCM)
- **UPSIDE DOWN** - Dir. Luca Tornatore
 - Narrative - Italian - Italy - 2021 - 93 min
 - *International Premiere*
 - **Logline:** Paolo, a 19-year-old with Down syndrome, meets Armando, a kindhearted boxing trainer at the local gym. Constantly underestimated by the world around him, Paolo steps into the ring himself and discovers a sense of belonging.
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Sunday, April 30 at 4:30 p.m. and Monday, May 1 at 7 p.m. (JCC SI)
- **Closing Night: OKAY! (THE ASD BAND FILM)** - Dir. Mark Bone
 - Documentary - English - Canada - 2022 - 86 min
 - *East Coast Premiere*
 - **Logline:** Four musicians on the autism spectrum come together through their shared love of music to write, record, and perform their first album of original songs.
 - **Date(s)/Location(s):** Friday, April 28 at 7 p.m. (DCTV) and Closing Night Reception on Wednesday, May 3 at 7 p.m. (MMJCCM)

ReelShorts: Out of the Box

Short films that push the limits of creativity and imagination.

Date/Location: Saturday, April 29 at 2 p.m. (MMJCCM)

- **LIMBO** - Dir. Barak Drori
 - Narrative/Animation - Hebrew - Israel - 2022 - 9 min
 - *International Premiere*
 - **Logline:** On the verge of losing the last thread of sight he has left, Adam tries to process his loss.
- **I AM IRANI** - Dir. Farhad Irani
 - Documentary - Persian - Iran - 2022 - 40 min
 - *World Premiere*
 - **Logline:** Farhad, a well-known Iranian photographer, was born with a rare genetic disorder that affects the development of the facial structure. Although this has made Farhad stand out all his life, his determination and resilience are what truly set him apart.
- **BENDIX: SITE UNSEEN** - Dir. Anthony Scalia
 - Documentary - English - US - 2021 - 26 min
 - **Logline:** Surrounded by highway traffic sits the unassuming Bendix Diner, owned and operated by John Diakakis. As the blind, single father of three young children who also work at the diner, John attempts to provide a better life for his family.
- **MAC & CHEESE** - Dir. Amanda Pinto
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 - 5 min
 - *East Coast Premiere*
 - **Logline:** An everyday hero grapples with friendship, responsibility, and the decision to eat (or not to eat) his roommate's mac & cheese.
- **CULICADE** - Dir. Greg Moran
 - Narrative - English - Australia - 2021 - 7 min

- *New York City Premiere*
- **Logline:** A late night intrusion leads to a life and death struggle.
- **MIKE'S WORDS** - Dir. Jared Jacobsen
 - Documentary - English - US - 2019 - 11 min
 - *New York Premiere*
 - **Logline:** A man with a rare physical disability creates films that focus on the social aspects of being a minority.

ReelShorts: Mental Health

Short films with poignant and insightful reflections on the complexities of mental health.

Date(s)/Location(s): Saturday, April 29 at 4 p.m. (MMJCCM) and Wednesday, May 3 at 12 p.m. (MC)

- **REMEDIAL** - Dir. Laurie Jeanette Gardiner
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 -20 min
 - *East Coast Premiere*
 - **Logline:** Inspired by real events, Remedial observes one of the loneliest disorders that children recovering from life-altering traumas face.
- **NEURODIVERGENT** - Dir. Afton Quast Saler
 - Documentary - English - US - 2021 - 25 min
 - *New York Premiere*
 - **Logline:** In this profoundly personal mixed-media experience inside the ADHD mind, a 35-year-old film student interrogates her past and future, trying to make sense of this misunderstood disorder.
- **MIETTE** - Dir. Maude Bouchard and Camille Trudel
 - Narrative - French - Canada - 2021 - 13 min
 - *East Coast Premiere*
 - **Logline:** Through an encounter between a director and a scarred young woman, Miette explores how guilt shapes our personal narrative and relationships.
- **JUST IN CASE** - Dir. Kirsty Robinson-Ward
 - Narrative - English - UK - 2021 - 14 min
 - *New York Premiere*
 - **Logline:** An exploration of what it's like to live with bipolar disorder, through the lens of a concerned father and his scared daughter.
- **BREATHE** - Dir. Zac Norrington
 - Documentary - English - US - 2022 - 16 min
 - **Logline:** A close-up look at the determination and rigorous mindset of the first woman to swim two consecutive laps around Manhattan Island while battling mental illness.

ReelShorts: Family Friendly

Delightful short films that the whole family can enjoy.

