

ladd Look

SUMMER 2023



**OVER-THE-RHINE
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL**

organized by ladd

FESTIVAL SCHEDULE INSIDE!

Empowering adults with disabilities since 1975

Ladd Look

Mission Statement:

Guided by the belief that every person has ability and value, we empower adults with developmental disabilities to live, work, and connect.

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**OVER-THE-RHINE
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL**

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MovieMaker magazine



PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

CELEBRATE OUR SHARED HUMANITY

Did you know that Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival is one of the 25 coolest film festivals in the world? In 2022, MovieMaker Magazine bestowed this honor on the Festival for exceptional films and unforgettable experiences. “Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival is newer, but mighty. Highlighting disability and marginalized filmmakers, the Festival works hard to promote the films,” noted Emmy-award-winning filmmaker, and MovieMaker Magazine juror, Ms. Iman Zawahry.

But, it has taken many years to become internationally known for being a platform for and celebration of diversity, inclusion and shared humanity. In 2013, LADD hosted Cincinnati ReelAbilities, a film festival featuring films by, about and for people with disabilities. Longtime supporters Susan and Jeff Harris attended ReelAbilities Film Festival New York and were inspired to bring something similar to Cincinnati. “They first brought ReelAbilities to Cincinnati and to LADD. Jeff then facilitated the national program under LADD, which expanded to 18 cities across the U.S. and Canada,” explains Molly Lyons, film festival director.

“He was also a part of expanding the vision of the Festival to tell other untold stories, which was a key driver of organizing Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival,” Lyons continues. Based on the success of ReelAbilities, LADD launched the new Film

Festival in 2018. “The vision for the Festival is to serve as a platform for storytelling beyond the disability community, including untold and under-told stories of diverse groups. In doing so, Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival celebrates and uplifts these stories and the disability community,” says Lyons.

The Film Festival features dozens of films in venues throughout Cincinnati’s historic district of Over-the-Rhine. As varied as the films will be – crossing all forms and genres – the mission of each is the same: to engage and unite people. “Film is a communal experience,” says tt stern-enzi, festival artistic director. “Powerful stories are shared through film. Audience members discover how they relate to these stories and are able to learn from completely different perspectives. That’s what we hope to deliver at every screening, including bold, provocative conversations with panelists after each showcase.”

Using cinema as a tool to build empathy, festival director Molly Lyons says. “The Film Festival creates experiences for filmmakers and audiences that expand beyond the screen into the outside world and into real human relationships. Kay and Jack Geiger had the idea to create a film series in

partnership with the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center—Freedom Film Festival.” Molly Lyons adds, “The Geigers reached out to us about expanding the mission of the Film Festival and bringing in more untold stories.” The newly created festival incorporated the vision the Geigers had set out and Jack took on the role of festival director for the 2018 and 2019 and now support the festival as a co-founder and chair of the leadership committee.

The Geiger facilitated a partnership between the Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival and the Freedom Center to award the Freedom Award to a film that puts freedom front and center. Similarly, the Harriet Beecher Stowe House Power of Voice Award is given to a film that uses powerful storytelling as a tool for change, a film that shines a light on injustice by challenging old ideas to give people a new way of looking at things.

“We believe that every person, every body has a story worth telling. We are thrilled that the work done by LADD and Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival to build inclusive community is being recognized on a national and international scale,” says Lyons. “And by association, greater Cincinnati is recognized as ‘cool’ because of the support this community has shown these films and filmmakers and the mission and vision of LADD.”



Academy Award Winner Marlee Matlin speaks at the 2015 ReelAbilities Film Festival organized by LADD

Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival highlights the importance of seeing reflections of one's own story in film and media. The Festival has become a place for disability culture to shine, says Dr. Kara Ayers, 2015 festival chair and associate director at the University of Cincinnati's Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. "Many of us who identify as people with disabilities celebrate that aspect of our identity, so we have a culture. And, as with any culture, we have art, we have stories," she adds. "The Film Festival tells the stories of that culture."

"Change happens with understanding. Film has a pivotal role to play in understanding each other, challenging stereotypes and changing culture," Lyons adds. "It's a movement about human connection."

And, Cincinnati is the perfect place for this movement. The city has historically represented compassion, cultural diversity and inclusion. "In the early 1800s Cincinnati locals had begun calling it 'The Queen City' and 'The Queen of the West,' in reference to the culture, arts, and civilization the city offered in the midst of the wildness of the emerging West," Lyons explains. "Cincinnati became a primary stop on the underground railroad and a major pathway to freedom. During World War 2, Cincinnati's Union station also became a hub for people who fled the holocaust to emigrate to America. Today, Cincinnati is still one of the most immigrant-friendly cities in the country, and home to the nation's first data-informed, gender equity certification programs. It has the top minority business accelerator in the country and is home to many museums and festivals that celebrate culture and change, including ours."

To learn more about Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival's past, present and future, visit otrfilmfest.org.

