>> Lauren Appelbaum: Hi everyone. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Lauren Appelbaum and I'm the vice president of communications of RespectAbility, a nonprofit fighting stigmas and advancing opportunities so people with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of community. I am a white woman with long brown hair and glasses, wearing a navy blue shirt, standing in front of a black banner with the RespectAbility logo in white and yellow behind me. My pronouns are she and her. I do wanna apologize for starting a few moments late. We did have some technical issues but we are so glad to be here with you. I, myself, am an individual with an acquired non-visible physical disability, and I have had the privilege of conducting trainings on the why and how to be more inclusive and accessible. And so I'm really glad that you're able to be here for this discussion. I wanted to note that we have live captioning done by a real life person that is available in this Zoom app by clicking on the CC button at the bottom. You also can view everything as a transcript in a web browser, we are posting that link in the chat box for you now. This panel is live, so we will be taking questions from you during the second half of the panel. Please add your questions to the Q&A box to do so. If you are watching us on Facebook during the live airing we'll be monitoring for questions there too. This panel is being recorded and will be available on RespectAbility's Facebook page and website after this event concludes. A higher resolution recording with open captions and our ASL interpreters will be posted and sent to everyone who registered next week. If you want to stay connected to RespectAbility, I invite you to sign up to our weekly newsletter on disability inclusion and equity in the entertainment industry. That link is being posted in our chat box now as well. We are really proud to be doing this event in partnership with Film Independent. They're also a nonprofit and they help filmmakers make their movies, build an audience for their projects and work to diversify the film industry. With more than 250 annual screenings and events, they provide access to a network of like-minded artists who are driving creativity in the film industry. I'd like to turn this panel now over to our moderator, David Radcliff, who's a member of the Writers with Disabilities committee of the Writers Guild of America West, while also serving within that Guild's inclusion and equity group. He was born with cerebral palsy and has spoken on issues of disability and equity in business and entertainment for audiences at the Kennedy Center, the Annenberg innovation lab, HBO, Bank of America and the Veterans Affairs office of Los Angeles. His work as a writer has won top honors at the Austin Film Festival and earned him a spot in a Disney ABC writing program. He has written on series, including ABC's "The Rookie" and an upcoming comedic program for Netflix that was co-created by Jeremy Konner of "Drunk History" and executive produced by President and Mrs. Obama. David also served as a creative consultant on the Sundance Award winning documentary "Crip Camp" and was thrilled to attend Sundance in person in 2020. I'd like to hand the floor over to David.

>> David Radcliff: Hi everybody. I'm David. I'm so excited to be part of this conversation. We have some really talented artists approaching disability from all different kinds of perspectives and themes and genres. So I'm gonna let them introduce themselves to you and tell us a little bit about their connection to the disability community and the film industry. Alice, would you like to go first?

>> Alice Austen: Sure. My name is Alice Austen. I am a white and Native American woman in a green coat with a lot of books and a piano in the background. My pronouns are she her. I am a writer, director, producer and I was the writer/producer of the 2019 Sundance and Cannes film called "Give Me Liberty". And we had a very long and interesting fight to cast that film authentically. We had a number of individuals with different kinds of disabilities who were in the film and it was an extraordinary and beautiful experience. And I learned a lot about how challenging this is and doesn't need to be in our industry.

>> David Radcliff: Thanks, Andrew?

>> Andrew Reid: I am Andrew Reid. I am wearing a base beige, dark skinned, and I am a recent grad from the USC School of Cinematic Arts. And just recently finished a short film for Film Independent. So, happy to be here.

>> David Radcliff: Shaina?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: Hey everybody. I am an Indian woman with mid-length black hair, black rimmed glasses, red lipstick, a black blouse with yellow flowers against a bookshelf and a white wall. I like to joke that I'm a triple threat. I'm a wheelchair user, Punjabi and a woman. I am also a graduate of USC, go Trojans, and Academy Gold. And currently I'm in development on a feature film which recently won the SFL reigning grant.

>> David Radcliff: Congratulations. Hikari?

>> Hikari: Sorry. I, just muted. Hi everyone. I am Hikari. Nice to meet you guys. I am a Japanese woman. I'm currently in Tokyo, but you see a background is a, where I camped this whole summer for six weeks, it's Grand Teton National Park. And I have a little short hair and a white shirt. And then I think I'm wearing like a rapper, a little cardigan. I'm a writer/director/producer of film called "37 Seconds". We, that was my first feature film. We premiered in Berlin in 2019, we received the Audience Award and CIC Arts Cinema Award. And it was about a girl who is a comic book artist who has got a cerebral palsy. And we were able to cast, or find a fantastic known actress, but she did fantastic job, Mei, who was also cerebral palsy. I'm also a USC grad, yay. (laughs) Yes, that was my first feature. And now I'm in Tokyo prepping to jump on a TV show for HBO Max, and, while I'm prepping for my second feature film. Nice to meet you all.

>> David Radcliff: Awesome. Thank you. Nasreen?

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: Hey everyone. My name is Nasreen Alkhateeb. I'm a DP. I've been making film and television for 10 years. I am a multi heritage woman, both black and Iraqi. I have curly brown hair down past my waist. I'm wearing a red Siouxsie and the Banshees shirt and I am sitting inside a living room in a sunlit Los Angeles this afternoon. I acquired my disability a couple of years ago and I started to get involved with RespectAbility as an organization and started to actually use my storytelling abilities to connect with a new community, which I'm really happy to be part of.

>> David Radcliff: Thanks. And I realized, I forgot to describe myself. I'm a white man with cerebral palsy. My hair has gotten very long in this pandemic. It's hanging in front of my face. I'm wearing a gray sort of thermal winter long sleeve shirt. And I'm sitting in front of my apartment wall, which is yellowish. (laughs) So, and, Nasreen, I'll start with you. I had read it in an article that you had mentioned that beyond being a part of so many different underrepresented communities yourself, prior to gaining a disability you admitted that you hadn't given too much thought to disability in your day to day life. And I find that that's true of a lot of folks who don't have disabilities and then later acquire them. So maybe you can start us off by talking about what you thought disability was and what you believe it to be now and how it sort of informed your work and your perspective.

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: I think my misconceptions were like a lot of people's misconceptions. When I thought about disability I thought it had to be something visible, right? I had to be someone who is in a wheelchair or someone who needed a mobility device to walk. I didn't think about all of the layers and the spectrum that disability is. And when I thought about diversity, I'll admit, I wasn't thinking immediately about disability as part of that group. And I'm sad to say that it took, you know car hitting my body and becoming disabled to really expand my perspective on that. But I'm grateful for that now. Yeah, I think the way we classify disability in the States, much like other countries, is very narrow, and for persons outside the disability community. And I think there's a lot of room for expansion and understanding in terms of what it means to be disabled, how it can be incorporated into everyone's world, everyone's industry and how easy it is to normalize it.

