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JCC Manhattan's 8th Annual ReelAbilities: NY Disabilities Film Festival Announces Official 2016 Lineup

*Festival Runs in Over 40 Venues throughout New York Including Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Museum of the Moving Image, and the New York Public Library Followed by a National Tour*

**New York, NY, February 1, 2016** – The official line-up of JCC Manhattan’s 8th Annual ReelAbilities: NY Disabilities Film Festival was announced today, marking the largest edition of the festival to date. The 2016 festival will take place in a record number of venues across New York from March 10-16, making this the most accessible festival in the country. The festival will also include its largest slate of films featuring U.S. and New York premieres of acclaimed movies from around the world. Films will screen at JCC Manhattan and in a variety of other prestigious locations, including Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Museum of the Moving Image, Whitney Museum of American Art, and New York Public Library branches. A nationwide tour of the festival will follow the New York launch.

For a full list of festival venues, visit: <http://ny.reelabilities.org/venues>

The festival will kick off at **JCC Manhattan, 334 Amsterdam Avenue at 76th Street**, with a special Opening Night Gala with the New York premiere of the light-hearted, award-winning film *Margarita with a Straw*. The film is based on a true story of a young Indian woman with Cerebral Palsy who moves to NY to attend NYU and is exposed to a new world. This edgy yet joyful film captures the spirit of ReelAbilities as an accessible story that presents people with disabilities in an engaging and fresh manner.

In addition to a wide variety of award-winning films from across the globe, post-screening discussions, author talks, performances, exhibitions and other special events are major components of the ReelAbilities experience.

Initiated by JCC Manhattan in 2007, ReelAbilities is the largest festival in the country dedicated to presenting award-winning films made by and about people with different disabilities – physical, developmental and psychological. Through film, ReelAbilities brings the community together to celebrate diversity and inclusion, by engaging film lovers and audiences from all walks of life. The festival is part of a movement to bring awareness and appreciation to the experiences and stories of people living and thriving with disabilities – building on the cultural shift that puts complex images of people with disabilities into the foreground of film.

"At a time when diversity and inclusion is lacking on our screens, we put disabilities in the forefront with hopes that this will bring the New York community to further recognize the country's largest minority." says Isaac Zablocki Director and co-founder of the Festival. Ravit Turjeman, Co-Director of the festival added, "We were overwhelmed by a record breaking number of submissions. These amazing films are being made, and need to be seen more."

ReelAbilities provides accessibility aids such as captions, ASL interpretation, audio description and CART (live captioning) in all of its 40 accessible locations. This ambitious undertaking is supported by members of the community, grants, and sponsorships. For the first time, ReelAbilities has received the prestigious Art Works grant from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as The Reeve Foundation’s Quality of Life grant.

The festival partners with over 70 community, film, arts, government, disability, and educational organizations, making it the only film festival to bring stories of people with disabilities to such a wide-reaching audience.

Tickets for JCC Manhattan’s 8th Annual ReelAbilities: NY Disabilities Film Festival go on sale February 11, [ny.reelabilities.org](http://ny.reelabilities.org) or (646) 505-5708.

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The full film lineup is as follows:

JCC Manhattan’s 8th Annual ReelAbilities: NY Disabilities Film Festival

**FEATURES**

**2E: TWICE EXCEPTIONAL**

Dir. Thomas Ropelewsky (54 min, USA, Documentary)

An honest, up-close look at what it’s like to be – or to be the parent or teacher of — a gifted young person coming to terms with a learning difference. This documentary follows the personal journeys of a group of high school students who have been identified as “twice exceptional” – gifted or highly gifted individuals with learning disabilities or differences. Featuring thought-provoking interviews with students, parents, teachers, psychologists and therapists, *2e: Twice Exceptional* is essential viewing for anyone interested in understanding where our next generation of “outliers” -- geniuses, mavericks, and dreamers -- may come from.

**Short blurb:** An honest, up-close look at a group of high school students identified as “twice exceptional”—highly gifted individuals with learning disabilities or differences. *2E* indicates where our next generation of “outliers”—geniuses, mavericks, and dreamers—may come from and what it’s like to be their parent or teacher.