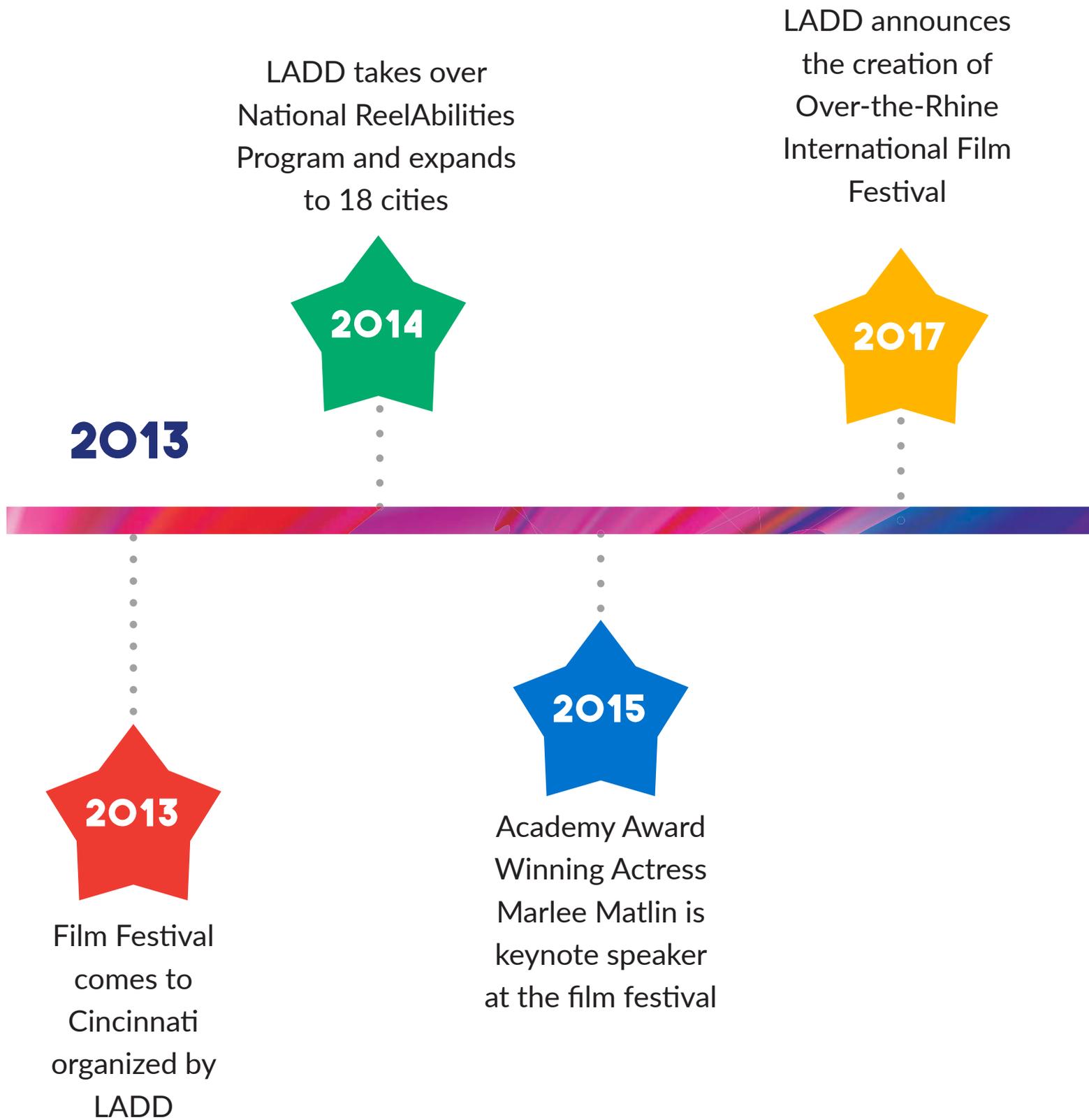


Supreme Court Justice, Richard Bernstein speaks at the OTR International Film Festival, organized by LADD



Kay and Jack Geiger attend the OTR International Film Festival

TIMELINE OF OUR FILM FESTIVAL



2018



Open Casting Call for people with disabilities



Wins Cincinnati Regional Chamber Climb Award

Partnership with other local film festivals to host drive-in screenings



2021



Festival goes hybrid and offers virtual screenings



Creation of Power of Voice and Freedom Film Awards in partnership with the Freedom Center and Harriet Beecher Stowe House

Festival wins Movie Maker Magazine's 25 Coolest Film Festival in the World



NOW

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!



JOIN US FOR OVER-THE-RHINE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL JULY 6 TO 8 FOR CAPTIVATING FILMS, PANELS, PARTIES AND ONE OF THE LARGEST FILM GALAS IN THE MIDWEST. FILMMAKERS WILL SHARE NEW PERSPECTIVES, CONNECT ON NEW LEVELS AND OPEN HEARTS TO NEW AUDIENCES IN THE COMMUNITY.

HERE'S A SNEAK PEEK INTO A FEW OF THE FEATURED FILMS:

OKAY! THE ASD BAND FILM

Featuring members of The ASD Band (also performing at the Opening Night Gala), "OKAY! The ASD Band Film" is documentary-shorts director Mark Bone's first feature-length documentary.

Behind the scenes, Bone got to know the band members on a personal level, learning more about each one individually, as well as their roles within the band. The members of The ASD Band, all of whom are on the autism spectrum, include: lead singer Rawan Tuffaha, guitarist and vocalist Jackson Begley, drummer Spenser Murray, piano player Ron Adea, and musical director and bassist, Maury LauFoy.

Three members of the band first met onstage in April 2019 in Toronto while performing for World Autism Awareness Day. Since then, they've grown in their music, joined together as a band, and performed their first show at Toronto's Opera House in February 2022 while also releasing an album.