>> David Radcliff: That links to something I wanna ask you, Hikari, I know that you had, as there's so many USC people here, I mean, I'm a USC grad as well. And I know that you had worked in America and in Japan and chose to make "37 Seconds", which is a beautiful film everybody should watch, it's on Netflix. Chose to make it in Japan. And I'm wondering about that as someone who hasn't been to Japan myself, the sort of attitudinal shifts that you may notice between Japanese culture towards disability or American, are there differences, are there particular reasons why you chose to make this story in the location that you did?

>> Hikari: Absolutely. I grew up in Osaka, which is a second capital and it's a pretty big city, but then I moved to America when I was 18. And since then I've have a few friends who are with... Wheelchair girls, I call them. So my wheel girls, they, if, well, let's put it this way. So, in Tokyo, if you go in the big city or in Osaka, Osaka, it's like a little bit different, but Tokyo, you don't really see very many people in wheelchairs, you know, going around, outside in the city, inside of the city, just because, it's just, even though it looks very mobile and it's very wheelchair friendly, it actually really isn't. And then I think it comes from the people who are a little bit too busy caught up on their lifestyle. So a lot of times people don't like to go out and, but then I knew, I have a lot of friends, again, here that are with some kind of disability and they just don't like to go out so much. So that was kind of the reason that I wanted to make a movie here just to show that, you know, we're all here. And I feel people are a little bit more, to me, people are more friendly in the United States. I think overall here people are much more shy. And so I think that comes from not just kind of supporting each other in a sense that if somebody needs help, they don't really, you know, reach their hands and say, do you need help? And yeah, so that was kind of the reason why I wanted to set up, set a movie here, in Tokyo, specifically in Tokyo.

>> David Radcliff: And Alice, when we had emailed each other, you had mentioned that there were some interesting challenges trying to get your film made, "Give Me Liberty", which is great. Everybody should check that out as well. I feel so honored to be able to have this conversation about so many great projects. Can you speak a little bit about what sort of challenges you confronted and maybe how as someone who doesn't have a disability it opened your eyes to some things you might not have considered about the film industry or about production?

>> Alice Austen: Sure. It's interesting because I started out as one of the two creative people behind the film, and with my partner, Kirill Mikhanovsky, and I only produced it because we were having such an extraordinarily difficult time getting the film done. And there were a number of reasons, but one of them was financing. And we really, we cast a young woman who's extraordinary, named Bella Spencer, who actually has ALS, is a wheelchair user. She was just in style, like, 50 women, you know, kind of audition this month, which is really cool. And Lolo was a force of nature and she's remarkable and... It was absolutely unequivocal. We were going to cast Lolo, and that became really difficult. There was pressure to cast someone who was bankable, right? And we had a number, as I mentioned, of other characters with disabilities. And we were working with a center, a workplace for people with disabilities, and we knew the people we would cast, they were non-actors for the most part. And so it seemed to us completely incorrect, inauthentic, disingenuous to then cast the lead woman with an actress pretending to have a disability. So we refused to do that. Consequently, there was a moment where I realized I was looking for like the "Mr. Goodbar" producer. I'm like, who's the producer? And I said, oh no, it's me. So I ended up producing the film. And what I think I'd like to say, the most important thing I've learned, the people, our cast with disabilities were rock stars. They were amazing. We never had a continuity issue. We never, I mean, they were unbelievable. They were so fabulous to work with. And, I think, for me, it's really important to see that and be able to say it, because I think there's fear, like, oh, if we have somebody who uses a wheelchair or we have someone who has certain cognitive impairment, it's gonna make it so impossible and production is hard enough already. And in fact, I mean, our cast with disabilities made it better and easier and more extraordinary every step of the way. So...

>> David Radcliff: I mean, personally, I think a lot of that quote unquote fear comes from lack of exposure in the first place. So it becomes a self fulfilling concern. So if you don't see it then you don't think a certain community is hireable. And then sometimes when you do see it, we are misrepresented in such a way that makes people leery about hiring us potentially. But there are, as so many of these particular films show, there's so many extraordinarily talented people to put in front of the lens, some of whom aren't getting the opportunities that they deserve. So we have two recent USC film grads here, Andrew and Shana. And I'm thinking back to when I finished film school and I reached out to certain diversity programs and asked, like, who's the person I can chart behind, my path behind, like, where's the, where's this Shonda Rhimes of our community? And so I'm wondering, as people that just recently finished school, whether you've seen the landscape change a little bit, whether you feel hopeful about the future of filmmaking for folks with disabilities and kind of how you see a pathway for your own career. Shana, do you wanna start with that question?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: Yeah. So I don't know if I'm the best example because I graduated at the height of the pandemic in May of last year. (people laugh) So the rule book was out the window, right? But what basically happened was, you know, my friends and I had to move back home. I'm currently in Sacramento, not in LA. And we were like, what are we gonna do? We have a film degree? What now? Right? There were no, there were really no jobs out there. So, luckily we had started a production company in school and we really just went heavy on post-production. We were blessed that we had networked so much at USC that people were giving us jobs. And at the side I wrote my feature screenplay that I developed at USC. And then I ended up finding producers during quarantine. And then we got the SFL grant and I'm just really blessed and like, I'm knocking on wood right now, but I also think it goes to show how adaptable we are as filmmakers coming out of that program, and just filmmaking in general, like, you have to be flexible. And so I do think there are more opportunities for people with disabilities than there were before. It's still not enough. It can always be better. And I'm looking forward to what the future holds.

>> David Radcliff: Andrew?

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah, no, I totally echo Shaina's thoughts. I do think it's getting better. I think there is more work to be done. I think since graduating, you know, USC has been a huge support for me. I have participated in programs with Film Independent. I was fortunate also to be in the RespectAbility summer lab program. And these organizations have definitely supported me as an artist. And also, you know, being a Jamaican immigrant as well, and coming over to California and going to to USC film school with no ties to anything could seem kind of overwhelming and arduous. And then on top of that, you have a disability. I, myself was completely paralyzed, told I'll never walk again. Now I walk with a cane. And you don't see too many people, you know, like you, for lack of a better word, but that shouldn't get in the way at all. Because at the end of the day, you're an artist, you're a creative and that fuels your passion. And everyone has their own obstacles. And you just have to learn how to navigate yours. And there are more stories being told about disability by people with disabilities. There's so many untold stories in that world and I'm just really excited to hear, you know, the other stories being told. I myself have, you know, a story that I wanna tell within the community and I hope we can all bring it to life.

