

ReelAbilities

FILM FESTIVAL

HOUSTON

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Department of Neighborhoods
Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

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ReelAbilities Film and Arts Festival Celebrates its Fifth Year in Houston

Free, city-wide events promoting inclusion bring stories of people living with disabilities to Houstonians

HOUSTON (December 1, 2016) –ReelAbilities Film and Arts Festival returns to Houston in its fifth year February 16 - March 6 with a speaker series, an award-winning film festival, live music jam session, art exhibit, educational tours to local schools and seminars at offices around Houston, and more, all with the intention to use the arts as a vehicle to educate the community and change perceptions about individuals with varying levels of abilities, all at no cost to participants and attendees.

ReelAbilities, originally founded in New York City in 2007 and now presented in 15 cities, generates and nurtures awareness of those living with disabilities of all types by showcasing their lives and stories through art, film, music and inspirational talks. The film portion of the festival will take place from February 19 - 23 at Edwards Greenway Grand Palace Stadium 24, where 15 movies will be screened followed by interactive panels to encourage audience discussion.

Houston is considered one of the most innovative cities hosting ReelAbilities, as this festival utilizes multiple avenues to further educate the community beyond strictly film, including **ReelMusic**, an all-inclusive jazz and blues music jam being held at the Secret Group space where professional musicians invite artists with disabilities to perform with them, and **ReelPeople: UPAbilities** - a series of intellectually-stimulating, 20-minute discussions with thought leaders from across the country held at the Rice University Shepherd School of Music. This year's focus will be on the impact video games have on the lives of those living with varying levels of abilities. Additionally, Houston will continue to extend the ReelAbilities mission to local schools, via ReelEducation, and businesses, through its **ReelWorkplace** program, to

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conduct interactive sessions about the ways students and employees can respectfully live and work alongside their peers and colleagues living with disabilities.

Along with host city organizer, JFS Alexander Institute for Inclusion and in collaboration with the City's Department of Neighborhoods Houston's Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, lead support from The Bristow Group and TIRR Memorial Hermann (founding partner), all ReelAbilities Houston events are free and open to the public. Mayor Sylvester Turner also joins as a member of the Honorary Committee of ReelAbilities Houston 2017. Dr. Kelly Cohen Fein M.D. has facilitated an additional partnership with The Houston Ballet, where she currently serves as a member of the board, for a pre-event celebration on February 14.

"The impact that ReelAbilities Houston has on the lives of Houstonians is immeasurable", said event chair, Vikki Evans. "Even if you don't live with a disability yourself, you've probably interacted with someone dealing with a disability that you may not fully understand or know how to interact with." She goes on to say, "It is our mission at ReelAbilities to challenge the way people think about disabilities, and to encourage Houstonians to take action - treating each other with more respect and compassion than ever before."

The 2017 festival will celebrate ReelArt in a brand new way, with the grand opening of the Center for Art and Photography at Celebration Company, a public showroom and gallery to sell the artwork, photography and products of artists with disabilities. The showroom is now open Mondays from 10:00-8:00, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00-5:00, and Fridays from 10:00-4:00, with the new exhibition beginning on January 30th.

All events are free, but some do require registration. Disability accommodations are available at all locations and accepted. To register visit online at <http://www.reelabilitieshouston.org/> or

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call (713) 667-9336. For media inquiries, please contact Allie Danziger at the ReelAbilities Houston press office at allie@integrateagency.com or 713-225-0880.

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ABOUT REELABILITIES

ReelAbilities is the largest festival in the country dedicated to promoting inclusion for people with disabilities through the arts. The mission of ReelAbilities is to utilize the arts as a vehicle to both educate and change perceptions about individuals living with disabilities. Launched in New York in 2007, Houston is one of 15 cities expanding the festival throughout the country. JFS Alexander Institute for Inclusion, founded by Joan and Stanford Alexander and a division of the JFS Disability Services, is Houston's host organizer which seeks to foster a community that includes all individuals by eliminating the stigma associated with disabilities. Lead support is provided by The Bristow Group and TIRR Memorial Hermann (Founding Partner). The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities is a key collaborator for the festival along with over 50 community organizations.