In the making of the film, the bandmates wanted to represent autism in its realness, honesty, and authenticity, rather than the portrayal it often receives in Hollywood. Those who screen the film at the Film Festival will get to see how the band did all the arrangements, including the song "Fireflies" written by Tuffaha.

SPELLERS

Inspired by the book *Underestimated*, the new full-length documentary "Spellers" challenges conventional wisdom regarding a group relegated to society's margins: nonspeakers with autism, who most "experts" believe are cognitively disabled.

As the film opening asks, "What if we've been wrong...about every single one of them?" "Spellers" answers that question, in convincing fashion, through the stories of eight nonspeakers—Aydan, Evan, Sid, Maddie, Jamie, Vince, Cade, and Elizabeth—who all found their voice through the miraculous process of using a letterboard to communicate their thoughts and feelings.

THE YEAR BETWEEN

Inspired by true events, "The Year Between" is the story of Clemence Miller, a college sophomore who is forced to move back home after having a mental breakdown. Faced with a surprising diagnosis of bipolar disorder and a jarring return to the Illinois suburbs, Clemence has to learn how to live with her well-meaning but frustrated family and find balance in a world that seems hellbent on thwarting her.

The main character uses comedy as an educational tool and coping mechanism to represent mental illness in a different perspective



rather than the heavy and dark take it typically gets. Ultimately, the film gives a well-rounded look at bipolar disorder as well as other mental health issues like depression, not just for the person diagnosed but also for their families and loved ones. Lots of laughs

along the way, and a star-studded cast to boot, from Steve Buscemi and J. Smith-Cameron to Emily Robinson and Wyatt Oleff, as well as Alex Heller who also directed the film.



OVER-THE-RHINE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

organized by **ladd** 

These are just a few of many films you'll get to enjoy at this year's Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival, the nation's first inclusion and diversity film festival led by the disability community. Screenings will take place throughout

Cincinnati's vibrant OTR neighborhood, a historic district where people from diverse backgrounds gather to shop, see art, and find community in downtown Cincinnati.

Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival, organized by LADD, brings together stories that celebrate differences and honors our shared humanity. "Cinema has the power to build empathy, and that's what it's all about," says tt stern-enzi, film festival artistic director. "We hope to create experiences for filmmakers and audiences that expand beyond the screen into the outside world and into real human relationships. We hope you will join us in person and online for top-notch films from some of the world's most unique storytellers."

Those who attend this year's Festival will have the opportunity to participate in film screenings, events and parties, intimate gatherings, star-studded meet-and-greets and so much more. To learn more about Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival, and to get your tickets, visit otrilmfest.org.



FOCUSING

WHEN KATE SIAHAAN-RIGG CAME TO CINCINNATI AS A FILMMAKER FOR THE FILM FESTIVAL IN 2018, SHE HAD NO IDEA HOW MUCH IT WOULD CHANGE HER LIFE.

Today, Siahaan-Rigg is now creative and chief experience director for Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival. "I had such an awesome experience as a filmmaker when I came to the Film Festival. I just wanted to be a part of what LADD, the leadership committee, Molly Lyons and tt stern enzi had already created," she explains. "I wanted to bring my experience as a producer and as a BIPOC, autistic artist into the overall concept of the Festival."

In addition to her work with the Film Festival, Siahaan-Rigg is an award-winning essayist, playwright and performer whose work on Asian American identity has been shown at the Smithsonian Institution, the Comedy Central Stage, the HBO Workspace, the Mark Taper Forum, Grand Performances and many more. Profiled twice on PBS for her work with Amerasian punk comedy duo Slanty Eyed Mama, she is also the executive producer and creator of reality TV shows such as "Dance Your Ass Off"

(NBC Universal) and "Cache Craze" (Disney XD). A Canadian native and graduate of The Juilliard School and the University of Melbourne, Siahaan-Rigg's first indie film "Happy Lucky Golden Tofu Panda Dragon Good Time Fun Fun Show" was invited to nine film festivals and won three awards.

"I love that I can tap into my network of live artists to perform, more stars to participate and more industry coming in — making each event at the Film Festival more memorable," she says. "I knew I could use my TV production and branding skills to continue to carve out a space for the Festival as a leader in cultural inclusion, one-of-a-kind screenings and opportunities for filmmakers to connect to other people telling unique, untold stories."

Siahaan-Rigg says talent is what makes any arts festival special. "Optimizing local talent while also attracting people from around the country is part of the plan," she explains. "We have a real opportunity



ON VISION

to bring stories and visibility to huge audiences and to highlight Cincinnati's position as one of the most inclusive, compassionate, kind cities in the country."

Coming off of being named "one of the coolest 25 film festivals in the world" by MovieMaker Magazine last year, Siahaan-Rigg says the OTR Film Festival is perfectly poised to make this the biggest event to date.

"We're deepening our relationships to other Cincinnati arts and activism institutions like the Freedom Center and Harriet Beecher Stowe House and exploring what those relationships might bring to visiting filmmakers new to the city, to audiences who are inspired by the idea of storytelling as a method of creating a better, more inclusive world, and to our supporters who want to express their desire for legacy through the arts. All these relationships and experiences create a buzz in the city," she says. "And we're kicking everything off in a big way with the festival launch gala at the gorgeous Cincinnati Music Hall, planned by my colleague and party planner to the stars, Julian Ford. It's on track to be a sold-out event, with music, great food, films and special guests from the worlds of TV and film."