**A BLIND HERO: THE LOVE OF OTTO WEIDT**

Dir. Kai Christensen (89 min, Germany, Narrative)

The heroic story of unsung hero Otto Weidt, who saved dozens of Jews from the Nazi death camps. Owner of a Berlin brush and broom factory, Otto Weidt uses his skills to outwit the Nazis and protect his staff, most of whom are Jewish and blind. When his secretary is deported to Auschwitz, Weidt, nearly blind himself, embarks on a journey to free her. A gripping true story of a courageous man, *A Blind Hero* relies almost exclusively on eyewitness accounts and the memories of those whom Weidt saved.

**Short blurb:** The story of the heroic Otto Weidt, who saved dozens of Jews from the Nazi death camps. Weidt, a broom factory owner, cunningly outwits the Nazis to protect his staff, most of whom are Jewish and blind.

**DO YOU DREAM IN COLOR?**

Dir. Abigail Fuller & Sarah Ivy (76 min, USA, Documentary)

The poignant coming of age story of Connor, Nick, Sarah and Carina, who navigate the growing pains of high school, but, unlike most teens, they face another challenge – they are blind. *Do You Dream in Color?* captures their journeys as they strive to achieve their goals: to be a sponsored skateboarder, to travel the world, to become a rock star and to be the first in one’s family to graduate high school.  Through their personal stories we learn of the experience of being blind and how these fearless teenagers navigate through it.

**Short blurb:** Four teens who are blind navigate high school and strive to achieve their goals: to be a sponsored skateboarder, to travel the world, to become a rock star, and to be the first in one’s family to graduate high school.

**ENTER THE FAUN**

Dir. Tamar Rogoff & Daisy Wright (67 min, USA, Documentary)

The unlikely collaboration between a veteran choreographer and a young actor with cerebral palsy delivers astonishing proof that each and every body is capable of miraculous transformation. As Tamar Rogoff trains Gregg Mozgala to dance in her performance, they discover that her lack of formal medical training and his fears and physical limitations are the impetus for her choreography and their unprecedented discoveries. *Enter The Faun* is the story of a joyous, obsessed journey towards opening night. It challenges the boundaries of medicine and art, as well as the limitations associated with disability.

**Short blurb:** As a veteran choreographer trains a young actor with cerebral palsy to dance in her performance, they discover that her lack of formal medical training and his fears and physical limitations provide the impetus for unprecedented transformation.

**GABE**

Dir. Luke Terrell (72 min, USA, Documentary)

Gabe Weil is a 27 year old born with the most severe form of muscular dystrophy. For his entire life, Gabe had been told he would be lucky to live past 25. But recently, he learned he was misdiagnosed, and may live well into his 50's. Although this news was overwhelmingly positive, it presented a surprising obstacle. Gabe did not have any long-term goals. He was forced to rethink his life from scratch. This radical shift in consciousness propelled him to set new goals, continue facing reality, and manifest more dreams.

**Short Blurb:** Gabe was born with muscular dystrophy. For his entire life, he was told he would be lucky to live past 25. Upon learning he was misdiagnosed and could live well into his 50s, Gabe is forced to rethink his life from scratch.

**HAPPY 40TH**

Dir. Madoka Raine (100 min, USA, Narrative)

This beautifully acted ensemble film features four women coming together to celebrate the birthday of a friend, who has remained a recluse ever since a car accident with her husband left her in a wheelchair . Over the course of the weekend, much wine is consumed, intimacies are shared, and an unthinkable betrayal forces the group of friends and lovers to re-evaluate long-held beliefs and assumptions. *Happy 40th* pokes and prods at fragile relationships to reveal uncomfortable truths about the secrets we keep from each other and from ourselves.

**Short blurb:** Four women celebrate a friend’s birthday for the first time since a car accident left her in a wheelchair. Over the course of a weekend, intimacies are shared and an unthinkable betrayal forces the group of friends and lovers to re-evaluate long-held assumptions.

**IN HARMONY**

Dir. Denis Dercourt (90 min., France, Narrative)

Marc is an equestrian stuntman. After a serious accident which traumatically injures him, he loses all hope of ever getting back on a horse. Florence works for an insurance company and is in charge of Marc’s case. Although they have nothing in common, Marc and Florence’s brief interaction will impact them in more ways than they can imagine. *In Harmony* is a poignant and inspiring story about the passion of a man for his horse, and his nearly impossible return to happiness after a dramatic fall. Set in the breathtaking landscape of Brittany and featuring impeccable acting throughout, the film is a vibrant life lesson.