>> David Radcliff: I think Shana raises an interesting point that I've definitely found to be true as I meet more and more disabled folks in all kinds of industries, is we have built in within us an adaptability that is just bred out of having to navigate a world that is not designed with us in mind. And that seems to be a, in an equitable world that would be a very employable skill set, especially on a film set. If you have somebody that is like born to solve problems and put a smile on and get the work done. So I'm hopeful that, those sorts of... And that sort of energy carries forward throughout the industry and seeing a lot of the projects in this group makes me extra hopeful for that. I wanna ask each of you who are, who identify as having a disability, what sort of stories would you like to see more of? And maybe even for the panelists as well who don't have a disability, what sort of questions or stories would you like to see more of that address the disability community? I think we see a lot of... When we do see growth in this area, it tends to be on the independent, in the independent sphere, not necessarily on the studio side, but what's missing out there?

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: I think just regular love stories, like stories with disability lead characters, intersectional lead characters, and the story has nothing to do with disability at all. Yes, that's a part of my life as a person, walking around as a person, but it's not my entire story. So I think we've seen a lot of... We've seen a push towards inclusion, but the story still has such a backbone in this person is disabled. Like, yes, that's a section of my life. That's part of my life. It's not everything, and making it everything about the story takes away from the individual story. So I'd love to see just like more love stories.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah, I’ll piggyback off of what Nasreen was saying, in the sense that just the individuality of the character or people with disabilities, like "Run", I think, like, it had a character with a disability and, you know, showed it in an interesting way that I hadn't really seen before, which I really liked and also had an authentic portrayal of it. And I think like focusing more so on the character. Yeah. Maybe an element in which they navigate, true. And that can also add to the story and teach us something new, but focusing also just more so on the personality and the characters and how it's created something special and unique about this individual and more so, less so emphasis on it. (indistinct) Is within the realm that can emphasize the world and the character.

>> David Radcliff: I think some of that comes also from the decision to cast authentically, which we've discussed. I'm interested, Alison, what you mentioned before about, there is sometimes some resistance to that because it's not seen often enough. What do you think are the strategies, besides taking on like, well, I'll just go produce it myself then, what are some strategies that disabled people might use to get this message across? I think what happens sometimes is folks will say in television, well, we have someone involved with the project whose brother's disabled, so that counts, right? Or I had a disabled friend once, so that's representation, right? But we how do bridge these gaps so that we can have, you know, more disabled people behind the camera and in front of the lens and everywhere else?

>> Alice Austen: Well, I think Nasreen and Andrew really hit an important component of this. And it's something I've talked to Lolo about a lot, because... So here's a young woman who's brilliant actress, completely aside from anything else. And she has not, she got so many accolades. She was nominated for best actress afterward. And yet she has not gotten picked up by like one of the agencies that would go through normally and cherry pick these incredible actors who give great performances and start sending them out on auditions. And I think it's partly because there's this perspective of, like, well, I haven't had any calls for someone with a disability, and the mindset just has to shift completely. I mean, you have a role for a woman, you know, whatever her age is, who's the judge? Send her out. If you have a... I think part of the mindset is, one, there has to be more authentic casting. And if you have a role that calls for someone with a disability you should make every effort to cast a person authentically. But you also should be casting people in all kinds of roles because our world is diverse. And not just sending people to roles, you know, who have a disability to for roles that calls for someone with a disability. And I think that's the mindset that's just really hard to change. And I think we all just have to do it. I think that's part of it. There just has to be this movement. And I pressured agents, I've been contacting people, and I'm really honest, and I'll say, you know, you're missing the boat here. You're like, you're behind the curve. This is the next thing. And you're not getting it. You're missing something really important, but it's, there's still a lot of, I'd say education, you know.

>> David Radcliff: I think both "37 Seconds" and "Give Me Liberty", the fact that they are built around central performances from actresses who are, like, quote unquote, untested and they're both disabled and both performances are so great and so vulnerable and exciting. Did that, is there a part of you that was surprised, because you hadn't had experience working with disabled actors before? Surprised at how easy? Well, I shouldn't say easy, how fluid that experience can be? Either of you can respond to that.

>> Hikari: I guess I can answer that too. Sure, I think as a writer/director who wrote the story, originally, was, a girl with a, actually she was not cerebral palsy, but it was, she was paralyzed, because I had a very close friend of mine who got in the car accident and I was hearing her experience and that was kind of inspiration that I wrote originally story about. And then, so just to go back a little bit, but then, I think having people in the wheelchair, it all depends, right? Like if Mei, for example, she has a electric wheelchair which is a little bit more, you know, it takes a little longer to move around and whatnot, but then it's all about crew. It's all about us kind of being their support and just being there helpful, and if she needs help, obviously we're around her 24/7, but then I think everything can just work just perfectly, I think, just because it was my first time making a first feature film to Mei acting for the first time, we weren't quite sure how her physicality was going to, because she can't really, she's just, you know, sitting in the chair all the time. So we wanted to make sure to give her extra time and not rushing her into something that, you know, she's not ready or whatnot. And we shot everything in chronological order, things like that. We try to care for her. But, and also, I think, me as a writer, the story had to work whether she has a disability or not. I think importance of that was the story. And then I, again, I, what Alice said, I didn't want to cast actress who's gonna sit on the wheelchair and pretend like she has a disability. It wasn't, my point wasn't that. It was just about a girl who wants to do what she wants to do and pushing for it. So having, finding Mei was just such a treasure. We literally, we started to reach out to all sorts of different kinds of organizations, to the groups, and we reached out probably like about 900 groups and whatnot, but after all that I think it was just all, it was just, came out wonderfully. And then I think we learned so much more as a crew who never worked with a person with disability. We learned so much, she taught us so much and she was just wonderful to work with. And I think we learned, we really, you know, I tell every single friend of mine is like, you have to, like, you definitely should consider, because sometimes, you know, there's one more better than, you know, just much more natural, authentic as far as performings. There's something that, you know, that you just don't expect to happen. And I, yeah, sorry, just not to bumble through it, but I think it just definitely could work. I mean, just, you know, we just had to figure out the schedule and that's it. So I encourage everybody to work together for sure.

>> David Radcliff: Actually-

>> Alice Austen: We had an-

>> David Radcliff: Oh, okay.

>> Alice Austen: I was just gonna say we had an interesting situation because we ended up making the film for a quarter of the proper budget. And we're very grateful to have won the Cassavetes Award at the Film Independent, its Spirit Awards, but that presented certain challenges because we shot in winter and we didn't have a lot of leeway. We didn't shoot chronologically, which was a nightmare for the production designer for so many reasons. And so we didn't know what to expect either. And we had a crew, that film, you know, I think we all understand film is, becomes very collaborative and everyone must pull their weight when they do it. It's this sort of magical, energetic thing that happens. And we had a really tremendous crew and everybody helped. And so I think we all, a lot of people were attached to the project for several years. We all had this sense that we have to make it and we all work together. And so many people helped that the whole thing had gotten very hard but the quality of it was really positive. And I think that was somehow captured as well. So I don't think it ever, I mean, again, it was just Lolo and all of our other cast members only helped our process.