Moving forward, Siahaan-Rigg says she wants to continue deepening OTRFF's archive of online

content from visiting panelists, stars, filmmakers, and speakers. "We really can be the world's most inclusive and diverse film festival. That's not just some corporate jargon," she explains. "It means that OTRFF can set the standard for uncovering incredible stories and talents that you might never see anywhere else and showing the world the ideas and inspirations behind these stories."

Siahaan-Rigg says she's most excited about the movies, the popcorn, and the magic that happens at the OTR Film Festival. "When you sit back and enter wild wonderful worlds that are entirely surprising and sometimes life-altering because you get to see yourself a little differently and understand your place in humanity by relating to someone else's story," she says. She's also looking forward to the late-night horror movies they added to this year's lineup.

"I take a lot of pride in my role, ensuring that every experience at OTRFF be unique, memorable, and special, from developing the website to the parties to the kind of artists we feature for live performances," she says. "I want everything to reflect the values of our disability and diversity-led programming and the incredibly cool feel of Cincinnati."

"I WANTED TO BRING MY EXPERIENCE AS A PRODUCER AND AS A BIPOC, AUTISTIC ARTIST INTO THE OVERALL CONCEPT OF THE FESTIVAL." – KATE RIGG

CURATING CONVERSATION ON SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TT STERN-ENZI LOVES FILM. HE'S ALSO AN ADVOCATE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND SPARKING DISCUSSIONS ON THE TOPIC. WHEN YOU MESH THOSE TWO PASSIONS TOGETHER, YOU GET A WHOLE LOT OF EXCITEMENT COMING FROM HIM FOR THIS YEAR'S FILM FESTIVAL.

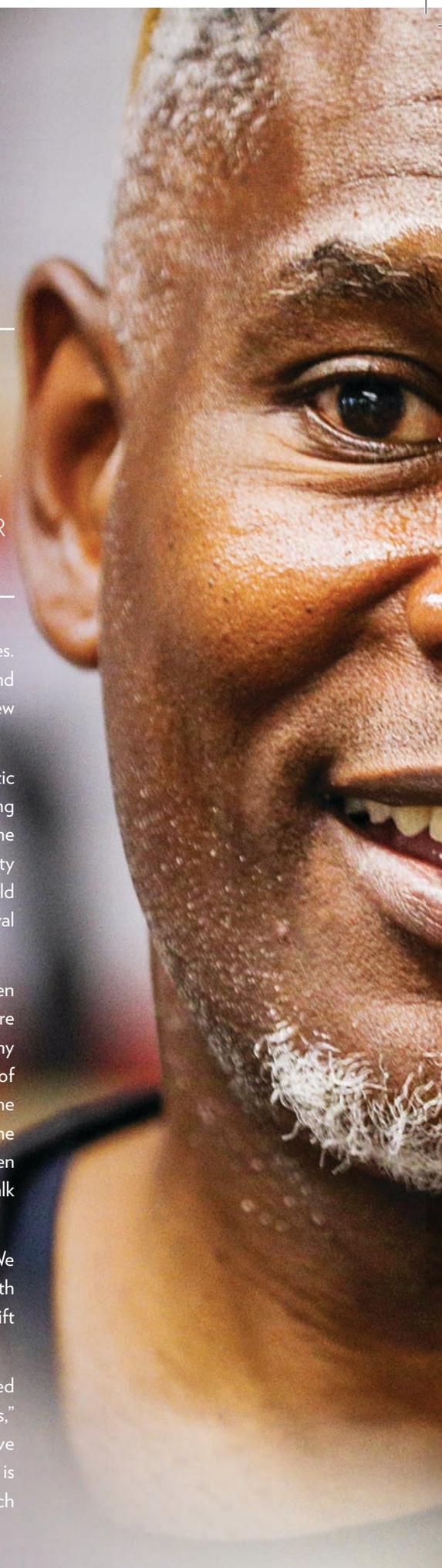
Beginning July 6, the Festival will showcase more than 50 films representing over 12 countries. These unique stories support the idea that every body has a story. Presenting movies from, and about, marginalized groups allows audiences to experience the world from multiple points of view at the same time.

When stern-enzi speaks, the world listens. He's spent 20 years as a freelance writer and film critic in the greater Cincinnati region, including with Cincinnati CityBeat and Fox19 as well as earning distinction as an accredited critic on Rotten Tomatoes. He has also curated film programs at The Mini Microcinema and other regional venues while serving on the advisory board for the University of Cincinnati's Center for Film & Media Studies. There's not a lot stern-enzi hasn't done in the world of film. It's only fitting that he joined the team as lead programmer and curator for the Film Festival and now serves as artistic director.

Throughout his film career, stern-enzi has built a list of achievements of which he is proud. When he first started working, he was in the disability field as an employment training specialist before transitioning to staff training. "I can't discount being able to combine that background with my interest in film as artistic director of Over-the-Rhine Film Festival," he says. "Being a person of color, I understand and appreciate the struggles to find reflections of yourself onscreen and the long journey to such representations, so to be able to promote the necessary work others across the diversity spectrum are doing means quite a bit. At the end of the day, though, I am most proud when people approach me and let me know that they enjoy seeing me talk about films on television. I walk away with a huge sense of pride knowing that my opinion means something."

