

LIVE UNITEDGreater Milwaukee
& Waukesha County

The 2016 Milwaukee Film Festival

Films that reference and reflect United Way's areas of impact:
Education, Health, Income + Community

10 Billion - What's On Your Plate? (d. Valentin Thurn)

Program: FILM FEAST

By the year 2050, Earth's human population will reach 10 billion. This begs a sobering question: How are we going to feed such a multitude of mouths? Taking a broad view of the future of food production and distribution, *10 Billion: What's on Your Plate?* is a bracing call to action that is perfect for fans of docs such as *Food Inc.* Covering the ethics and best practices of food sustainability moving forward, the film takes us on a globe-trotting journey that highlights the perils (the hazards of genetic modification) and possibilities (featuring Milwaukee's own Growing Power) that lie ahead of us. (pg. 60)

Tags: *Health*

11:55 (d. Ari Issler and Ben Snyder)

Program: UNITED STATES OF CINEMA

Marine veteran Nelson Sanchez should be happy. Honorably discharged and finally back home within his Dominican community of Newburgh, New York, he appears set to start anew. But the life he left behind has come back to haunt him in the form of a rival arriving by bus, five minutes before midnight, in search of revenge for his fallen brother. Tired of trading one violent environment for another, Nelson must take a stand if he is to survive the night—even if nobody stands beside him. (pg. 74)

Tags: *Community*

Almost Sunrise (d. Michael Collins) [CENTERPIECE SCREENING]

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

When Milwaukee-based veterans Tom Voss and Anthony Anderson returned home from Iraq, they didn't expect their debilitating battles with depression and anxiety to prove every bit as life-threatening as the war zones they left behind. In an effort to help mend the emotional scars and moral injury (a term used by mental health professionals to describe the psychological wounds opened when someone is made to go against their deeply ingrained sense of right and wrong) they've sustained and put their pasts behind them, the two men set out on an extraordinary journey—a 2,700-mile trek on foot across America, starting off in Milwaukee and ending in California. Along the way they'll run into many who support their journey, veterans willing to share their painful experiences, and even an American-Indian shaman who offers them spiritual advice. An inspiring and intimate portrait of two men who journey on behalf of the mental health of fellow veterans, *Almost Sunrise* moves beyond the merely palliative and seeks to heal those who struggle so mightily in their return to domestic life. With suicide rates among veterans at near-epidemic levels (one veteran commits suicide nearly every hour), a documentary that offers the potential for hope to veterans in need of just such a message couldn't be more necessary. (pg. 31)

Tags: *Education, Health*

AWOL (d. Deb Shoval)

Program: UNITED STATES OF CINEMA

Aimless Joey (*Mistress America's* Lola Kirke in a finely calibrated performance) seeks escape from the small town of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and its meager economic opportunities. A visit to the Army recruiting office seems to offer the way out she seeks, but a chance encounter with slyly seductive housewife Rayna changes her trajectory irrevocably. As Joey falls ever more deeply in love with Rayna, clouded judgment leads her down a path she can't turn back from. *AWOL* (expanded from an award-winning 2011 Sundance short) is a tenderly realized lesbian romance that doesn't flinch from the harsh realities of small-town life on the poverty line. (pg. 74)

Tags: *Income*

Beware the Slenderman (d. Irene Taylor Brodsky)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

It was a local story that horrified the nation: two 12-year-old girls lure their friend into the Waukesha woods, where they proceed to stab her 19 times in an effort to appease a faceless mythical entity known online as the Slenderman. But there's much more to the story than its "evil" headlines. A sobering documentary that delves deep into the story behind this shocking crime, with heart-wrenching access to the young women's families, *Beware the Slenderman* examines how an urban legend, created whole cloth on the internet, could take root in impressionable young minds and lead to an unspeakable act. (pg. 54)

Tags: *Education, Health, Community***Burden of Peace (Paz y Paz)** (d. Joey Boink)

Program: CINE SIN FRONTERAS

Charting the entire tenure of Guatemala's first female attorney general, *Burden of Peace* is a remarkable portrait of one woman's steadfast battle for justice and human rights in the face of insurmountable odds. Operating in one of the world's most violent countries, Claudia Paz y Paz uses her fierce yet humble demeanor to yield immediate results. The prosecution rate leaps from 5% to 30% in year one, and she shockingly manages to convict Guatemala's former dictator on charges of genocide, but political corruption forces this Nobel Peace Prize nominee to flee her own country. Extraordinary access helps tell a story that defies belief. (pg. 40)

Tags: *Income, Community***Can You Dig This** (d. Delila Vallot)

Program: BLACK LENS

In South Los Angeles, one of the biggest food deserts in the country, the last thing you would expect to find is a beautiful garden sprouting up through the concrete urban landscape. This inspiring documentary follows the journey of four gardeners who are part of an urban gardening revolution taking root. Each of the film's subjects put their hands in the soil to transform their neighborhoods and change their own lives in the process. (pg. 37)

Tags: *Education, Income, Community***Check It** (d. Dana Flor and Toby Oppenheimer)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

Strength in numbers is what led to the creation of the "Check It," a Washington, D.C.-based street gang notable for being quite possibly the only exclusively queer gang in the United States. Tired of the bullying and hate crimes they're subjected to on a daily basis, these young people of color have banded together (now numbering over 200!), developing a fierce reputation for striking back at anyone foolish enough to attack one of their ranks. But some of the Check It's elder members see the need to move forward, pursuing their diverse passions (fashion, activism) in an attempt to break the cycle of violence. (pg. 54)

Tags: *Education, Health, Income, Community***City of Gold** (d. Laura Gabbert)

