

AMI SHORT CUT :THE REEL ABILITIES FILM FESTIVAL

Transcribed by: AMI

ANNOUNCER: Here's Victoria and Anthony with an AMI This Week shortcut.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: So Victoria, earlier this month was the ReelAbilities Film Festival.

Did you get a chance to check out any films or events?

VICTORIA NOLAN: Unfortunately, I did not. And you know what? I was so excited hearing about it coming up, and I just didn't get around to going. But I am fully behind everything it stands for – Canadian and international shorts, documentaries and features about the deaf and disability community, by those communities.

Well, the film festival made its way to Canada in 2016, making Toronto the first official international chapter. This year the Toronto Bureau team and I made our way to the opening night to catch up with several of those involved, including the Minister of Science, Sports and Persons with Disabilities, the honourable Kirsty Duncan.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: Headlining the opening night of ReelAbilities TO was a film titled, Keep the Change.

BRANDON POLANSKI: Who is the new initiate, and what's wrong with him?

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: Actor Brandon Polansky was on hand to explain why he wanted to be a part of this project.

BRANDON POLANSKI: The purpose of this film—it's just supposed to change the way we look at people on the autism spectrum and stop painting these awful pictures of us as if we're a bunch of... I don't know, like a bunch of ugly people that should date other ugly people, or we can do it. We just have to settle and accept it. We never have to accept it. That's why we made a film like this.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: The film, written and directed by Rachael Israel, explores a love story between two individuals who met in a support group with Brandon as the male lead playing David, and Samantha Elisofon as Sarah. The film is charming, witty, and heartwarming

SAMANTHA ELISOFON: What would you like to talk about?

BRANDON POLANSKI: I love the Brooklyn Bridge.

SAMANTHA ELISOFON: That sounds wonderful.

BRANDON POLANSKI: We can both jump off the bridge.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: Keep the Change was just one of the many films on the docket at ReelAbilities TO, but there were many more fantastic films showcasing talented artists with disabilities. The Honourable Kirsty Duncan, Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities addressed all those in the attendance at the screening.

KIRSTY DUNCAN: I think we should all be so proud that our city is hosting this. And let's hope this spreads across Canada.

[Applause]

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: Following her address, Minister Duncan emphasized how important the festival is to the fabric of Toronto and Canada.

KIRSTY DUNCAN: This is just absolutely tremendous tonight. I hope Toronto is coming out to watch because Canada is at its best and society is at its best, when everyone is included.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: ReelAbilities is focused on integrating the represented communities in many ways at the festival.

Several community members got involved as volunteers. One of those volunteers is Ben Clement.

He shared his thoughts on the importance of ReelAbilities.

BEN CLEMENT: It's a really inspiring experience and it's a really unique festival that you don't always get a chance to see movies about deaf people or people with disabilities.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: Ben's not just a volunteer, however. He's also an actor who just landed his first lead role in an upcoming theatre production called The All Abilities Tree. Another volunteer, Effie Biliris, is excited to watch as many films as possible because of the variety they offer.

EFFIE BILIRIS: They all come in different forms of disabilities, and I think all of them have their own encouragement behind it.

I think the one thing I'm really excited about is the one about deaf culture. Coming from a person with a hearing aid, they don't really show that in the media and that's a good way to bring it out.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: Effie also thinks this festival has a lot to offer both persons with and without disabilities.

EFFIE BILIRIS: It's a great way to explore your options and to open your mind up, especially if you don't know about disability and what people can do in here. It's a great way to show the outside end of it, and I think it's a great inspiration.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: Toronto is very fortunate. It is the first international location to hold the chapter of the ReelAbilities Film Festival. This is its third year in Toronto, but as Minister Duncan points out, it could be just the beginning for the festival within Canada.

KIRSTY DUNCAN: Wouldn't it be wonderful if it spreads across the country and to highlight persons, to portray persons with disabilities and films by persons with disabilities? And to highlight and celebrate and promote the contributions that they make to Canadian society and around the world.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: How great are those volunteers? They were so energetic and involved. Everyone I spoke to said they'd be back for years to come.

VICTORIA NOLAN: Well, hopefully in the coming years, the festival continues to grow across the country.

ANTHONY MCLACHLAN: Absolutely. If you'd like to know more about the ReelAbilities Film Festival, you can find them online at reelabilities.org. That's reel spelled R, E, E, L.