**Short blurb:** After a serious riding accident, Marc loses all hope of ever getting back on a horse. Florence, who works for an insurance company, is placed in charge of his case. Their brief interaction will impact them in more ways than they can imagine.

**MARGARITA, WITH A STRAW**

Dir. Shonali Bose & Nilesh Maniyar (97 min, India, Narrative)

A funky, stereotype-busting coming-of-age tale about a Punjabi teenage girl with cerebral palsy, based on a true story. Laila, an aspiring writer and secret rebel in a wheelchair, is accepted to New York University and leaves India for Manhattan. After a chance encounter with a fiery female activist, Laila starts to grow emotionally and explore this new world and its liberal sexualities. Tackling subject matter rarely explored with lightheartedness, this TIFF award-winning drama is a beautiful, bold and brave portrait of love, identity and sexuality. *Margarita, With a Straw* is joyous cinema bound to win your heart.

**Short blurb:** A funky, joyous, coming-of-age tale. Laila, a Punjabi girl with cerebral palsy, is an aspiring writer who leaves India for a coveted spot at New York University, where she is exposed to and explores a new world.

**PATRICK’S DAY**

Dir. Terry McMahon (98 min, Ireland, Narrative)

Patrick is a warm young man living with schizophrenia. Medication and his mother’s fierce protection means he is no threat to himself or anyone else -- until St. Patrick’s Day, when he meets Karen, a suicidal flight attendant who has no idea the intimacy she shares with Patrick might reintroduce her to life. This audacious love story provocatively explores issues ranging from the right to intimacy to the question of when parental love becomes a destructive force.

**Short blurb:** An audacious and provocative love story. Patrick is a warm young man living with schizophrenia. His mother’s fierce protection means he is no threat to himself or anyone else -- until St. Patrick’s Day, when he falls in love.

**STILTS AND SPOKES**

Dir. Jack Winch (91 min, USA, Documentary)

A heart-felt, entertaining and comedic documentary. After Jay Cramer falls off a rock boulder climbing and breaks his neck, he rebounds from injury – which has left him quadriplegic -- to win the Los Angeles Funniest Comic competition. While in rehab, he meets a world class double above-the-knee amputee sprinter, Katy Sullivan, and falls head over heels for her. Both fall in love and go on to inspire millions.

**Short blurb:** After falling off a boulder while climbing and breaking his neck, Jay Cramer rebounds from injury to win the Los Angeles Funniest Comic competition. While in rehab, he meets and falls in love with Katy Sullivan, a world-class double above-the-knee amputee sprinter.

**THAT WHICH IS POSSIBLE**

Dir. Michael Gitlin (84 min, USA, Documentary)

A community of painters, sculptors, musicians and writers make work at the Living Museum, an art-space on the grounds of a large state-run psychiatric facility in Queens. Shot over the course of two years and structured across the arc of a day, the film observes with an intimate lens and unspools like a musical, both bracing and tender. It explores the liberation and healing that creativity can offer those drawn together by shared struggle. It points to a more humane and holistic approach to mental illness, and to the joy of transforming society itself.

**Short blurb:** A community of painters, sculptors, musicians, and writers create works at the Living Museum, an art space on the grounds of a large state-run psychiatric facility in Queens. *That Which Is Possible* explores creativity as a more humane and holistic approach to mental illness

**TRUE SMILE**

Dir. Juan Rayos (82 min, Spain, Documentary)

An astonishing journey seen through the eyes of 26-year-old Sergio Aznárez Rosado, who was born both blind and autistic who lives a life packed with adventure. Over the course of 30 days, Sergio embarks on a 1,300-kilometer tandem bike ride with his brother, Juan Manuel, who pilots the bicycle. Together, they traverse desert and high mountains, starting in Cuenca in central Spain and finishing in one of the most remote villages in Morocco’s Atlas Mountains. This documentary immerses us in Sergio’s seemingly unreachable world, helping us to perceive the world through his eyes.

**Short blurb:** An astonishing journey of two brothers—Sergio, who is blind and has autism, and his brother, Juan—who embark on a 1,300-kilometer tandem bike ride from Spain to Morocco.

**THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS**

Dir. Maximon Monihan (109 min, USA, Narrative)

A radically different vision of filmmaking. This silent film follows Olga, a teenager with hearing impairment who is lured from Central America to New York City under the false promise of attending a Christian sign language school. Once she arrives, Olga finds herself a slave to an international criminal syndicate. Forced to sell “I am deaf” trinkets on the subway, Olga is trapped inside a nightmare that will not end – and we, the audience, are trapped with her. Based on a true story, *The Voice of the Voiceless* shatters our ideas about film, storytelling, and sound.