Program: FILM FEAST

L.A.'s Jonathan Gold remains the only food critic to have won a Pulitzer Prize, and his plaudits are well-earned. Combining immensely skilled writing alongside an insatiable appetite for knowledge and discovery, Gold opened a whole new deliciousness to those who would never have found it otherwise. Giving equal heft to taco trucks and strip-mall phở joints as he does to expensive, Michelin-starred restaurants, Gold has crafted a career out of exploring the far-flung and exotic, changing the lives of immigrant family restaurants with a stroke of his pen. A celebration of the uniquely diverse city of Los Angeles, *City of Gold* will satisfy your hunger for delicious documentary filmmaking. (pg. 61)

Tags: *Community*

Death by a Thousand Cuts (d. Juan Mejia Botero and Jake Kheel)

Program: CINE SIN FRONTERAS

Tension between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is near its boiling point, and the vicious murder of a Dominican park ranger just might be what sends it spilling over in this gripping documentary packed with breathtaking cinematography. On the two-country island of Hispaniola, a man is found dead in the Sierra de Bahoruco National Park at the hands of a machete similar to those used by Haitians who cross the border to illegally gather and produce charcoal, a practice that has led to mass deforestation. The discovery feeds into the rampant xenophobia and anti-immigration sentiment that pervade this environmental battle for scarce natural resources. (pg. 40)

Tags: *Education, Health, Income, Community***Death by Death** (d. Xavier Seron)

Program: COMPETITION

A hypochondriac mother/son duo fears the worst in this gorgeously stylized absurdist comedy from Belgium. Michel, an unsuccessful actor only moderately better as an appliance store employee, obsesses over death at the expense of enjoying life. Splitting his attention between a mother who refuses to move into an elder-care facility (she couldn't leave behind her phalanx of feline children, see) and a girlfriend with renewed interest in her more successful ex, Michel can barely find the time to tend to his own neuroses. Gorgeous black-and-white cinematography pairs with hilarious deadpan humor in this award-winning, off-kilter comedy. (pg. 46)

Tags: *Health***The Demons** (d. Philippe Lesage)

Program: COMPETITION

Ten-year-old Felix spends the majority of his existence in late-'80s suburban Montreal living in a near-constant state of fear: fear that his parents are breaking up, fear of somehow contracting AIDS, and fear most of all of the horrible rumors surrounding the recent rash of child disappearances. Told with the icy calm and stylistic reserve of Michael Haneke, *The Demons* crafts an "atmosphere of permanent unease" (*The Hollywood Reporter*) that places you in the paranoid mind-set of a young child whose limited understanding exists at the intersection of "fevered imagination and nightmarish reality" (*Variety*). (pg. 47)

Tags: *Health***Embers** (d. Claire Carré)

Program: CINEMA HOOLIGANTE

A stunning sci-fi vision of an apocalyptic future where mankind has been ravaged by a neurological disorder that has eroded both our short- and long-term memory, *Embers* announces the arrival of a distinctive cinematic voice in director Claire Carré. A man and woman wake in each other's arms with no memory of who or where they are, an abandoned child seeks adult protection, and a father and daughter live in a sealed bunker, memories intact but fraying under the pressure of their isolation. This film is a thoughtful rumination on how memory shapes us, as these disparate people try to exist in the present despite their forgotten past. (pg. 42)

Tags: *Health, Community***The Empire of Scents** (d. Kim Nguyen)

Program: FILM FEAST

A kaleidoscopic journey into one of our most mysterious and powerful senses, this film by director Kim Nguyen (*War Witch*, MFF13) guides us through a wide variety of smells, immersing us in a world of scent and exploring how different aromatic bouquets are able to conjure vivid memories, delectable tastes, and deeply ingrained experiences. We meet chefs, sommeliers, and perfumers all in search of the elusive aromas that will truly set their products apart, as well as a woman whose sense of smell was taken from her in the aftermath of a freak accident. These disparate elements all combine to help us delve into the secrets behind the essential sense of scent. (pg. 61)

Tags: *Health*

The Fits (d. Anna Rose Holmer)

Program: COMPETITION

An astonishing work that tackles the liminal phase between childhood and adolescence, with all the confusion and exuberance that it entails, *The Fits* is an ethnography of the young that will appeal to anyone who's ever operated on the periphery. Prepubescent Toni (newcomer Royalty Hightower in an amazing turn) spends her days training alongside her brother in his all-male boxing gym while cautiously observing the female dance team The Lionesses perfect their intricate dance routine nearby. Finally mustering the courage to sign up for the squad, Toni witnesses her teammates being stricken by mysterious convulsive spells that defy explanation. Told with the visual confidence of a veteran filmmaker with superbly naturalistic performances, this deft balance of the strange and joyous is certain to cast a spell. (pg. 47)

Tags: *Education, Health, Income, Community***Five Nights in Maine** (d. Maris Curran)

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

Sherwin (*Selma's* David Oyelowo) is in a tailspin; his wife, suddenly lost in a tragic car accident, encouraged him to connect with her cancer-stricken mother (the great Dianne Wiest) in one of their last conversations. Despite his reservations, grief-stricken Sherwin makes his way into the Maine woods to connect with a woman who previously disapproved of him, only to find himself trapped in an echo chamber of resentment and anguish. An electric chamber drama that generates the kind of frisson that can only occur when two great actors square off against one another, *Five Nights in Maine* is a sensitive portrait of love, loss, and companionship, eschewing melodrama in the face of understated naturalism. (pg. 32)

Tags: *Health***Free to Run** (d. Pierre Morath)

Program: SPORTSBALL!