>> David Radcliff: I think too, with... I remember when I was on my first show, I mean this is a crew that solves problems. That's part of the job. Solves like daytime versus nighttime challenges or transportation challenges or builds a studio set in a few weeks. So the idea of saying... And yet it's odd to me that anyone would have something in the back of their minds that would make them reluctant to bring somebody in that has different kinds of perspective and may also need a ramp. (laughs) Shaina, can you speak, or Andrew, speak to, in your film school experience? I mean, USC has grown significantly since I was there. There's now, like, an Aladdin's palace where the film school that I'm familiar with was. What sort experience did you have in that environment, working towards, or working on your, managing your own set and running the show as a director?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: So, yeah, I was lucky. I mean, my professors supported me 100% and I was honestly really nervous about that going in. I had gone to undergraduate, I had gone to undergrad at Sacramento State University where I made a film, basically showing how bad services for students with disabilities were. So I was a bit of a rebel going into USC and I was fully prepared to do the same thing, if, you know, my needs weren't being met, but my professors supported me. The only thing that I felt that I was at a disadvantage when I first got there, was that everybody was talking about how they wanted to shoot their films on location. Right? They wanted to like go out and find the perfect place or go to the desert. So many people went to the desert. And I didn't have a car, right? I didn't have a wheelchair accessible van there with me for the first year. And I really felt like I was at a huge disadvantage in my first semester. And then I was like, you know what? I'm going to just use what I have and use my resources. And I think my stories are stronger because of it. And I think I'm a much more flexible filmmaker because I had to do that. I adapted my ideas to what was around me. So that was, yeah, that was my experience.

>> David Radcliff: Yeah. And I totally agree with her, you know, just to piggyback off of what she was saying, you know, you are put in situations sometimes where I feel as though people are not 100%, I understand that community not 100% sure or thinking of the limitations that you may have to remember, and filming can be extremely physical. But I think, kinda what Shaina was saying, put on a producer hat on, in the sense of how can I adapt? And ultimately at the end I think what drove me whenever I was, you know, reached a wall where I was like, oh, I wanna do it this, but can I physically do it? Ultimately, what has always driven me, what keeps me in this industry to this day is the stories. I'm in love with the stories that I'm trying to tell. I'm extremely passionate about 'em. And even if you're the only person with a disability on set, you will set precedent because people will follow your passion. And passion is just the key to it all in the stories that you're trying to tell. And if people believe in it regardless of whatever limitations you may have, people will follow you. So...

>> Shaina Ghuraya: I also, just... Oh, sorry for that-

>> David Radcliff: Go ahead.

>> Shaina Ghuraya: To jump in, I was really upfront with my professors about physically what I could and could not do. And that was really helpful later down the line. And that's just to anybody going into film school, who has a disability, being upfront about what your needs are. Like, I had to be a cinematographer for one of the requirements in my class and because I was upfront about them, they had a student help me. And it was a student, right. It wasn't like an older person who didn't know the camera. So yeah, it was a peer.

>> David Radcliff: That's great. Nasreen, I can think of few environments more spontaneous and unpredictable than a vice presidential campaign, being lead cinematographer for that. And we've been talking about the adaptability that's built into disabled folks. I'm really interested in hearing about how you felt about being brought on to that, you know, amazing opportunity and then how you sort of built your day or your schedule to make it work.

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: So being on a campaign trail is totally, totally different than being part of a set in our own studio. There's no amount of control that I have over schedule or location. So it's really a matter of keeping up. and it was definitely a new experience for me. And it was one that I'm grateful for. And if I had more control over a situation like that, you don't, you never will, but there would be, you know, tools put in place for everyone, not just me as a disabled cinematographer, but I did the best I could with what I had.

>> David Radcliff: There is, yeah, sort of mental preparation, mental and physical preparation that, when I was starting in TV, I didn't really expect, like there is just, it takes over your life. So the idea that any of us would do this work at all is amazing. Just the amount passion and time and physical and mental effort we all have to put into these projects is really admirable in and of itself. Shaina, I'm really interested in how... I think of all the folks here and the projects that I saw, you were the only one that like directly addresses disability in a comedic way. And I feel like that's an area that people don't, especially non-disabled people are terrified to touch. So do you wanna give some pointers to the audience out there about, yes, we need to see more disabled characters and disabled stories. What would your advice be to folks that are reluctant to touch those kinds of topics?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: It's a fine line, I will tell you that. When I was, 'cause I grew up around Sacramento and I was, I didn't have many friends with disabilities, right? And so when I moved to LA for USC, I was suddenly surrounded by people in the entertainment industry with disabilities, and that was amazing. But I didn't really find that community until my second year in. So my first year it was really just me and Nicole Evans who was a great actress, she was on "Superstore", and I would give her my scripts and be like, is this okay? Like, this is my experience and I'm passionate about it, but I wanna make sure that I'm doing right by the community. And so we would spend hours just going back and forth making sure we weren't, we were being authentic in what we wanted to say and what we wanted to represent. And I think that's key, right? I had somebody, three weeks ago, send me a script. They were not disabled. And it was a comedy about a person with a disability who was going on a first date. And it was, like, it wasn't the greatest. And I had to give feedback on it, but that's when I knew, like, this is such a fine line, and it's so important that I get it right every time. And so now with this feature film that I'm doing, it's a dark comedy, which is even harder. And we're talking about the intersectionality between being Indian and being in a wheelchair. And it's really just getting a lot of eyes on it from the community of people with disabilities, right? We're all out there. We're also accessible. KMR casting is a great way to meet actors with disabilities, right? And so that's really what I do now. I just get a lot of eyes on it and a lot of feedback because I'm not the only person with a disability.

>> David Radcliff: And disability in and of itself, as we can see on this panel alone is such a diverse category. I was told years ago by an exec I won't name, who was, who is himself part of many underrepresented groups, but not disabled. He said, you can choose to be either an artist or an advocate. You can't be both. And I wanna hear what that engenders in you, all of you as a sort of mandate, is that true or not? I suspect that this room might feel differently. (laughs)

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: I think the projects that you choose to be a part of is your way of advocating for others, is your way of advocating for yourself and being an activist. I think those two things go hand in hand. I mean, that's, the house I was raised in is of the mind that whatever gifts you were given are not your own. They don't belong to you. They belong to everyone. So if my gift is cinematography and seeing the world through my lens, through the experiences I've had as a person, I am essentially an activist artist. I don't get to choose that. That's just who I am.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah. I would kind of piggyback off of Nasreen in the sense that, like, there's a lot of people that just talk the talk, and at the end of the day, we're all here because of our passion for film. So the stories that we're trying to tell are hopefully progressive. (indistinct) Entertain or drive people and hopefully in the theater in some distant or near future, but, like, yeah. So, and then at the end of the day, the conversation, we all wanna spark conversation, so, and then you can get into it from there. So...