This year, stern-enzi says he's excited for the new events and opportunities being offered. "We have great films, but there is more to the Festival. We also collaborate, partner and connect with restaurants, bars, retail businesses and arts organizations in the community to celebrate and uplift the OTR community."

This year's theme is "[un]told stories," which stern-enzi believes is a challenge that can be embraced every year. "Finding and sharing untold stories, unheard voices, unseen faces and new experiences," he says. "At every festival I attend now, I push myself to do more than just watch the films. I believe watching the films and hanging out for the Q&As are just the first steps. What truly matters is leaving the theater, engaging with people, talking about what we've seen and learning from each



STORIES
(un) **STORIES**
ORGANIZED BY LADD

**OVER THE RHINE INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
2023
JULY 6-8**



2023 Schedule

THURSDAY, JULY 6



SPECIAL EVENT
OPEN CASTING CALL
FOR PERFORMERS WITH DISABILITIES
 11A - 2P Ensemble Theatre, 1127 Vine St.
 To schedule an audition email:
 lmeyers@ensemblecincinnati.org



SPECIAL EVENT
OPENING NIGHT GALA
 6:00 Music Hall
Special guests: KEVIN IANNUCCI and MADISON TEVLIN (actors, Champions) as well as a performance by ASD BAND.
FILM SCREENING
OKAY! (THE ASD BAND FILM) (D)
 7:30 Music Hall
 Sponsored by P&G

FRIDAY, JULY 7



SPECIAL EVENT
BREAKFAST WITH TT
 8:30A SITE 1212, The Art Academy
Special guests: Kevin Iannucci and Madison Tevlin (actors, Champions).
 Sponsored by FotoFocus



SHORT FILM BLOCK
THE WEDDING APPLICATION (N) /
METAMORPHOSIS (N)
 11:30A SITE 1212, The Art Academy



SHORT FILM BLOCK
BLUE VEIL (D) / WHAT WE'LL NEVER KNOW (D) /
ASH (N) / THE BLOOM (D) / ASTOR PLACE
THE AMERICAN DREAM (D) /
INSPIRED (N)
 12:00 Contemporary Arts Center

COLOR KEY

EVENTS • SHORTS • FEATURES

FRIDAY, JULY 7 (CONT.)



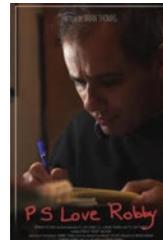
SHORT FILM BLOCK
GREEN WATER (N) /
WARSHA (N) /
SIX FEET OF SEPARATION (N) /
LUNCHBOX (N) /
THE SPRAYER (N) /
THE SOUND OF YOUR VOICE (D)
 1:00 The Woodward Theater



FILM SCREENING
GO THROUGH THE DARK (D)
 1:30 SITE 1212, The Art Academy
 Sponsored by Duke Energy



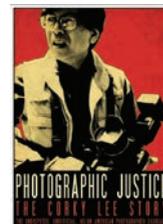
FILM SCREENING
FOR KICKS (D) / REOPENING (D)
 2:00 Contemporary Arts Center



SHORT FILM BLOCK
PS LOVE, ROBBY (D) / GAME OVER (D) /
THE STEVIE PROJECT (D) / FRIDAY NIGHT BLIND (D)
 3:00 The Woodward Theater



FILM SCREENING
THE EXILE OF THE SEA (D)
 3:30 SITE 1212, The Art Academy



FILM SCREENING
PHOTOGRAPHIC JUSTICE: THE CORKY LEE STORY (D)
 4:30 Contemporary Arts Center
 Sponsored by FotoFocus



FILM SCREENING
1946: THE MISTRANSLATION THAT SHIFTED CULTURE (D)
 5:00 The Woodward Theater

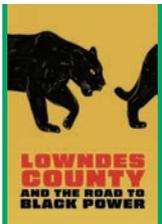
FRIDAY, JULY 7 (CONT.)



FILM SCREENING
NO LEGS. ALL HEART. ^(N)
 6:00 SITE 1212, The Art Academy
Sponsored by Huntington Bank



FILM SCREENING
9TO5: THE STORY OF A MOVEMENT ^(D)
 7:00 Contemporary Arts Center
Sponsored by CET



FILM SCREENING
LOWNDES COUNTY AND THE ROAD TO BLACK POWER ^(D)
 6:00 Freedom Center



FILM SCREENING
THE YEAR BETWEEN ^(N)
 7:30 The Woodward Theater



FILM SCREENING
THE ANGRY BLACK GIRL AND HER MONSTER ^(N)
 8:30 SITE 1212, The Art Academy
Sponsored by First Financial Bank



FILM SCREENING
LEONOR WILL NEVER DIE ^(N)
 9:30 Contemporary Arts Center



SCAN FOR INFO
 & TICKETS



SATURDAY, JULY 8



SHORT FILM BLOCK
MY NAME IS... ^(N) /
MORIAH ^(N) / **CANARY** ^(N) /
SUGAR GLASS BOTTLE ^(N) /
CLINICAL ^(N)
 10:30A Contemporary Arts Center



FILM SCREENING
SWEET DISASTER ^(N)
 10:30A The Woodward Theater



STUDENT FILMS
COLD SUMMER ^(N) /
IGNITION ^(N) / **SPEAK IN A WHISPER** ^(N) / **TRANSMISSION: LISA STEPHEN FRIDAY** ^(D) / **TIKTOK CHALLENGED** ^(N) / **LOST DOG** ^(N) / **DAD'S SHIT** ^(N)
 12:00 SITE 1212, The Art Academy
Sponsored by the UC Center for Film and Media Studies