**Short blurb:** Olga, along with others from Mexico and Guatemala, is brought to New York under the false promise of being offered a scholarship at a [sign language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sign_language) school. Upon arrival, they discover they are being held hostage by a cartel, and are forced to sell paper towels on the [New York City Subway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City_Subway).

**SHORT FILMS:**

**A GRAND PURSUIT**

Dir. Will Strathmann

2015, 23 min, USA, Documentary
Vasu Sojitra is the first leg amputee to attempt climbing the Grand Teton mountains without using a prosthetic leg.

**BIRTHDAY**

Dir. Chris King

2015, 16 min, USA, Narrative

A severely wounded Marine returns home to his wife after months of surgery and rehabilitation.

**BUMBLEBEES**

Dir. Jenna Kanell

2015, 4 min, USA, Narrative

Despite being told as a child he would never walk or speak, Vance accomplished the impossible. But now he has a new challenge: dating.﻿

**CHIMES FOR TYLER**

Dir. Stephen Panaggio

2014, 8 min, USA, Documentary

A boy with autism can distinguish wind chimes by sound.

**GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN**

Dir. Diego Robles

2012, 12 min, USA, Narrative

A blind veteran changes his outlook on life after meeting a young girl.

**GOOD BEER**

Dir. Tony Borden

2015, 7 min, USA, Narrative

Shannon and David meet online and go on a revealing first date.

**I DON’T CARE**

Dir. Caroline Giammetta

2014, 14 min, UK, Narrative

A mother-to-be faces the possibility of having a child with Down syndrome.

**JESSE**

Dir. Adam Goldhammer

2013, 14 min, Canada, Narrative

After her parents are killed, 22-year-old Kelly is the sole caregiver for her older brother Jesse who has autism.

**LITTLE HERO**

Dir. Marcus A. McDougald & Jennifer Medvin

2015, 10 min, USA, Documentary

A 6-year-old boy with autism is seen through his twin sister's eyes.

**MACROPOLIS**

Dir. Joel Simon

2012, 7 min, UK, Narrative
Two toys made at a factory are thrown out, and together attempt to be put on a store shelf.

**MARINA’S OCEAN**

Dir. Cássio Pereira dos Santos

2014, 16 min, Brazil, Narrative

A teen with Down syndrome visits the sea for the first time.

**THE MOBILE STRIPPER**

Dir. Shirlyn Wong

2104, 14 min, USA, Narrative

What begins as a ride to the gas station by a man with Parkinson’s develops into an unforeseen adventure.

**PERFECT**

Dir. Karim Ayari

2013, 12 min, USA, Narrative
Julius meets with his psychologist after what he considered to be a disastrous first date due to his involuntary tics.

**SOLILOQUY**

Dir. Heidi Latsky

2015, 14 min, USA, Documentary

An illuminating and moving close-up of a diverse group of performers of Heidi Latsky Dance.

**STILL RUNNING**

Dir. Wayne de Lange & Sven Harding

2014, 5 min, USA, Documentary

Following a cycling accident which left him paralysed, Pieter du Preez becomes the first ever C6 quadriplegic to complete an Iron Man triathlon.

**STRINGS**

Dir. Pedro Solís García

2013, 11 min, Spain, Narrative

﻿María’s routine at school is altered by the arrival of a child who soon becomes her best friend.

**SUPER SOUNDS**

Dir. Stephen de Villiers

2014, 12 min, USA, Documentary

A serendipitous encounter between a young girl and a boy with superhero aspirations.

**TAKE ME**

Dir. Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette & André Turpin

2014, 10 min, Canada, Narrative

A nurse confronts his principles when he’s asked to aid two patients in assisted sex.

**THE TALES OF THE GOLDEN SAND**

Dir. Fred & Samuel Guillaume

2015, 23 min, France, Narrative

The mythical tale of the sweet town of Merryville, where an unexpected intruder disrupts the daily calm.

**WELCOME TO THE LAST BOOKSTORE**

Dir. Chad Howitt

2015, 11 min, USA, Documentary

A day in the life of a bookstore owner—a father, husband, small business owner, and paraplegic—showing the store’s magnetic appeal to the community.