Charting the transition of long-distance running from its origin on the margins of society to the universal passion it has become today, *Free to Run* is a globe-trotting journey through the history of putting feet to pavement. Originally reserved for men in stadium settings, modern long-distance running only admitted women in the '60s. Featuring a veritable who's who of the field, including the famed Steve Prefontaine and Kathrine Switzer, the first woman to officially run the Boston Marathon, *Free to Run* is a captivating and perfectly paced documentary. (pg. 72)

Tags: *Health, Community***From Mass to the Mountain** (d. Kurt Sensenbrenner and Colin Sytsma)

Program: CREAM CITY CINEMA

Eastern Panama finds itself in dire straits—impoverished and struggling to combat the government corruption that has left citizens decimated by drought and a contaminated water supply, people here are in desperate need of assistance. Enter Ripon, Wisconsin's own Father Wally Kasuboski. Dubbed "Padre Pablo" by the Panamanian locals, he has dedicated 28 years of his life toward developing the infrastructure necessary to bring drinking water to this rural community. An inspiring story of one man's tireless efforts to bring succor to an exploited people, *From Mass to the Mountain* is the moving story of a Wisconsinite who has embraced a new home and is passionately working to improve it. (pg. 50)

Tags: *Education, Health, Income, Community***Generation Startup** (d. Cheryl Miller Houser and Cynthia Wade)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

With entrepreneurship at an all-time low in America (even more so in areas struck by economic turmoil), it's going to take young, hardworking people willing to sacrifice it all in order to make their dreams a reality for us to turn things around. And six recent college graduates are looking to do just that in Detroit, with an effort to utilize startup culture as a means of urban renewal. We follow these passionate individuals over the course of 17 months through setbacks, successes, hopes, and despair as they attempt to transform their post-industrial Rust Belt location into a high-tech haven of innovation. (pg. 55)

Tags: *Education, Income*

Ghostland (d. Simon Stadler)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

The Ju/'hoansi Bushmen of Namibia, one of the most ancient extant cultures on our planet, are being forced to change: Prohibited from the hunt that had previously sustained them and penned into fixed housing away from their nomadic lifestyle, they are now dependent on government assistance and adventurous tourists who treat them as attractions in order to survive. What begins as a fascinating culture clash with a radically non-Western culture escalates when members of the Ju/'hoansi travel to Europe and take in this encroaching world of plenty. *Ghostland* affords us a fascinating (and funny!) opportunity to see ourselves from the outside, thanks to these once-remote peoples. (pg. 55)

Tags: *Education, Income, Community***God Knows Where I Am** (d. Jedd Wider and Todd Wider)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

An unidentified homeless woman is found dead in an abandoned New Hampshire farmhouse. Lying next to her is a diary that documents her final months in isolation, as she survived only on scavenged apples and rainwater. A documentary that unfurls a delicate mystery that doubles as an anguished elegy, *God Knows Where I Am* is a sensitively rendered portrait of someone who could all too easily be relegated to the fringes of society. Instead, we are brought into this harrowing yet beautiful story whose scope expands to include our country's mental health services without ever losing sight of the heartrending perspective at its center. (pg. 55)

Tags: *Health, Income***Halfway** (d. Ben Caird)

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

The good news for Byron (*The Blind Side's* Quinton Aaron) is that he's being released from jail on parole. The bad news, however, is twofold. One, he's being sent to rural Wisconsin to work on a relative's struggling farm, where he will be the only black resident—a fact not lost on his inhospitable neighbors. Secondly, the drug dealers in the life he left behind aren't going to give him up so easily. A story of the possibility of redemption and the power of perseverance in the face of small-town discrimination, *Halfway* is a beautifully photographed, suspenseful, and moving drama made in our very own Montfort, Wisconsin. (pg. 32)

Tags: *Income, Community***HAPPY: A Small Film With A Big Smile** (d. Michael Patrick McKinley)

Program: CREAM CITY CINEMA

Visual artist Leonard "Porkchop" Zimmerman could have given in to the darkness that encroached on him from all sides following the untimely passing of his partner, Brian, to illness. Instead, he chose to channel his grief into art, creating numerous paintings of robots involved in exploits that run the gamut from mundane to profound. Out of this grew the "Happy" campaign, the robot drawing that became a worldwide phenomenon as a colorful reminder of the transformational power of embracing joy. *HAPPY* is an irresistible and inspirational portrait of one man's journey through the storm in order to share with us the sunshine he found on the other side. (pg. 51)

Tags: *Health, Community***Home Care** (d. Slávek Horák)

Program: WORLDVIEWS

Vlasta has spent the majority of her adult life tending to others. Whether it's the numerous stops she makes along the Czech countryside in her role as a home nurse or at home, where her retired husband, Lada, spends his days tinkering in the garage, she has happily placed others ahead of herself. But a chance encounter reveals that Vlasta will need to be taken care of, an unexpected shift in family dynamics that leads Vlasta down a touching road of self-discovery. A compassionate and tender village dramedy about a woman's pursuit of meaning in her life, *Home Care* was the Czech Republic's official entry for the 2016 Oscars. (pg. 77)

Tags: *Health*

Hooligan Sparrow (d. Nanfu Wang)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

A daring documentary filmmaker teams up with an infamous activist to uncover rampant sexual abuse in the Chinese school system in this harrowing work of undercover reportage. In China, the penalty for rape is death, whereas the punishment for child prostitution is a prison sentence, a loophole that allows for rampant sexual abuse so long as the offender claims to have paid for it. Luckily, activist/provocateur Ye Haiyan (a.k.a. "Hooligan Sparrow") refuses to remain silent in the face of injustice. Activist and filmmaker band together to brave government interrogation, secret-police encounters and mob intimidation, all in the hopes that this precious video footage can somehow make it out of China intact. (pg. 55)

Tags: **Health****In Pursuit of Silence** (d. Patrick Shen)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

Our everyday lives are steeped in noise, from the vehicles on our streets to the multitude of tiny screens that dominate our lives, but there is a need for rest and quiet in the 21st century, and it may just be a medical necessity. Starting with John Cage's seminal composition 4'33" and introducing us to far-flung pockets of silence and contemplation the world over (a Japanese Zen temple, Alaska's Denali National Park), *In Pursuit of Silence* is a remarkable sensory experience filled with unforgettable visuals and immersive sound design that demand to be seen and heard on the big screen. (pg. 56)