>> David Radcliff: As far as the on set experience, both for our disabled panelists and for those disabilities, what is it that you wish people, and by people, I mean producers, folks working at studios, audiences knew about disability on set. If you could make a tweak or adjustment right off the top, what would you want people to know?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: I just have a short story about like the first set that I was on when I was in LA. I was a PA and the lead actress of that production was a wheelchair user. So I was thrilled about the inclusion, right? But the producers were great, but I noticed that they were asking her to do things, like, you know, regarding lifting her from her chair and stuff like that. And it was very quick conversations. Like, can we quickly do this? Right? And she's agreed, but she seemed awkward about it. And I was a PA. So I went up to her when there was a break and I asked her, are you comfortable doing this? And she said, not really, but it's fine because, you know, I'm just lucky to be here. Right? She had been like... So I was like, no, no. So I went to the producers and I'm lucky that they were so kind and that they listened. And instead of speaking for her, I just told them that like decisions to lift someone can't just be done in like two minutes. Right? It needs to be a whole conversation with her. And she needs to feel like she has the ability to say no. And that really, I think being an ally in that moment helped clarify my mission moving forward. But I wish producers would think about that when they do have actors or crew with disabilities, or just people in general, just asking before every set, like what accommodations does anybody need and making a safe environment would be great.

>> David Radcliff: Right. Yeah. I don't imagine that the non-disabled participants in this panel are used to being picked up at will on set. Has that happened? (laughs)

>> Alice Austen: No, actually Dima, the guy who played Dima in "Give Me Liberty", used to pick me up and say, I have to produce him and not put me down. But I do think that there is this conversation that needs to be held sort of in advance, when you're, before you're, not, like, kind of in the throes of, oh my God, we've gotta get this shot, we've gotta get, we only have an hour and then we have to wrap for the day and if we don't get it, we're in trouble, so that you understand the demands of the day and what's okay and what is not okay, you can accommodate before you encounter that kind of rush moment, but that's true with the question of human respect and being a sort of practical producer as well, to think about what people need and what makes sense. So it should be, again, It's one of those things that should be a no-brainer and it's... But it's not that hard again.

>> David Radcliff: And there's also already a culture of accommodation on set for, very often, whoever, you know, whoever's on the poster. So if that can be transferred to, you know, other folks, that's, it seems like an easy switch. So what are you excited about? This is a strange question coming off of coronavirus but I feel like this new normal, whatever this new normal is that we're developing, not just in film, but across all industries has potential to change the way that we think about story, the way that we think about inclusion and accessibility and everything else. Does this spark creative ideas in any of you or excitement for new places that your career can go, new voices that you can bring in to your projects? Has it changed the way that you work? (laughs)

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: I mean, definitely people are asking questions they've never asked before. This idea that we all have to have PPE and that there are safety protocols, bringing those questions up is like a gateway to universal design, which is awesome, because universal design doesn't just mean people with disabilities get to be on set, but it means everyone on set who needs something, right, not just people who are disabled, have a chance to name it. And if you were asking this at the very beginning of production while you're in development, you get a very accurate layout of what a schedule could look like, what a set design could look like if it was actually accessible to everyone on set. So I'm excited. I mean, I hate to say that, considering we're in a pandemic, but yeah, I think it's an opportunity that disability, filmmakers that I know are taking advantage of.

>> Alice Austen: We had a number of octogenarians in our cast, and, which would right now be impossible, right? Which makes me very sad. And so I do hope this conversation will evolve, and of course, vaccines and PPNE so that once again we can give all actors of all ages and, you know, kind of, all walks, opportunities because, I've been told point blank, like, oh, don't do a film with a lot of elderly people right now. That's really terrible. And so, yeah, that's another piece of it. But I think there's a lot, I think a lot of people are working and we're understanding that there are certain things that really do matter. And a lot of things have fallen away that we sort of thought mattered. And it's been a very difficult period for so many people. And it's also a time where you can really sort of recenter and realign priorities. So...

>> David Radcliff: This might extend also outside of talking about film but I'm wondering, we have seen with COVID, it's hit the disability community particularly hard, and we've also seen now that younger folks with disabilities are not being prioritized on lists for vaccination, which reveals a whole lot about our society, I think. So does anyone want to share how they are doing right now? I mean, what is this... I have a lot of thoughts about what COVID means for me and my family. Does anyone want, our audience, our Sundance audience to know something about your COVID experience that they might not?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: I mean, I took it as an opportunity to learn new skills. Right? I kind of immersed myself in learning color. I've been doing a lot of editing and I think that's helped me, again, be a better storyteller and a better filmmaker, but yeah, I mean, I'm home with my parents saving money so that when the time is right I can get back out there, but I'm also really lucky that I have my parents and that I'm able to, you know, be home and safe and quarantine. And I know for a lot of people with disabilities that's just not possible, right? They do have to go out and get groceries and it's dangerous every time you leave the house. And I do wish we were being prioritize for the vaccine, because I would really like to step outside. But no, I've literally been in the house since July. I haven't even gone to the grocery store. So...

>> David Radcliff: Are you baking bread? Everybody I know was baking bread for like eight weeks

>> Shaina Ghuraya: Not yet. I'll start that next. I've been making a lot of chai. I love chai, so...

>> David Radcliff: So, anybody else wanna share their COVID thoughts? Nope. Okay.

>> Hikari: I guess that, I can say I, yeah, I guess, you know, when you are on set and when you're doing productions, like, I definitely find a way to spend time. Same as Shaina. Yeah. I just try to write and try to come up with new ideas and what can do more to elevate your stories, to have more time to do the research, where, I had a TV show that got canceled and it was on hold for a longest time, but then that time period, I was waiting to get back on set. But then that was the time that I could actually get to work and study and write the characters and whatnot, where if I went and jumped on in production, then I would have never had an opportunity to do learn more about, you know, the characters or the story in depth. So there's always some way you can spend time, I guess we are in this creative business so we can spend every moment just to be creative and we can be creative sitting in the toilet, too. (laughs) So while we're here, let's just keep creating.

>> David Radcliff: Man, now I feel like I'm really underperforming. (both laugh) I didn't that was my peak moment. Okay. (laughs) I wanna make sure we have some time to open it up for our Q&A, which is virtual, of course, here. Let's see. I hope I'm doing this right. Hmm. Oh, here we go. Who on set? This is a question from Michelle, who on set should be responsible for being sensitive and accommodating towards those with disabilities? Is it a producer's job or, dot dot dot. Any thoughts on that? In other words, let's say, should there be someone designated to make sure that all disability related needs are met? Did any of you have that on your particular projects?