SHORT FILM BLOCK
AHMAD ^(D) /
FORGOTTEN SONG ^(N)
 12:00 Contemporary Arts Center



SHORT FILM BLOCK
POWERLANDS ^(D) / **BECOMING HARRIET BEECHER STOWE** ^(D)
 12:30 The Woodward Theater

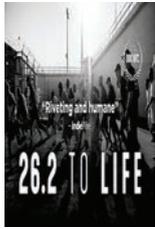


FILM BLOCK
A SLICE OF PIE ^(D) /
SEE MY ABILITY NOT MY DISABILITY ^(D)
 2:30 Contemporary Arts Center
Sponsored by Fifth Third Bank



FILM SCREENING
THE WAIT TO NOWHERE ^(D)
 3:00 The Woodward Theater
Sponsored by Geiger Family Fund

SATURDAY, JULY 8 (CONT.)



FILM SCREENING
26.2 TO LIFE (D)
4:30 SITE 1212, The Art Academy
Sponsored by JP Morgan



FILM SCREENING
UPSIDE DOWN (N)
5:30 The Woodward Theater
Sponsored by Saul Schottenstein Foundation B



FILM SCREENING
SPELLERS (D)
7:00 SITE 1212, The Art Academy
Sponsored by Q102



SPECIAL EVENT
AWARD CEREMONY & WRAP PARTY
9:00 The Woodward Theater

VENUES



SITE 1212, The Art Academy of
Cincinnati College of Art & Design
1212 Jackson Street



The Woodward Theater
1404 Main Street



Harriet Tubman Theater at
The Underground Freedom Center
50 E. Freedom Way



Contemporary Arts Center
44 E. 6th Street

CINCINNATI
MUSIC HALL

Music Hall
1241 Elm Street



other about our favorite films. Being part of a community that's willing to spread the word. That's how you get rid of the "un" in untold stories," he continued.

The Festival's mission is to do more than just create valuable audience experiences. stern-enzi believes it's going above and beyond to bring in filmmakers, actors and content experts to enrich audience engagement. "We also attempt to connect regional audiences with the local film community -- either with filmmakers or opportunities to discover how they can get involved with film production.

In curating these films and identifying those who are invited to speak at the festival, stern-enzi says the festival uses FilmFreeway to review work by mainly underrepresented filmmakers eager to share their vision with audiences. "It is an honor to have the chance to consider each and every project submitted because the programming team and I understand how difficult it can be for filmmakers to break out in a meaningful way," he adds.

As for the 2023 festival, stern-enzi says there's a lot of excitement to be had. "The larger festival and film world is starting to recognize us as an important part of the ecosystem," he says. "That means folks are paying more attention to the films we bring in and the discussions and events we create around them. It's not always about breaking a new film, like we did with CODA in 2021, but providing filmmakers with a larger platform."

Also this year, there has been a lot of focus on ensuring that there is a cultivation of a growing audience that appreciates the power and impact film can have on culture and society. "I want us to be at the forefront of starting meaningful conversations that place disability squarely and firmly in the dialogue on diversity, equity, and inclusion," says stern-enzi.

The films selected for this year's festival, stern-enzi says, speak to and beyond the moment we currently find ourselves in. "Their stories push audiences to recognize the intersectionality of life and to offer audiences the opportunity to reflect on their journeys," he says. "With every festival, the job is to scope out the widest array of the available narratives that will push and challenge folks to see and hear."

Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival selects titles that do the work behind the mission while also showcasing features that are within and outside typical genres and storytelling formats. stern-enzi is one who searches for larger questions of representation — whether it be disability, race or another often-marginalized community — to spark a much bigger conversation than what is typically had in film and storytelling. "I will always be happier when we have more narratives than documentaries that organically represent folks that we might not get to see in certain roles or stories," adds stern-enzi.

"I never know what doors the next opportunity will open, I just trust that the doorways will be there," he says.

Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival was the only festival to screen CODA after Sundance (and a year before its wide release).



OPEN CASTING CALL FOR ACTORS WITH DISABILITIES

JULY 6 AT ENSEMBLE THEATRE WITH D. LYNN MEYERS

In collaboration with Casting Society of America, Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival brings a new opportunity for aspiring actors with disabilities to be seen. D. Lynn Meyers, a local casting director, will host an open casting call at Ensemble Theatre on July 6. Meyers has cast more than 50 feature films; her partnership with the Film Festival is important to those in the community and more so to those with disabilities.

As the producing artistic director and CEO of Ensemble Theater Cincinnati, Meyers prides herself on being devoted to inclusion and breaking down stereotypes. She is passionate about the mission of Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival, the nation's first diversity film festival led by the disability community. "I believe it's important to let film and stage represent the entire population," she explains. "To be inclusive is the way to understanding and harmony."

In fact, in 2011, Meyers was named as one of four finalists for the Zelda Fichandler Award, which honors directors whose work is making an impact on the art form and their community. Meyers has held auditions for people with disabilities in the past and has cast incredible actors and performers in film and theater and industrials as a result.