Tags: **Health****Jim: The James Foley Story** (d. Brian Oakes)

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

While all Americans became familiar with the grisly end of freelance journalist James Foley (kidnapped in Syria in 2012, publicly executed by ISIS two years later), few are familiar with the personal story of this Marquette graduate and his devotion to covering stories in some of the most dangerous parts of the world. This is a deeply personal and emotionally powerful tribute to a life fully lived, with family and friends providing testament to the selfless and courageous man Foley was while fellow prisoners reveal the harrowing chronicle of his captivity and his incredible attempts at helping those around him even in his final days. (pg. 32)

Tags: **Community****KEDİ** (d. Ceyda Torun)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

In the glittering jewel that is Istanbul, the cat population occupies a very special place in the city dweller's heart: not strays and not housebound, cats here number in the hundreds of thousands. They wander freely through the streets, scaling walls and interacting with humans who adore and revere them. After all, as one documentary subject succinctly puts it, cats embody "the indescribable chaos, the culture, and the uniqueness that is Istanbul." Whether you want a fascinating glimpse into an ancient city, an examination into what makes us fall in love with animals, or simply to ogle adorable cats, *KEDİ* is your cinematic catnip. (pg. 56)

Tags: **Community****Keepers of the Game** (d. Judd Ehrlich)

Program: SPORTSBALL!

When the girls' lacrosse team of Salmon River High takes the field for the sectional championships, it's far more than their cross-town rivals they're facing down: history (seeking to become the first all-Native girls squad to win it all), misogyny (lacrosse began as a solely male tradition in Native culture), and even apathy (their own small-town community appears ambivalent regarding their success and is cutting funding for girls' lacrosse after the season) all stand in the way of these remarkable teenage girls. Exciting game footage and moving personal portraits combine to take you along on the team's inspiring ride to the championship game. (pg. 73)

Tags: **Education, Community**

Kings of Nowhere (d. Betzabé García)

Program: CINE SIN FRONTERAS

The small Northern Mexican hamlet of San Marcos has become a ghost town following the construction of a dam that turned the once-thriving town into a drowned village. But a few families remain to stand sentry over the eerily quiet terrain, including an elderly couple who speak in hushed tones regarding gangs that take to their waterlogged streets at night and a shop owner who remains open if only to feed a cow whose pasture has become an island unto itself. A quiet, visually entrancing elegy (winner of the 2015 SXSW Audience Award), *Kings of Nowhere* is a mesmerizing documentary about a town all but forgotten. (pg. 41)

Tags: *Income, Community***Lamb** (d. Yared Zeleke)

Program: WORLDVIEWS

Forced to move in with distant relatives on a South Ethiopian mountainside while his father seeks employment, young Ephraim struggles to fit in, with only his late mother's lamb to provide him comfort. Unsited for the rugged farm work his uncle Solomon demands of him, Ephraim finds solace in the kitchen, cooking alongside the women of the house. When Solomon demands that Ephraim's beloved lamb be prepared to feed his family, help comes from the unlikelyst of places: Solomon's headstrong oldest daughter. Framed by absolutely gorgeous mountainside scenery, *Lamb* is a coming-of-age film that tells a simple story with unobtrusive beauty, drawing comparison to the masterful neorealist work of Satyajit Ray. (pg. 77)

Tags: *Education, Income, Community***The Land** (d. Steven Caple Jr.)

Program: BLACK LENS

Executive Producer Nas presents this vivid inner-city saga set amidst Cleveland's skateboarding culture. During the day, Cisco and his group of friends videotape their daring skate stunts in the hopes of one day going pro. At night, they use them to pull off kinetic carjackings. But when they get mixed up in a drug deal and cross a ruthless queen-pin, they put their friendship—and lives—on the line. The film features an impressive cast that includes Michael K. Williams (Omar of *The Wire*), Erykah Badu, and Machine Gun Kelly. Set to a solid hip-hop soundtrack, *The Land's* engaging narrative and powerful performances match the music that sustains its energy and poetry. (pg. 37)

Tags: *Community***The Last Laugh** (d. Ferne Pearlstein)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

Can the Holocaust be funny? That's the query at the heart of this provocative documentary that asks a cavalcade of comedians (Mel Brooks, Sarah Silverman, Carl Reiner, and many more) and survivors how to solve for time in determining when tragedy can eventually turn into comedy. A host of pop culture clips (*The Great Dictator*, *The Producers*, *Seinfeld's* "Soup Nazi") and rare footage of cabaret shows inside of concentration camps show the potential (and lack thereof) of humor to heal cultural trauma. This moving doc shows that there are no easy answers to such a question, simply opportunities to think, to laugh, and to remember. (pg. 56)

Tags: *Health***The Legend of Swee' Pea** (d. Benjamin May)

Program: SPORTSBALL!

Lloyd "Swee' Pea" Daniels' journey to the NBA defies belief. A playground legend who became one of the most sought-after college prospects in hoops history, Daniels was caught in a police sting operation before he played a single game for UNLV. Later, a crack deal gone wrong saw him shot three times in the chest, yet somehow Daniels, with shrapnel still in his body, ended up playing for the San Antonio Spurs five years later. This amazing story, centered on a vulnerable personality who allows remarkable access to his life, transcends any simplistic notion of rags to riches with its tale of addiction and recovery. (pg. 73)

Tags: *Health*

Life, Animated (d. Roger Ross Williams) [OPENING NIGHT]