Date/Location: Sunday, April 30 at 12:30 p.m. (MMJCCM) - *FREE*

- **THE HERO** - Dir. Andrew Arguello and Courtney Ropp
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 - 12 min
 - **Logline:** A high school student and aspiring comic book artist with Down syndrome enters into his own imaginary world of heroes and villains, where the superhero helps him find his own courage.
- **SUPER POWERS** - Dir. Chase Fritz
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 - 8 min
 - *East Coast Premiere*
 - **Logline:** After getting the news that her parents have been arrested for tax evasion, Emily, a struggling community college student, must take over as the primary caregiver for her teenage sister with Down syndrome.
- **RITE OF IDENTITY** - Dir. Youmee Lee
 - Narrative/Animation - American Sign Language (ASL) - English - US - 2022 - 4 min

- *U.S. Premiere*
- **Logline:** An animated film about a deaf child who has exceptional artistic talent but struggles with an overwhelming soundscape.
- **CHARLIE AND THE HUNT** - Dir. Jenn Shaw
 - Narrative - American Sign Language (ASL) - English - US- 2021 - 14 min
 - *East Coast Premiere*
 - **Logline:** A young girl goes on a whimsical adventure and faces her fears while recovering a sentimental family treasure.
- **ANDY & KALIOPE** - Dir. Crystal Arnette and Catriona Rubenis-Stevens
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 - 6 min
 - **Logline:** When Andy, a young boy with cerebral palsy, must move to yet another foster home, his caseworker helps him connect to his inner superhero.

ReelShorts: The Art of Living

Short films that celebrate the power of creativity and human expression.

Date/Location: Monday, May 1 at 5 p.m. (MMJCCM) - *FREE*

- **SOUL(SIGNS): OPERA** - Dir. Kevin Newbury, Brandon Kazen-Maddox and James Matthew Daniel
 - Experimental - American Sign Language (ASL) - US - 2022 - 22 min
 - *New York Premiere*
 - **Logline:** A series of three short films exploring the intersection of opera and American Sign Language, starring some of today's most acclaimed Deaf and signing performers.
- **IMAGININGS** - Dir. Anja Hiddinga
 - Narrative - American Sign Language (ASL) - Netherlands - 2022 - 13 min
 - *North American Premiere*
 - **Logline:** Six deaf performers share struggles and dreams of a new Deaf generation. These poetic self-portraits in sign language show empowerment and confidence, and the vulnerabilities that come with being different.
- **IMAGINED TOUCH** - Dir. Jodee Mundy OAM AND Sofya Gollan
 - Documentary - British Sign Language - English - Australia - 2021 - 33 min
 - *International Premiere*
 - **Logline:** When two deafblind women ask a theater director to help them make a show about being deaf and blind, never in their wildest dreams did they imagine it would become an award-winning show.

ReelShorts: With an Edge

Short films that challenge conventions.

Date/Location: Tuesday, May 2 at 6 p.m. (MMJCCM) - *FREE*

- **IT'S PERSONAL** - Dir. Kyla Harris and Lou Macnamara
 - Documentary - English - UK - 2021 - 31 min
 - *East Coast Premiere*
 - **Logline:** Kyla requires 24-hour care. During the pandemic, she asks filmmaker friend Lou to swap cameras for catheters and learn how to assist her. A daring and authentic perspective on the care crisis in Britain today.
- **FLIRTING (WITH POSSIBILITIES)** - Dir. Garrett Zuercher
 - Narrative - American Sign Language (ASL) - English - US - 2021 - 19 min
 - **Logline:** In a predominately hearing and speaking world, a young deaf man tries to figure out the most effective form of communication in order to flirt with a cute hearing guy.
- **COMING OUT AUTISTIC** - Dir. Steven Fraser
 - Documentary - English - UK - 2022 - 4 min
 - *U.S. Premiere*
 - **Logline:** An animated documentary that explores the parallel experiences, feelings, and reactions of telling the world that you are autistic when you also identify as LGBTQ+.



- **BIG BANG** - Dir. Carlos Segundo
 - Narrative - Portuguese - France - 2022 - 14 min
 - **Logline:** In Brazil, Chico earns his living fixing ovens, which he easily fits into thanks to his small size. Marginalized by a system that values him as a misfit, he begins to start resisting it.
- **ACT OF GOD** - Dir. Spencer Cook and Parker Smith
 - Narrative - English - US - 2022 - 22 min
 - **Logline:** In Brazil, Chico earns his living fixing ovens, which he easily fits into thanks to his small size. Marginalized by a system that values him as a misfit, he begins to start resisting it.

The entire film festival schedule and additional details on each film, including synopsis, run time, disabilities represented and more, can also be found [here](#). Opening Night tickets are on sale now, starting at \$125, and can be purchased [here](#). Tickets for the entire festival will be on sale March 30, with many free events, and others starting at \$15. More information on festival programming and special events will be announced at a later date.

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

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ABOUT REELABILITIES FILM FESTIVAL: NEW YORK

Founded in 2007 by the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan, ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York is the largest festival in the country dedicated to promoting awareness and appreciation of the lives, stories, and artistic expressions of people with disabilities. The weeklong festival is renowned for its wide-ranging international film selection, riveting conversations, and performances, presented annually in dozens of venues across the New York metropolitan area. In 2010, ReelAbilities Film Festival: New York expanded into an international program, presenting its one-of-a-kind programming in cities throughout the United States, Canada, and Central America. For more information, please visit reelabilities.org.

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 30,000 people annually through 1,200 programs each season that educate, inspire, and transform participants' minds, bodies, and spirits. Since its inception, the JCC has been committed to serving the community by offering programs, classes, and events that reach beyond neighborhood boundaries, reaching people at all stages of their lives. Learn more at mmjccm.org.

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