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: So, the one of the last productions, I was a part of, I actually advocated, this was a character, the whole show was built around an LGBTQ and disabled character. And even though I was DP on set, not necessarily my hat to wear, but I made sure that that person and that individual had what they needed. And I made suggestions to the producer and the director that they weren't offering off the bat. So in that situation I wish there had been someone on set that was designated. But what was great was that I was already in the room where these discussions were going down or discussions that needed to go down and I was able to pipe up and say, hey, have you guys thought about this? Have you thought about this? This is something that could be appreciated or could actually make story better, more authentic.

>> Hikari: On our set, we always had at least one or two caregiver and make sure that, you know, whatever needs that may, couldn't tell us but then, she was comfortable enough to tell caregiver and they'll relate it to us, because on set, we're all so crazy. So I think it's important, 'cause sometimes people have more understanding than us obviously, and that if the professional comes in it just makes much more comfortable for actors and actresses or crew members. So that's definitely important.

>> Alice Austen: I agree with... We had, Lolo had an assistant who was with her and we were really fortunate to have a group support their stay in a place that had accommodations. And so it worked beautifully, but I felt that was essential to have someone who always was there in the box. So...

>> David Radcliff: I mean, it's interesting too, because, Hikari, your film is so much about autonomy for the character and her needs and interests, and being able to vocalize that and the relationship with the mother sort of suffocating that instinct. And so the idea that... I think it would be extra important in that case to make sure that the actress was comfortable and was proactive and, you know, verbalizing her needs. What did, what was her, I mean, you don't have to go into too much detail if you don't want to. I am curious about, like, her family's reception of the film, given that family dynamics are so central to that movie?

>> Hikari: Her family was very supportive, her mom, especially. And so, I've interviewed a lot of people with disability and their parents and how it was because the story had to be their authentic, and the mom character was created by several women who had children with disability. And that was the reason why she became so protective and whatnot, but then, in real life, Mei's mom is very open. She's like, go experience, do whatever!

>> David Radcliff: Oh, that's great. (laughs)

>> Hikari: So, it was a very interesting to see and yeah, she has sisters and whatnot, and they're all just very excited for her to experience this. And, but, yeah, I think it's, it was great. They were very happy. First I was very- (David laughs) In that whole movie, but yeah, thank you for the question.

>> David Radcliff: Open question from our Q&A box, how does or can the industry in general reach out better to people with disabilities who want to work in film, who may live in more rural states? i. e. Montana, Wyoming, North or South Dakota. I'm from Nebraska, myself. Where film services may not be as prominent available or folks may not realize they could exist. This person says, I'm visually impaired and I live in one of these more rural states and have found getting opportunities is very non-existent. As an aspiring creator who's gone to school to study film and graduated and then gone back to my home state, I've found this has been very limiting. Any thoughts on that? Anybody here from a rural area?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: I mean, so I'm from Sacramento. And when I started off in film, I had the same fear. I was like, how do I get a career off the ground being in Sacramento? And what I did was I just networked with a couple of people around me in my city, and we became really close and became like this filmmaking crew. And thankfully filmmaking is more accessible than ever now, especially with phones, you can make like a really good film and good content, but then my friends and I faced the same thing when pandemic happened and a bunch of them moved back to Florida, in a rural part of Florida, and we have the company now. And so because of that, because we're friends, we already have a crew in place, they're able to keep making content where they are. So that was kind of like my journey but also I've been doing this at Q&A's. I'm gonna put in the chat, the company website, and just send us a contact form because I understand. I was in your position like four years ago. And I was so scared. I didn't know how this was gonna happen. And yeah, send us an email.

>> David Radcliff: This is how it happens. This is like Sundance in person. We all just hang out at different events and pass cards around. That's great. Another question from the chat, I am a POC female video editor slash videographer slash motion graphic designer with Asperger's syndrome. I recently finished college and I always expected to get a professional job after college. I had interviews and I get rejected. It's hard to get a dream job nowadays. Gratefully, I work retail to make ends meet. That's not so much a question as a comment, I suppose every Q&A has some, but I think it does open up a really interesting area about perseverance, which is another skill set that I think disabled people have in spades just by virtue of living in the world. Does anyone want to speak to how they overcome moments of self doubt or when you hear no again and again, as so many filmmakers do?

>> Hikari: I guess I can talk about that one. (laughs) Talk about that. I think, this is, whether you have a disability or not, we, I got shut down, you know? No, yeah, you are interesting. You're great. But then there's always but, right? So I think what we, what I did, I can only speak from my experience was that whatever I was interested in and whatever I wanted do, like, I just did it. So if I can't get the job as a director, then I'll do editing. Or if I, if somebody is looking for a photographer, I'll just grab my camera and start shooting stills for a film set. Like, anything that you can do, you just kind of have to figure out to do it. And the perseverance is definitely, I think, and then also believing yourself. I often talk to high school students and whatnot, but it's, our idea come from our minds, right? Like everything just kind of, it pops in your head and it's like, oh, that's important. So we have to write it down. So that's how we make everything into the format. So I think our thoughts and the, what we want can work, we just have to keep pushing. Even though everybody says, no, no, no, you can't do it. That's not gonna happen. It's, It's impossible. You know, when you hear that somebody says impossible, I get like excited. It is like, all right, let's make it possible then. (laughs) So, just keep going and just don't get crashed, those challenges are always full last to grow. So keep going at it.

>> David Radcliff: When I was in high school, I took a summer class, a screenwriting class at USC. It was that class that impelled me to move from Nebraska to California and go to undergrad at USC. And while I was taking that class, I was going across campus in one of those, like, motorized carts, like a pride scooter. And this woman, random woman says to me, "What are you doing here at USC?" And I said, "I'm taking a screenwriting class." And she said, "You make movies in that?" And walked away. (laughs) And I said, well, yeah, of course, like, of course I would. I mean, this is how I show up. So I think for a lot of us with any disability, it's just that process of continually overcoming that, even internally within ourselves. And since that comes as a second nature, you just kind of roll around saying, of course, yeah, this is how I'm showing up to work and the work will get done and wait and see. Does anybody else have thoughts on that particular question?

>> Alice Austen: I think what Hikari said is absolutely right. You really have to persevere and never... We have a situation where we have the whole budget of our film and a very big company behind us and everything was just fabulous. And we were like the toast of the independent film world, and it all fell apart. And no one would pick up our phones. No one would talk. I mean, it was terrible. It was like, we were kind of became pariahs, which is a scary thing when it happens in this industry. And that was in the fall of 2017 and I had this crazy revelation In January of 2018 that, oh my God, I have to produce this movie. And we started shooting in February. So, it was like, and honestly, people said to us that you're done, it's not going to happen. It's impossible. And I think it was exactly that word that made you think, oh no, it's not, we've got, so it's just, like, you know, you have to get up over and over. And it's really hard. I'm not diminishing how difficult it is. And I think it's still hard. I mean, in this time everything feels a little like the matrix, you know, like we're all in the matrix, like work, work, work and it's very strange, but, yeah, it's perseverance and getting back up and trying. So...