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

Owen Suskind was your traditional toddler: a playful, chatty bundle of energy and joy, curious about the world around him. But at the age of three he began a sudden withdrawal into himself that seemed irrevocable; he ceased to speak altogether, and his diagnosis of autism suggested little hope of ever retrieving the boy he once was. But then, a discovery: Armed with the knowledge that Owen spent untold hours watching and rewatching Disney films and memorizing the dialogue (preferring their comforting consistency over the ever-changing real world), his father donned an Iago (the parrot sidekick from *Aladdin*) hand puppet and asked Owen what it was like to be him, thus beginning a powerful journey of rediscovery for a young man who learns to cope with the help of some of his animated friends. Any lover of film can attest to the power a great movie has to reshape our views and make sense of a chaotic world, but few would imagine a story as incredible as this one told here by Oscar-winning director Roger Ross Williams (*God Loves Uganda*). Whether you are a Disney fan or not, there is no doubt you will be moved by this story of a young man's courage to face the world alongside his steadfast family, a charming reminder that sometimes the simplest solution is best. (pg. 30)

Tags: **Health**

Little Boxes (d. Rob Meyer)

Program: UNITED STATES OF CINEMA

An interracial couple (*True Blood*'s Nelsan Ellis as a jazz-loving novelist/food critic and the always great Melanie Lynskey as a photographer/art professor with a newly acquired tenure-track position) moves across the country from Brooklyn to the suburbs of Washington state, uprooting their preteen son from his comfortable existence and dropping him into the center of a "sea of white." This tight-knit family struggles to adapt to their starkly different surroundings, striving to understand themselves and one another in this dramedy that "gently touches on issues of race, class and privilege" (*Variety*) while aided by winning central performances and an understated approach. (pg. 75)

Tags: **Community**

Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise (d. Rita Coburn-Whack and Bob Hercules)

Program: BLACK LENS

A genuine American icon receives the moving and personal portrait she so richly deserves in *Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise*. The film focuses on Angelou's prolific accomplishments and allows her to tell her life story in her own words. Co-directed by MFF2011 alum Bob Hercules (*A Good Man*), this documentary spotlights her career, relationships, causes, and the obstacles she overcame in her ascension towards luminary status. (pg. 37)

Tags: **Education, Income**

Milwaukee 53206: A Community Serves Time (d. Keith McQuirter)

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

53206: a Milwaukee ZIP code where 62% of the adult men who live in it have spent time behind bars. A character-driven, immersive ensemble helps tell the stories behind the statistic, showing the effects mass incarceration has on the hearts and minds of those left behind. These stories are sensitively brought to us, showing the familiar human, domestic faces behind what is so often used as simply a talking point. This encore presentation to our world premiere of the film back in June will be followed by a moderated onstage panel discussion, one that should prove especially resonant to local audiences. (pg. 33)

Tags: **Education, Health, Income, Community**

Miss Sharon Jones! (d. Barbara Kopple)

Program: SOUND VISION

Sharon Jones is no stranger to adversity: Blessed with a voice that crackles like a thunderbolt from the heavens, she rose to stardom in the world of soul music at an age when most musicians would've given up. But at the peak of her fame, her career is put on hold when she's informed that she has pancreatic cancer. Two-time Oscar winner Barbara Kopple (*Harlan County, U.S.A.*) brings us the personal story of Sharon's recovery, as she struggles to hold onto her band The Dap-Kings and make a triumphant return to the stage, determined to come out the other side of her diagnosis as a soul survivor. (pg. 69)

Tags: **Health**

Mom and Me (d. Ken Wardrop)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

Oklahoma City—recently declared "the manliest city in the United States"—sets the scene for this moving doc that shows the only things stronger than these tough guys are their mothers. We listen in as men call in to local radio program *The Joe Show* to provide tribute to the powerful women who shaped them into the men they are today, all the while looking into the various unique bonds between mother and son, be they strong (a disabled man and his overprotective mother) or weakening (the son struggling with his mother's Alzheimer's). The stories compiled are emotional, frequently hilarious, subtly beautiful, and always touching. (pg. 56)

Tags: **Health, Community****Morris from America** (d. Chad Hartigan) [CLOSING NIGHT]

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

Morris (newcomer Markees Christmas in a breakout performance) is dealing with all of the normal problems a boy entering his teenage years faces: feelings for girls, struggling to make friends, concerns about where he fits in the world. These issues are compounded by his status as the only African-American student in his new residency of Heidelberg, Germany, thanks to his single father's (*The Office* and *Hot Tub Time Machine's* Craig Robinson) newly acquired job. With his well-meaning father and protective German instructor (Carla Juri, *Wetlands*, MFF2014) as the only friends he has, Morris relies on his love of hip-hop music (penning bars whenever the opportunity presents itself) to help him cope with his outsider status. When Morris catches the eye of 15-year-old Katrin (an older woman!), things seem to be looking up, even though he'll still have to learn to be comfortable with himself before he can connect with his peers. Director Chad Hartigan (*This Is Martin Bonner*, MFF2013) tells this fish-out-of-water/coming-of-age story with youthful energy and verve to spare, paying careful consideration to the delicate father/son relationship at its center and allowing his talented performers to nail their respective roles in this irresistibly funny and sweet crowd-pleaser. (pg. 31)

Tags: **Education****Motley's Law** (d. Nicole N. Horanyi)

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Marquette graduate Kimberley Motley travels far from her husband and three kids to become the only American lawyer licensed to practice in Afghanistan. While the whip-smart Motley would be the first to admit that she initially did so for the money, she has since become motivated by seeking justice for the human rights cases on her docket, working to untangle the gnarled hotbed of corruption that is local government in Afghanistan. But with the situation on the ground becoming more chaotic by the day, Motley must decide whether to continue to work or return to the family she misses so dearly. (pg. 33)

Tags: **Education, Community****National Bird** (d. Sonia Kennebeck)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

To say the U.S. government's deployment of predator drones has been controversial is an understatement. While the debate that rages here at home exists mostly on moral and theoretical grounds, *National Bird* unveils harsh realities, showing us the physical and emotional wreckage left behind by military drone attacks. Director Sonia Kennebeck present this insightful look into the U.S. drone program, interviewing victims who have been caught in the crossfire and three brave whistleblowers emboldened to speak out against the program and provide firsthand accounts of exactly what the deployments entail. It is a startling, comprehensive portrait of modern drone warfare and its implications. (pg. 57)