ABOUT JFS ALEXANDER INSTITUTE FOR INCLUSION

Founded at Jewish Family Service through the generosity of Joan and Stanford Alexander in 2007, the JFS Alexander Institute for Inclusion seeks to improve the lives of those with various disabilities, including mental illness and developmental and functional problems, such as cognitive, physical, psychological and sensory disabilities. Through programming, collaboration and advocacy, it works to foster a community that includes all individuals, creates and sustains new and existing disability services and strives to eliminate the stigma associated with disabilities. More information at www.jfshouston.org

ABOUT CELEBRATION COMPANY

Celebration Company, is an entrepreneurial employment program for adults with disabilities, operated by JFS Houston's Disability Services program. Celebration Company redefines what it means to have a disability and to be a part of the community. With a strong belief in self-determination CC offers both a transitional and supportive employment track and uses the community around us for vocational and life skills training. CC uses the arts as well as traditional vocational skills to help each client meet their desired goals.



ABOUT UP ABILITIES

The UP Experience – Unique Perspectives from Unique People – is an engaging and intellectually stimulating event that brings together 12 of the world’s most extraordinary thought leaders, creators, and innovators for one exceptional day. These are the people behind the technologies, the trends, the ideas, and the global movements that shape our existence. The only event of its kind in Houston, UP is a learning opportunity, a creative conference, a think tank, and an entertainment event all in one. During 20-minute onstage presentations, each of our 12 speakers discusses his or her work, passion, and ideas for the future; offstage, attendees experience up close and personal Q&A sessions. Designed for both personal and professional application, UP is an infusion of exceptional people, exceptional thinking and exceptional advances.

2017 SCHEDULE & LOCATIONS

- **February 14: Pre-event Celebration with The Houston Ballet:** Houstonians are invited to a special one-hour screening of the ReelAbilities short films on Valentine’s Day at The Houston Ballet located downtown. The screening will begin at 6:00pm and is free to the public. Guests are invited to join us for a showing of the short films *Perfect* (12 minutes), *I Don’t Care* (14 minutes), *Birthday* (16 minutes), and *Bumblebees* (4 minutes). Each attendee will walk away with a special giveaway from ReelAbilities thanking them for their presence.
- **February 16: ReelPeople: UP Abilities:** This event, a partnership with The UP Experience, is the official kickoff of the festival, and opens the festival on February 16 at the Rice University Shepherd School of Music with presentations from extraordinary thought leaders on mental and physical disabilities and topics of inclusion. After the speakers' presentations, attendees can attend smaller Q&A sessions with the speaker of their choice. The reception will be sponsored by IberiaBank.

This year’s speakers include:

- **Henry Evans**
Henry Evans at age 40 became quadriplegic and mute after a stroke-like attack caused by a hidden birth defect. He is a frequent and enthusiastic collaborator with robotics teams such as Robots for Humanity who are developing tools to help the severely disabled navigate their lives and the world. Years of therapy helped him learn to move his head and to use his finger allowing him to use a head-tracking device to communicate with a computer using experimental interfaces. He currently collaborates with Georgia Tech on using the Willow Garage PR2 robot as a surrogate, as well as RLAB at Brown on quadrotors for expanding range of motion.



- **Jane McGonigal**

Jane McGonigal is a world-renowned game designer, and an expert on the engagement economy and the application of game-design to the real world. She serves as the Director of Game Research & Development with the Institute for The Future in Palo Alto, California. Jane's book, *SuperBetter: A Revolutionary Approach to Getting Stronger, Happier, Braver and More Resilient* debuted at #7 on the New York Times Advice bestsellers list, reveals a decade's worth of scientific research into the ways all games change how we respond to

stress, challenge, and pain. She shares stories and data from players who have followed the SuperBetter rules to get stronger, happier, and braver in the face of depression, anxiety, illness, and injury.

- **Elise Roy**

Elise Roy is a deaf lawyer, artist, artisan, and human rights advocate who works in the vanguard of the social design movement, which holds that designers have the capacity and responsibility to address and resolve human problems on micro and macro scales and thereby contribute to social well-being. Deaf from the age of ten, Elise has been a design thinker from early on, constantly adapting her environment and its tools to serve her extraordinary abilities. At Brown University, Elise was recognized as one of the nation's elite soccer goalkeepers and she began to see herself as an advocate for people with non-normative abilities. When Elise was in law school, she began working on the International Disability Rights Treaty at the United Nations, the first such human rights treaty to be passed in the 21st century, and she traveled the world to see it put into action.

- **February 19 - 23: ReelAbilities Film Festival:** The 2017 festival will screen 15 films beginning February 19 through February 23 at Edwards Greenway Grand Palace Stadium 24. Each of the films feature an interactive event to foster dialogue between the audience, the filmmaker, parents, professionals, or persons with disabilities, and to explore the particular subjects depicted in the film.

This year's films include:

- **February 19:**

- ***Enter the Faun* - (Evening film begins at 7:00 PM)** Opening night in partnership with **The Houston Ballet**

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 toward opening night. It challenges the boundaries of medicine and art, as well as the limitations associated with disability.