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: I think you just can't listen to no and you have to actually celebrate the nos because every time you hear a no you're closer to the yes. And there's always gonna be yeah. So you just have to keep that in mind. There's always gonna be a yes at the end of the road, you just have to get there and build your film community. I call it my film gang. Like, if you're working retail and you have a film degree, use the retail space as one of the scenes. Like, find someone that was always interested in film but never went to film school who will be your sound person, like, build this network, this tiny little gang of yours to create your own content, because that content will just keep leading you to the next project.

>> David Radcliff: Yeah, totally agree. Next question from the chat box, how do you feel about quote unquote, invisible illnesses and are there accommodations on set for that too? Disclosure... Oh boy, this is a big, this is a good question. Disclosure is sensitive enough. Should it just be automatically accommodated? So, I mean, there is the legal answer, by law things should be ADA compliant, but I'm interested, certainly, to hear from this panel on their thoughts on disclosing disability, if you have the privilege of being able to choose that and then also accommodations once you're on set.

>> Alice Austen: I'm also, I went to law school, so which turned out to be really handy in terms of production, being a producer. But I would think that there is, like there is this sort of legal question here as well, and maybe there should be some kind of provision made for disclosure, where it remains confidential and people's confidential information is well protected, so that they're able to get the kinds of accommodations they need without risk of some kind of exposure that they're uncomfortable with. And that's improper. So, that's my 2 cents.

>> David Radcliff: You heard it from a law school grad, folks. Most of us have MFAs, I imagine, or BFAs in this room. Okay. Next question. In the end, did Alice do, did Alison negotiate financing slash distribution? So that "Give Me Liberty" could keep Lolo as a star? Great question. So, there's a second part of that. My personal struggle is trying to convince producers that authentic casting is worth the investment. I think we've covered why it absolutely is. And we're seeing that, you know, there is some, probably not fast enough, but some movement in that, towards that objective. But Alice, do you wanna speak to that particular question of, did you negotiate financing so that you could make sure to keep Lolo involved?

>> Alice Austen: Yes. I mean, so, once everything fell apart and we were just doing it with Lolo, and we, actually, I think this is when people kind of started coming back to us. We were so determined to make the movie. I actually did a budget for a shooting it in real time, like in 24 hours, which would have been impossibly difficult and nightmarish, but I think word of that got out and they were like, oh my God, these people are crazy. They're really gonna make this movie come hell or high water. And then anyone we brought in to finance the film, and I was actually raising money as we shot, something I would never recommend, and then had to raise more money for pickups, and then had to raise money for post. And we were in pickups when we got the call from Sundance. So then our post-production period was just like insane. It was just insane, but we had to do it so fast. But, so anyone who was investing at that point, we had the cast, and we did have a couple of sort of well-known quite famous, one quite famous actor we were in discussions with, but I made it really clear, look he may or may not come in and it might or it might not work out. It didn't for some really good practical reasons. But don't premise your investment on anything but the cast you'd see in front of you now, like, this is what it's gonna look like. So, and our, we have wonderful investors, producers who came in and I'm really grateful to them. And they were part of our crazy journey, you know, through film festivals around the world, like to Russia, France. And it was an amazing journey together. And they were brave, and, you know, recouping is another story with distributors as we all know. So, but we had distributors who were brave, too. They picked up the film, they fell in love with it and they took a risk. So, and they were Wild Bunch and Music Box. And I'm really grateful to both of them.

>> David Radcliff: I mean, again, it's all about finding, keeping at it until you find the right community that's gonna support your big idea. Hikari, do you wanna speak to that also in terms of fighting for particular representation for your, I mean, honestly, I can't imagine your film without her in it, like, in my head there's no like alternate reality where you could have cast someone who was not authentically disabled, but do you wanna speak to that particular question?

>> Hikari: Yeah, sure. I think it's... Yeah. (laughs) Back to, I mean, I have so many common, like, yeah, experiences with Alice. It was just all right, who's this girl, Hikari, she's speaking that phone later. What has she done? All right. And who wants to cast? Who she wants to cast? So it was that all over. And, but I was very adamant about it from the very beginning. And I said, if I can find that girl, then this is gonna be a girl about a, who's very, who has a very sheltered life and who has a mom who's over-protective. I didn't, again, I didn't want to cast just because and just create the story. So that was very challenging. But, again, you keep pushing forward for it and it's gonna happen. I think finding... The script, actually, was originally, like I said, it was about a girl who was paralyzed because I was more knowledgeable about the experience. And, but then, so the story will be completely different. We had a similar element in the story, but then my girlfriends who are, who is, who can use the regular wheelchair, they are much faster, right? Like, the way she was, like, they're faster than me. So they always leave me alone. It's, like, wait, don't go! I'm like always following them. But then for Mei, when I met her, it was completely, you know, it was different and a different disability, but then I just really wanted to adopt that. I wanted to... I saw her who she was and she was just wonderful, beautiful human being. And I just wanted to embrace that. So I rewrote the half of the script to get to where it needs to be. And, again, adjusting the story to fit who she was. And I think that kind of made my movie much more original, I guess, much, not original, lots more authentic, but yeah, it's, Alice, it just always is tough, but again, you know, you keep believing in it, that it's just gonna happen. And you have to take out some of the moments that you want it to do, in a, for example, like animation and whatnot, I really wanted to do actual animation, but all right, so we don't have money. We need to spend money more on the production. So instead of using animation, let's do just After Effects. So all animation that are in my movie, it's actually done relatively easy, not just, we had a hand drawn comic, but then we just kind of layered it and made it look like animated version of it. So we saved money that way and et cetera. So there's always a way we have to figure out and just, but yeah, but in the end there's somebody say, hey! (laughs) Yeah, go make your money and movie. And it's like, great, I'm so glad that it worked out.

>> David Radcliff: But there are still folks. I hope that this viewpoint is dwindling, there are still folks that think or post online, if, that, if you cast a disabled person, disabled actor in a disabled role, that's not acting, as if the disability itself is so totalizing, that... So that's why you end up having like Daniel Day Lewis do it instead of finding someone with actual cerebral palsy. But it seems like with all these projects, that authenticity is so key. To what degree did you each find yourself sort of shaping towards, that's, sort of reshaping the story towards that decision, if at all?

>> Hikari: I guess for me, so the lead, so Mei, who she is, and then the lead actress, the Yuma, is a totally different person. So even though she never acted before, she did a lot of acting in it. It's just a situation, the physicality is what we wrote, what I wrote to fit her physicality. But yeah, I'm sorry. Like I totally, my brain totally farted. (laughs) So that-

>> David Radcliff: You touched on it, just sort of like, sort of tweaking the project to match the choice of doing an authentic casting.

>> Hikari: Yeah. I think that's the definitely important, that Mei absolutely needed, but then, yeah, she was 100% acting. So I think it was that again, is who, what she brought to the project made the movie, What it has with them.