Tags: **Health**

Need for Meat (d. Marijn Frank)

Program: FILM FEAST

Are we addicted to meat? Director Marijn Frank is having a crisis of conscience: While she constantly desires meat and recognizes that it's delicious, she nonetheless is cognizant of the ethical and environmental concerns that meat consumption brings along with it. In order to make a final judgment on this matter (and looking to the future dietary habits of her young daughter), Frank listens to arguments from all sides: A therapist, a butcher, vegetarians, an addiction expert, and a meat-loving master chef all weigh in on this delectable dilemma while simultaneously exploring our primal relationship to meat. Warning: contains images of animal slaughter. (pg. 61)

Tags: *Health***Notes on Blindness** (d. James Spinney and Peter Middleton)

Program: COMPETITION

When academic/theologian John Hull lost the ability of sight, he quickly realized that he would have to come to terms with his blindness, lest it consume and destroy him. So he set about recording a unique testimony to his condition, a series of audio diaries described by neurologist and author Oliver Sacks as the "most deep, precise, and beautiful account of blindness I have ever read." With a goal no less daring than to express blindness in cinematic terms, *Notes on Blindness* provides a stunning translation of Hull's interior musings. It is an innovative tribute to a brilliant man whose reservoirs of wisdom and insight prove deeply affecting and utterly unforgettable. (pg. 48)

Tags: *Health***NUTS!** (d. Penny Lane)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

A rags-to-riches tale born of the restorative properties of goat testicles, *NUTS!* is a truly gonzo tale of America's past, perfect for fans of *Finders Keepers* (MFF2015). When "Dr." J.R. Brinkley started proselytizing his miracle cure for impotency (one involving the aforementioned testes), a gambit that rather unbelievably yielded results, it garnered him widespread popularity and a massive fortune—wealth he used to create the world's largest radio station, run as a write-in candidate for governor of Kansas, and evade every government restriction sent his way. The film is a tribute to the fine American tradition of hucksterism. (pg. 57)

Tags: *Health***Oddball** (d. Stuart McDonald)

Program: RATED K

If you ask the townspeople of Middle Island in Australia what the lovable white dog Oddball is good for, they'd probably tell you the destruction of city property. But it turns out this pup is very good at something else: protecting the dwindling fairy penguin population of a nearby sanctuary from the foxes that have them near extinction. A gentle comedy based on a true story, *Oddball* effortlessly weaves its environmentally conscious message into the body of a crowd-pleasing bit of family fare. Come for the adorable animals (seriously, Google "fairy penguins" right now—we'll wait), stay for the heartwarming story! (pg. 63)

Tags: *Education***Ovarian Psycos** (d. Joanna Sokolowski and Kate Trumbull-LaValle)

Program: CINE SIN FRONTERAS

Meet the Ovarian Psycos, a grassroots group of Chicanas who join together to ride their bicycles through the streets of Eastside Los Angeles, riding to reclaim their neighborhoods and heal themselves while also making the streets safer for women. Founded by single mother/poet MC Xela de la X, the Psycos impart their own brand of feminism through this act of DIY activism. Be sure to join the founder of Ovarian Psycos on a South Side bike ride to the screening of the documentary film. For more details, visit mkefilm.org/events. ¡Acompaña a la fundadora de Ovarian Psycos en un recorrido por el surside en bicicleta hacia el cine para ver la película documental! (pg. 41)

Tags: *Health, Income, Community*

The Peacemaker (d. James Demo)

Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

Irish expat Pdraig O'Malley is a living paradox. A soft-spoken, recovering alcoholic, he nevertheless owns a Boston pub. He's spent the better part of his adult life as an international peace broker, spearheading conflict resolution in some of the world's most troubled areas, including Northern Ireland, the Middle East and South Africa. Despite a career devoted to bringing people together, Pdraig has driven away those in his personal life. A human portrait of a superhuman work ethic, this character-driven crowd-pleaser follows a troubled soul through his day-to-day work as a global conflict negotiator. (pg. 58)

Tags: *Community***Phantom Boy** (d. Jean-Loup Felicioli and Alain Gagnol)

Program: RATED K

The team behind festival alum *A Cat in Paris* (MFF2011) is back with the extraordinary story of Leo, a young boy who discovers a remarkable superpower while receiving chemotherapy in a New York City hospital: the ability to leave his body, soaring above skyscrapers and through walls, for short periods of time. It comes not a moment too soon, either, as the evil Man With the Broken Face has designs on crippling the city—plans that only Leo can stop, alongside a plucky reporter and hapless detective. Telling this superheroic noir with the graphic novel aesthetic that powered the filmmakers' previous success, *Phantom Boy* is suitable for kids and wonderful for kids at heart. (pg. 63)

Tags: *Health***Presenting Princess Shaw** (d. Ido Haar)

Program: SOUND VISION

In this real-life Cinderella story, Samantha Montgomery cares for the elderly in New Orleans by day and, at night, takes to the stage at local open mics as the aspiring singer Princess Shaw. She also records soulful a cappella renditions of original compositions for a smattering of YouTube followers. Unbeknownst to her, in Israel, the enigmatic composer Kutiman was combining her stirring vocals on YouTube with a potpourri of crowd-sourced instrumentals, bringing one of her songs to life in a way that's about to go massively viral. This is an immensely powerful story of social media bringing disparate people together in a cross-cultural exchange that just happens to make a dream come true. (pg. 69)

Tags: *Health, Income***The Prison in Twelve Landscapes** (d. Brett Story)