Director: Tamar Rogoff and Daisy Wright, Documentary, 67 min, USA, English



○ **February 20:**

▪ **Hear This! - (Short matinee film begins at 1:00 PM)**

When 10-year-old Tristan wants his dad to become the trainer of his soccer team, the club won't allow it because his father is deaf. Tristan decides to prove them wrong.

Director: Soulaima El Khaldi, Documentary, 15 min.

▪ **Strings (Cuerdas) - (Short matinee film begins at 1:00 PM)**

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

Director: Pedro Solis Garcia, Animated/Narrative, 11 min, Spain, Spanish, Family Friend

▪ **Little Hero - (Short matinee film begins at 1:00 PM)**

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

Director: Marcus A. McDougald & Jennifer Medvin, Documentary, 10 min, USA, English, Family Friendly

▪ **Chimes for Tyler - (Short matinee film begins at 1:00 PM)**

A boy with autism can distinguish wind chimes by sound.

Director: Stephen Panaggio, Documentary, 8min, USA, English, Family Friendl

▪ **Patrick's Day - (Evening film begins at 7:00 PM) Mental Health Night** in partnership with the **Houston Police Department and Houston Fire Department**

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. This raw and audacious love story provocatively explores issues ranging from the right to intimacy to the question of when parental love becomes a destructive force.

Director: Terry McMahon, Narrative, 98 min, Ireland, English, Adult Content

○ **February 21:**

▪ **Margarita with a Straw - (Matinee film begins at 4:00 PM)**

A funky, stereotype-busting coming-of-age tale based on the true story of a Punjabi teenage girl with cerebral palsy. 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.

Director: Shonali Bose & Nilesh Maniyar, Narrative, 97 min, India, English and Hindi, Adult Content



- **Stilts & Spoke - (Evening film begins at 7:00 PM)**
A heartfelt, entertaining, and comedic documentary. After Jay Cramer falls off a boulder 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. They fall in love and go on to inspire millions.
Director: Jack Winch, Documentary, 91 min, USA, English
- **February 22:**
 - **Gabe - (Matinee film begins at 4:00 PM)**
Gabe Weil is a 27-year-old who was 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 might live well into his 50s. 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.
Director: Luke Terrell, Documentary, 72 min, USA, USA, English
 - **Do You Dream in Color? - (Evening film begins at 7:00 PM) Partnership with Novum Energy Services**
The poignant coming-of-age story of Connor, Nick, Sarah, and Carina, who navigate the growing pains of high school, but, unlike most teens, 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.
Director: Abigail Fuller & Sarah Ivy, Documentary, 76 min, USA, English, Family Friendly
- **February 23:**
 - **The Case of the Three Sided Dream - (Matinee film begins at 4:00 PM)**
Multi-instrumentalist jazz legend Rahsaan Roland Kirk was known for playing multiple instruments at once and for his comical and political interjections on stage, creating music about his experience becoming blind as an infant. A child prodigy, adult visionary, and political activist, Kirk played even after becoming paralyzed, and up until the day he died.
Director: Adam Kahan, Documentary, 88 min, USA, English, 2014

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- **February 23: ReelMusic: An All-Inclusive Jazz and Blues Jam:** Professional jazz and blues musicians invite musicians with disabilities to jam with the band on February 23, from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. at the Secret Group to close the festival. Everyone is welcome to attend.
- **January 30 - March 31: ReelArt: The Art of Celebration:** The exhibition, one of few in the country, will take place from January 30 - March 31st at JFS Houston's new Center for Art and Photography at Celebration Company - an entrepreneurial program for adults living with disabilities who create art as an expressive outlet for creativity and as a life skill. The showcase will feature visual art and

photography from various artists, including Houston-based artist Grant Manier who lives with autism.

- **Ongoing: ReelEducation:** In addition to our city-wide public events, the festival also brings free programming during the school day to Houston area schools so that the message of inclusion and the importance of arts is being communicated to our city's youth – through film, music, and fine art. Last year, over 7000 elementary, middle and high school students participated.
- **Ongoing: ReelWorkplace:** ReelWorkplace seminars featuring films, speakers, and etiquette workshops about various topics of inclusion are attended by local companies to benefit their hiring managers, staff, and future employees.
- **Ongoing: ReelTravelers:** For the third year, ReelAbilities Houston will show film shorts in the Houston airport system as a part of Houston Airport System's Public Art Program so thousands of people passing through the airport can experience the festival and know how Houston's cultural arts scene includes subjects on diversity through the showing of world class films.