Not only does Meyers believe in inclusion for those of all abilities, but she also believes in the spirit of Cincinnati, especially as it continues to make its mark in the artistic and film communities. "Cincinnati is the most wonderful city for people to come to and film for so many reasons," Meyers says. "It's not just the architecture and the actors and all of that. It's the amazing crew we have here. We have such wonderful people, everybody from technicians, electricians and photographers, to caterers and dry cleaners."

With Cincinnati's growth in the film industry, Meyers believes it's the positive and quality work environments that make the city so attractive. "I think that's why you have directors like Todd Haynes, who did 'Carol,' come back and do 'Dark Waters,'" she says. "If you get a director to come back another time to a city that says an awful lot, especially when it's Todd Haynes, who's brilliant."

Additionally, Meyers thinks that the region's adaptability to transform into any place makes it a great location to film. With her role in the film industry, and as Cincinnati's presence grows, Meyers is hopeful that she can help create opportunities through local theater and

filmmaking, including casting of those in the community no matter who they are. Whether that's a major role in a film or a smaller part in a theater production, Meyers says she is able to see how even the smallest role fits in with the entire piece and can help that individual make the biggest impact.

Meyers' accolades include directing off-Broadway at The York Theatre Company such as Marsha Norman's "Traveler in the Dark" and James McClure's "Max and Maxie." Other projects include casting for PBS, CBS, BBC, HBO, MTM, Paramount and MGM. Her favorite feature credit was serving as location casting director of Academy Award winning "The Shawshank Redemption." She

has directed throughout the U.S. and Canada. Throughout her decades-long career, Meyers continues to return to where it all started—home in Cincinnati.

Meyers' role at Ensemble Theatre allows her to stay true to her passion and keep a pulse on Cincinnati's growing filmmaking industry. Auditions will be held at Ensemble Theatre at 1127 Vine Street. "It's open to anyone who may consider themselves to have a disability," Meyers explains. "There is no experience required and allows those who audition to be considered for future casting roles." Auditions are by appointment from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., but will be extended as needed. Audition videos may be sent to Meyers at lmeyers@ensemblecincinnati.org.



Actress and model Jamie Brewer and Film Director and Producer, Zo Wesson in 2017

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**PEOPLE WITH
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⌘ EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

PLANNING A PICTURE-PERFECT EXPERIENCE

WITH CELEBRITY EVENT PLANNER JULIAN FORD

They say there are dreamers and planners in this world, and planners make dreams come true.

Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival creative and chief experience director, Kate Siahaan-Rigg, says that couldn't be more true of Julian Ford, the celebrity event planner she brought on board to make the Film Festival's event dreams a reality.

"I came in last year working directly with Kate on some pre-screening events as well as the opening and closing night parties. Kate and I have known each other as colleagues in the arts and as friends who once lived in the same building in Hollywood," Ford shares. "We have always informally consulted each other on whatever we are working on individually. So, when she began working with Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival, we saw this as an opportunity to combine our skillsets to create one-of-a-kind experiences with a bit of Hollywood flair for the Cincinnati audience."

Ford has been a chef and party planner in Los Angeles for more than two decades, preparing experiences for well-known clients like Elizabeth Taylor, the Kardashians, Pink and the Obamas. "In that time, I have learned that the bottom line is to make memorable, surprising experiences by looking at the details," he says. "How the lights in the room create a vibe, how the food looks arranged on the platters, what bespoke touches we can add that make each event unique."

But no matter the client or budget, Ford says it always comes down to everyone feeling special and taken care of. "This

is especially true for the Film Festival events," Siahaan-Rigg adds. "Because these are unique and incredible untold stories, we want everyone seeing the films and attending the events to get the feeling that every body is important, vital, and part of the human story."

Ford says they do that by making the food delicious, the entertainment excellent and the rooms feel alive with the excitement of a high-end film festival. "I want people coming in the room to feel just as fabulous and special as people walking into a party I created for Paris Hilton or Ben Affleck," he says.

For this year's event, Ford has a premier opening night gala planned. "I am using some design elements inspired by film awards ceremonies I have designed in Hollywood. We are bringing in some musical talent from New York City as well as an inspiring group of speakers for the stage program," he shares. "The setting at Cincinnati Music Hall is both historical and grand which I think gives this event the real 'gala' feel we were looking for."

Ford says the closing night party and awards ceremony, held at the Woodward Theater, will have a more traditional feel.

"We'll still have some really unique and wow-factor touches though, from the music and entertainment, to the local eats and a cool DJ spinning," he explains.

While he's based in Hollywood, Ford has made several visits to Cincinnati over the past year to DO site tours of all the venues and make sure each one feels as magical as possible. "It's that feeling when you



"I WANT PEOPLE COMING IN THE ROOM TO FEEL JUST AS FABULOUS AND SPECIAL AS PEOPLE WALKING INTO A PARTY I CREATED FOR PARIS HILTON OR BEN AFFLECK," HE SAYS.



first walk in; it has to be just right," he says. "I am also choosing the menu and decor for 'Breakfast with tt' on Friday morning."

For "Breakfast with tt," Siahaan-Rigg says the vision is a morning talk show feel where the audience get exclusive insight. "We want them to get this really behind-the-scenes look at films, film making and of course our artistic director tt sternenzi," she adds. "It is a special way to give the audiences a way to break bread with industry people and filmmakers and to be part of the festival buzz!"