Program: COMPETITION

There are more people currently imprisoned in the United States than in any other time or place in history, but instead of bringing focus to the penitentiaries, Brett Story's beautiful and meditative documentary focuses on the unseen consequences of the prison-industrial complex on the American landscape. Be it struggles of reintegration (a New York chess player unable to find work, Los Angeles parks built to ensure sex offenders cannot live nearby) or economics (a former inmate's care package material guaranteed to pass prison restrictions), this unconventional portrait has a cumulative power that challenges and informs the mind and heart. (pg. 48)

Tags: *Education, Health, Income, Community***Queen of Katwe** (d. Mira Nair)

Program: SPOTLIGHT PRESENTATIONS

Based on the inspiring true story of one young girl's journey from selling corn on the streets of rural Uganda to performing gambits against world-class chess opponents in international competition, *Queen of Katwe* is a peerless work of entertainment from beloved director Mira Nair (*Monsoon Wedding, Salaam Bombay!*). When young Phiona (Madina Nalwanga in her acting debut) is introduced to the sport of chess, it's immediately apparent she has a gift, and with the support of her coach (David Oyelowo), her family (Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o), and her rural community, she's given the confidence necessary to pursue her dream of becoming an international chess champion. (pg. 33)

Tags: *Education, Income, Community*

Rara (d. Pepa San Martín)
Program: CINE SIN FRONTERAS

Life is becoming hard for Sara in the aftermath of her parents' divorce. She and her little sister live with their mother and her new female partner while occasionally visiting their father and his new girlfriend plus her approaching 13th birthday has created a maelstrom of hormonal difficulties. Developing her first crush alongside her developing body while dealing with her father's pointed questions about her mother's new relationship proves too much to bear. *Rara* provides an empathetic portrait of growing up amidst the turmoil of a fast-changing conservative society. (pg. 41)

Tags: *Health*

REVZA (d. Emir Cakaroz) | **Naneek** (d. Neal Steeno)
Program: CREAM CITY CINEMA

Revza: UWM instructor/filmmaker Emir Cakaroz returns to his native Turkey to spend some quality time with his widowed mother. It is a poetic, observational portrait (capturing both the intimate and mundane) of not just the relationship between a mother and her son but also the life of a widow in a patriarchal society. *Naneek*: Vietnam veteran Tim Keenan returns to the land that has haunted him throughout all the intervening years. In search of peace of mind and forgiveness, he revisits the battleground of Dak To and meets with former enemies in order to acknowledge the humanity of the Vietnamese people he fought against. (pg. 52)

Tags: *Health*

Sand Storm (d. Elite Zexer)
Program: WORLDVIEWS

A psychologically astute family drama essaying the role of women in the male-dominated Bedouin society, *Sand Storm* took home the Grand Jury Prize at this year's Sundance in the World Cinema category. While Suliman has allowed a certain degree of independence for his oldest daughter, Layla (a cellphone, driving lessons, an education), he nonetheless has designs on marrying her off to a middle-aged man she doesn't know. Meanwhile, his wife Jalila must make preparations to welcome Suliman's second, much younger wife. Mother and daughter must both rebel against the strictures of society, each standing up for their individuality in different ways. (pg. 79)

Tags: *Income, Community*

Sonita (d. Rokhsareh Ghaem Maghami)
Program: SOUND VISION

While young Sonita Alizadeh's dreams will prove familiar to many audiences—she aspires to be a world-famous rapper and idolizes Rihanna—her circumstances are anything but: An illegal Afghan immigrant living in the suburbs of Tehran, she must navigate a veritable minefield of struggles in pursuit of her goal. As she pens bars that rail against the social injustice she witnesses as a young woman in Tehran, her aspirations take a critical hit when her mother reveals plans to bring her home and sell her as a bride to help provide for her family. A vitally important breath of cultural fresh air, *Sonita* won both the Audience Award and Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival. (pg. 70)

Tags: *Education, Income, Community*

Speed Sisters (d. Amber Fares)
Program: SPORTSBALL!

These street racers have cut their teeth on the toughest races in the West Bank, roaring through the breakneck pathways and hairpin turns of improvised tracks that comprise Palestine's makeshift motor circuit. But this group of five charismatic thrill-seekers is the Middle East's first all-women street racing team, making the women trailblazers both culturally and literally. Defying stereotypes and racking up wins in the male-dominated racing scene, they must overcome obstacles both physical and societal in order to pursue their high-octane passion. Thrilling and inspirational, *Speed Sisters* introduces new role models for Middle Eastern women. (pg. 73)

Tags: *Community*

A Stray (d. Musa Syeed)

Program: UNITED STATES OF CINEMA

This neorealist slice of life follows a young Somali Muslim refugee in Minnesota (played by Barkhad Abdirahman, so memorable in *Captain Phillips*) as he attempts to turn his life around. Parlaying his stay at a local mosque into a job as a food deliveryman, he accidentally hits a stray dog. Feeling responsible for the animal despite his religion's stance toward her as "impure," he once again finds himself out on the streets, trying to find a place both for himself and this unwanted creature. A nonsensationalized portrait of the Muslim immigrant experience with a sweet human/animal central relationship, this film offers a different perspective for a polarized world. (pg. 75)

Tags: *Income, Community***Sweet Bean** (d. Naomi Kawase)

Program: FILM FEAST

Sentaro spends his days crafting dorayaki (two small pancakes with a dollop of red bean paste in the middle) at his small food stand, but sparse patronage and his haunted demeanor show that something is missing. That something is discovered when the elderly Tokue responds to his "help wanted" ad with an edible resumé: homemade bean paste so good that lines begin to form around the block. *Sweet Bean* is a richly observed (and mouthwateringly filmed) story of an elderly woman imparting her wisdom to a man in desperate need, an act that shows the power of food and tradition to bring people together. (pg. 61)

Tags: *Health, Income***Tanna** (d. Martin Butler and Bentley Dean)

