

FEATURED TOP STORY

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Weekend film festival to highlight disabilities, LGBTQ+ themes

By Kateri Wozny, Pasadena Weekly Contributing Writer Jun 16, 2022 Updated Jun 16, 2022



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Movie enthusiasts looking to watch independent films and engage in conversation about disabilities and LGBTQ+ topics can do so at the NewFilmmakers Los Angeles (NFMLA) InFocus series on Saturday, June 18.

“We are giving filmmakers an opportunity so that they can continue their work and feel empowered to make their next independent film,” said Larry Laboe, executive director for NMFLA. “They also walk away with tangible industry connections that will help them grow.”

NFMLA’s InFocus series is held monthly with three blocks of 90 minute programming and focuses on tackling the lack of diversity in underrepresented groups. This month’s series will focus on one program relating to disabilities and two programs relating to LGBTQ+. Filmmakers participate from all over the world while half reside in Los Angeles.

“We take a look at the work that is submitted to us and put together a well-rounded program based on the people, their backgrounds, themes and how it highlights into a curated shorts program,” Laboe said. “The LGBTQ+ program is our most popular series during the year.”

The festival will begin with 14 finalists from the recent Easterseals Disability Film Challenge, which allowed filmmakers with or without disabilities to contribute inspiring stories and demonstrate their talent in front of and behind the camera.

“The most underrepresented group are creators with disabilities and NFMLA partnered with Easterseals in 2019 to help showcase their stellar content,” Laboe said.

Two LGBTQ+ Cinema Short programs will also take place. The first program will include six films focusing on personal and community journeys with milestones, rites of passage, self-determination and meditation themes. The second program will include nine films surrounding relationship themes and the connections that are developed, including romance, social distancing, rehashing the past, grief and new beginnings.

“(An attendee) gets heavier notes in the first program in terms of exploring serious and dramatic scenes and it gets more light-hearted and transformative in the second program,” said Bojana Sandic, programming director for NMFLA.

In between the programs, movie goers will have a chance to view the premiere of Stacey Maltin and Margarita Zhitnikova’s queer musical drama “Triple Threat.”

“Margarita is an alumnus of ours and the film explores all forms of creativity and gender tropes,” Sandic said.

Audience Q&A sessions will conclude each program. Laboe said about 400 people attend the festival each month.

“Audience members are hungry and eager to see independent films, documentaries and features that they wouldn’t have the opportunity to see elsewhere,” Laboe said.

Those wishing to attend the virtual filmmaker panels on Friday, June 17 with Nicky Weinstock, executive director of Apple TV’s “Severance” series, and Nicholas Bruckman, director; Sam Bisbee, executive producer; and Amanda Roddy, producer of “Not Going Quietly,” a film about a man who embarks on a national campaign journey for healthcare reform, will require an All-Access Pass.

“There’s access to filmmaker panels and all films (in the series) along with an open bar (with this pass),” Laboe said.

Laboe noted that NMFLA is celebrating its 15th year as a nonprofit in July.

“It means impact for us in the film community,” Laboe said. “It’s been something that the community has a need for and filmmakers really value for their artistry and career.”

Sandic agreed. “We want people to become inspired to make their own work and have people in the audience connect to it through different perspectives,” she said.

WHAT: The InFocus Disability and LGBTQ+ series

WHEN: 1 to 4:30 p.m., Friday, June 17 (Virtual filmmaker panels), 1:30 p.m. to 10:45 p.m. Saturday, June 18 (film festival)

WHERE: 1139 S. Hill Street, Los Angeles

COST: Tickets are \$10 for individual programs and \$30 for an All-Access Pass.

INFO: A COVID-19 proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test within 72 hours prior to the event is required. newfilmmakersla.com

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