For this year's events, the Festival is focused on quality rather than quantity, Ford says. "We're making sure the events on the calendar are incredibly fun and exciting to be at," he adds. "My hope is to entice everyone to really participate in the Festival, which honestly is like no



other in the nation. Even though it is an international film festival, I really want to emphasize the flavor of Cincinnati with local artists, chefs, and vendors contributing to the overall experience." Ford says he wanted to be a part of Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival again because it's centered around sharing and discovering untold stories that you don't normally hear in Hollywood. "There's a real emphasis on giving everyone a chance to speak their truth and be embraced in it," he says. "We all deserve to be heard and to feel supported in our lives. I love working with this community and in the city of Cincinnati to support the Film Festival's vision for a kinder, more inclusive world."

To learn more (and snag your tickets to) upcoming Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival events, visit otrffilmfest.org/events-and-parties.

LOTUSSHARK, SIRI IMANI PRODUCE IMPACTFUL SHORT FILM FOR LADD

“Once you realize how things used to be for people with developmental disabilities, the power of LADD is so dynamic,” says Aymie Majerski, owner of LotusShark.

When LotusShark was asked to produce a short film for LADD, the team got truly inspired and fully engaged. Knowing that the film would be making its debut at Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival, which is organized by LADD, set the stage for a thrilling creative process.

“LotusShark is a woman-owned, creative media studio that is very selective about the projects with which we engage. We’ve been working with LADD for several years and we love it. What LADD provides the community is so very important,” Majerski adds. “We’ve done several video projects with them over the years, but this year we were given the opportunity to step outside of the box and we wanted to create something different, something with long-lasting impact.”

Through archival video and audio, as well as spoken word and cinematic imagery, Majerski says her team created a short film that searches yesterday to understand today and offer hope for tomorrow.

“We want people to feel inspired and empowered knowing that we ALL belong,” explains LotusShark production manager, Shannon St. George. “We want viewers to understand the power of this community and feel motivated to join in building an inclusive world.”

“LADD trusted our vision and approved a concept even if it felt a bit outside of their comfort zone,” St. George says. “This year’s piece now feels like a thought-provoking art film, rather than a typical promo video. We are so proud to be a part of this work.”

Part of the excitement for this project centers around a collaboration with Siri Imani, one of Cincinnati’s most prolific arts curators and hip hop artists, known for her spoken word poetry.

“Imani is a well-known poet and musician. We were lucky enough to bring her in for this project,” says Majerski. “She wrote the script for this spoken word film. It’s a beautiful, metaphorical piece with themes of empowerment, individuality, diversity, inclusivity, disability awareness and acceptance — with the tagline that brings it all together: ‘We All Belong.’ I truly believe that Imani’s words and LotusShark’s visuals will have a significant impact on the audience and will gain much-deserved recognition for LADD.”

These themes personally resonate with Imani, who was once on course to be a professional athlete. After experiencing severe health issues, she reinvented herself into an artist.

“I was down, and I really had time to think through everything. I could have definitely died. And I wouldn’t have had any type of legacy at all,” she recalls. “So, it changed even the purpose of writing for me. It was like ‘I really need to do something with my life,’ because that was so scary.” This project is particularly important to Imani as her words were inspired by her little brother who is her “why.”

CELEBRATING THE HUMAN SPIRIT.



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A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

OPENING NIGHT GALA JULY 6 AT MUSIC HALL

Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival, organized by LADD, officially kicks-off on July 6 with a star-studded Opening Night Gala at Cincinnati Music Hall.

At LADD, the goal is to provide the dignity of adulthood through housing, health and wellness, day programs, employment, and advocacy. “We envision a world where all can pursue their best life,” says Molly Lyons, film festival director.

And, everyone will be living their best life at the Opening Night Gala, coordinated by celebrity event planner Julian Ford, who regularly plans events for a-list celebrities such as the Kardashians and Beyonce. The event will be hosted by stars of Woody Harrelson’s “Champions,” including Madison Tevlin and Kevin Lannucci. The stars of the opening night film, “OKAY! The ASD Band Film” will also perform live!

“I am stoked that we are doing the festival launch gala at the gorgeous Cincinnati Music Hall, planned by my colleague and party planner to the stars Julian Ford,” says Kate Siahaan-Rigg, creative chief experience director for Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival. “It is already on its way to being sold out and is going to be a rip-roaring night of music, great food, films and incredible special guests from the worlds of television and film.”

Even the performers playing the cocktail hour and intro section of the night are impressive, Siahaan-Rigg says. “They’re two recent Juilliard

grads who call themselves ARKAI, one with family in Cincinnati. They play out of this world electric violin and cello,” she explains. “One of these guys will probably win an Oscar for original music. It’s exciting to share these bright young stars with our audience for the night!”

The Opening Night Gala isn’t the only star-studded party of the film festival. Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival will also host a full schedule of screenings and parties with celebrity drop-ins, food and drink, filmmaker forums and live performances with singers, musicians, poets, comedians and dancers. There’s something for everyone at one of the world’s coolest film festivals. One of the top 25 coolest to be exact, according to MovieMaker Magazine.

Tickets for the Opening Night Gala, while they’re still available, can be purchased at otrilmfest.org/special_event/opening-night-gala.

You can also purchase tickets for screenings and other events being held throughout the course of the Festival at otrilmfest.org/tickets.



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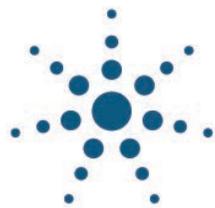
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