Program: WORLDVIEWS

A large active volcano isn't the only thing primed to explode on the remote South Pacific island of Tanna: after two warring tribes reach a detente by agreeing to marry the comely Wawa into the rival tribe to cease hostilities, Wawa runs into the forbidden forests to escape with her true love, Dain. Adroitly performed by nonprofessional actors who had never before seen a film, let alone a camera, telling a true story of the recent past that changed a region's customs and history, and filled throughout with breathtaking cinematography capturing the island's lush beauty, *Tanna* is a stirring tale of star-crossed lovers, Romeo and Juliet in a hidden corner of the world. (pg. 80)

Tags: *Community***There Are Jews Here** (d. Brad Lichtenstein and Morgan Johnson)

Program: CREAM CITY CINEMA

Director Brad Lichtenstein (*As Goes Janesville*, MFF12) tells a touching story of America's disappearing Jewish communities and the hardworking people striving to keep them intact and ensure that their cultural legacies are not lost. Come with us to Butte, Montana, Laredo, Texas, Dothan, Alabama (where a millionaire offers \$50,000 to families willing to relocate and join their dwindling populace), and Latrobe, Pennsylvania, as we witness more than 1 million American Jews living in small, once-thriving communities, bound together by faith and striving to keep the Jewish spirit alive. It offers a unique look into an underreported element of the Jewish-American experience. (pg. 52)

Tags: *Income, Community***These Daughters of Mine** (d. Kinga Debska)

Program: WORLDVIEWS

Two very different sisters must get over their mutual antipathy when both of their parents fall ill within a year in this Polish dramedy perfect for fans of *Terms of Endearment* and *The Descendants*. Marta is a headstrong actress starring in a popular TV series yet still unable to find her way in life. Her sister, Kasia, is a very different story, a sensitive people-pleaser with a loser husband always in search of work. Gradually, the two sisters begin to warm to one another as they encounter a number of tragicomic events in the course of caring for their ailing parents. (pg. 80)

Tags: *Health*

Two Trains Runnin' (d. Sam Pollard)
Program: BLACK LENS

In the summer of 1964, while hundreds of college students flooded into Mississippi to join the fight for civil rights (as seen in *Freedom Summer*, MFF2014), there were two groups of musicians and record collectors who also made their way to the South, seeking to discover the whereabouts of blues musicians Son House and Skip James and convince them to come out of retirement. Aided by strong performances of classic blues standards by contemporary musicians such as Gary Clark Jr. and Lucinda Williams, *Two Trains Runnin'* tracks the convergence of our political and cultural institutions during one fateful summer that changed the course of both music and American history. (pg. 38)

Tags: *Education, Income, Community*

Umrika (d. Prashant Nair)
Program: WORLDVIEWS

When Rama's (*Life of Pi* star Suraj Sharma) older brother, Udai, set out from their North Indian mountain village for the golden shores of "Umrika," it was a massive local event. And his letters from overseas, full of exotic details, were equally well received by all in the community. But when the letters stop arriving, Rama decides to follow the American dream for himself alongside his best friend (*The Grand Budapest Hotel*'s Tony Revolori), retracing Udai's steps to Bombay in hopes of finding his brother. This winning, '80s-set Indian indie (winner of a Sundance Audience Award) handles its comedy/drama balance with great warmth and exquisite detail. (pg. 80)

Tags: *Community*

Untouchable (d. David Feige)
Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

One of the year's smartest documentaries, *Untouchable* seeks to engage in an honest discussion surrounding our sex offender laws, peeling back the layers to reveal laws and punishments that may increase recidivism (by forcing numerous perpetrators into homelessness) instead of preventing it. Showing supreme sympathy for victims of sexual abuse while at the same time forcing us to walk in the shoes of offenders and become acquainted with their tortured humanity, *Untouchable* forces us to confront all sides of this issue, complicating any previously held positions while taking to task laws that fail to fully consider the ramifications of their continued existence. (pg. 58)

Tags: *Health, Income, Community*

The Violin Teacher (d. Sérgio Machado)
Program: CINE SIN FRONTERAS

Talented concert violinist Laerte has the opportunity of a lifetime: an audition for Sao Paulo's symphony orchestra. But he locks up, blowing his chance in spectacular fashion. Reeling from this rejection, he pivots into teaching music to children—specifically, the children of Heliopolis, Brazil's largest favela. Despite their hardscrabble existence, the kids prove enthusiastic pupils, desperate for the music therapy and arts education that provide a respite from the violence and poverty dominating their lives. Based on a remarkable true story, *The Violin Teacher* provides powerful uplift through its tale of the transformative power of music. (pg. 41)

Tags: *Education, Community*

The Wrong Light (d. Dave Adams and Josie Swantek Heitz)
Program: DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FAVORITES

Mickey Choothesa and his nonprofit Children's Organization of Southeast Asia (COSA) have been working to combat the sex-trafficking industry in Thailand, providing shelter and education for at-risk young women to ensure their safety. But as the filmmakers interview the families and young women who were saved by COSA, an unexpected narrative emerges that shows Mickey is not the altruistic savior he paints himself to be, and his exploitative actions only serve to harm efforts to end human trafficking. This absorbing documentary raises awareness about the global peril of human trafficking and shows the potential for NGOs to perpetrate fraud that exacerbates the very issues they're created to prevent. (pg. 58)

Tags: *Education, Health, Income, Community*

YARN (d. Una Lorenzen)

Program: ART & ARTISTS

Though the dual arts of crochet and knitting have long been thought of as a domestic concern, four brilliant female artists are taking this art form from the comfort of our homes to the public sphere of art installations, allowing us to rethink our relationship to and with yarn. We're taken on a colorful, globe-trotting journey as these artists use yarn in surprising and varied ways, from buoyant surfaces for children to play atop of to stage shows where acrobats incorporate knitting technique into their performance, showcasing the art behind what is often dismissed as craft. These disparate threads are woven together into a bold and energetic tapestry that shows a tight-knit community forming around this versatile medium. (pg. 35)

Tags: Community