>> Alice Austen: Yeah. Again, I completely agree. I mean, I think I've... Lolo, we gave a story that was not at all her backstory and her family story. And she grew up in California and she had very very different life and world and our character, you know, lives in a big sort of sprawling inner city family in Milwaukee and is the person who really holds her family together and supports everybody. And so Lolo was acting just as much as any actor, but what you do in casting, and Kirill and I really believe this firmly, to cast authentically, you cast people always when you're casting, who bring something of themselves to a role that makes it more authentic and moving and believable. And so to cast someone who hadn't had the weight of that experience and didn't really understand didn't seem right, certainly in our case, in what, with respect to what we were doing. So that was just not a question.

>> David Radcliff: Andrew, I know that with "Asia A", you did choose to use an actor who was not disabled, but there's a dream sequence in the middle of the film that may have made it challenging to have someone with a disability in the role. Do you wanna speak to that decision?

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah, no, about that, you hit the nail on the hammer with that one. I mean, that, you know, worked with actors with disabilities on different projects. I'm all for advocating, but if it's, you know, as I said earlier, what is the story about? And are there essential scenes where maybe you need to be in a situation where, you know, the actor is not disabled. I think that kind of redefines the lens in which you kind of have to assess. And I did think that scene was very important to the story and it was ultimately why at the end I did not go with a disabled actor for that role, because there was elements where you had to be ambulatory. And I thought it would be a disservice to try and cheat that in any other way. But you just have... Me, personally, I think you have to assess it based on the story, on the situation, on the character, and, you know, try to be as authentic as possible but also be aware of what you're trying to say and tell and how you're trying to tell it.

>> David Radcliff: I'm gonna jump back to the Q&A box real quick. We've got a couple more. Kaitlin Yang. Hi, Kaitlin. Kaitlin runs a post-production company here in Los Angeles called Alpha Studios. Does some amazing work on a variety of shows and movies, if you wanna check it out. Anybody who needs any post-work. She says, amazing insights, go Trojans! She's also a USC grad, like so many of us. What is one small action item that any production can implement tomorrow to better include disability and diversity? I think Nasreen mentioned at the top that disability doesn't always get folded into diversity conversations. We have a very diverse panel here in so many different ways, which is wonderful. What can, what's a small thing that productions can do to better implement disability in their diversity efforts?

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: I'd love to take a shot at that. So, they can do something really simple at the top of production. They can ask everyone involved in the production what they might need. And that can be something as simple as an extra chair to making isles five feet instead of three feet, to making sure there's always a ramp on set. And it's not just thinking about disabled community. It's thinking about everyone who's on that set. So before I acquired my mobility disability, I was disabled my whole life and I didn't realize I was disabled. I get migraines, right? I get migraines once or twice a week and those are debilitating. I'm on set and I'm getting a migraine, I need a quiet place to go. If I disclose that to the producer early on to say, hey, these are things that might come up. I need a quiet place to go. That quiet place could actually serve other people on the set as well. People with anxiety, people who are neuro-diverse and need a place to recharge without any sound or movement or lights. So I think every producer could just make a blanket ask of everyone participating. Hey, what do you need on set?

>> David Radcliff: That's great. I remember on a particular production I was on, I just sort of jokingly raised a comment about, you know, being on location, there weren't... I can switch from crutches to wheelchair as needed but that's a privilege in and of itself. And I realize that there wasn't accessibility into the restrooms on location. And someone said, that's the industry. That was the response. So my hope is that conversations like these can sort of make that response a non-starter in the future. So that the idea of what we see as the industry is fluid and can change depending on who's there and valued. A couple more questions real quick, as we wrap up. Karen says, thank you for this fantastic conversation. Have any of you worked on projects that were developed from non-traditional formats, for example, structured improv, entirely in ASL or from a non-text screenplay? I'm curious as someone for whom language is endlessly unsatisfying to write about autistic experiences in. This is from a filmmaker and actor.

>> Shaina Ghuraya: So I recently edited a dance performance by Alice Shepherd and it was a completely new experience for me. And I was so excited to be on the project because of that, because I was editing a dance performance, but also editing it with, you know, the fact that audio descriptions were going to go in and that music was going to go in but we were going to have, I think we had six different cuts at the end of it to accommodate everyone and their individual preferences and individual needs. And that was so cool for me moving forward. And I got in contact with everyone, from, you know, the person doing the audio descriptions to the person doing the unique sound design, and I'm hoping to work with them on my future film because that's just, it was something that I learned moving forward, how to be more accommodating.

>> David Radcliff: Anybody else on that one? Another quick question here from Dawn, is there any data that links having an accessible set to safety? It'd be helpful to have that information to present to investors and producers. Okay. So now we're getting into an interesting area of financing and money. And so if people have, you know embedded biases about, well, is it gonna cost more to have disabled people around? Is there a potential liability? I mean, disabled folks are always shooting down those misunderstandings, but does anyone wanna speak to that particular question?

>> Alice Austen: I'm happy to speak to that because we did win Cassavetes Award, which is for making a film for under $500,000. (David laughs) So, and I'd say technically, probably, gosh, I don't... Two thirds of our cast had disabilities. Many of our older cast members had walkers and canes and various circumstances that we had to accommodate. They were also incredible. Most of them were former soviets and they had a total soviet mentality. They were like, we start in the morning, we finish the day, we make the movie. But, it was not more costly. That's ridiculous. I mean, now in a time of COVID, we all know PPNE, they're all kinds of things that are gonna add cost to a production budget. That's just a given. You know, making sure that there are bathrooms that are accessible. I mean, that just wasn't that big a deal. I'm sorry. And we shot on locations, and we had an insanely difficult shoot and we had many locations and we didn't have any issues. So I just think it's getting that, you know, just changing your mindset a little bit and not being kind of a... I mean, producers just have to be like, okay, this is part of the landscape. We'll do it. No problem. So it doesn't have to be more difficult. It doesn't have to be more costly. It does have to be considered, but that's okay. It's like...

>> David Radcliff: I hope someone's tweeting that out, 'cause that's a great sound bite there at the end. So, terrific. I wanna close with a question that's always stuck in my mind because I read this on a message board years ago and I, it really rankled me. I was reading something about, I think it was hiring managers. This was not film specific, but focusing hiring... It was some message board somewhere. And someone had written, why would I hire a disabled person when I can hire someone without a disability? Again, treating disability as this totalizing thing. I have several answers to that question, but I'd like to hear what yours are? What is something that a disabled person brings that people might not consider, non-disabled people might not consider, that we need to start folding into our conversations around inclusion?

>> Alice Austen: I mean, an incredible can do attitude, honestly. Like just, there's, I think, sometimes in the world of people who don't have disability, there's like something that would be considered just not a big deal to someone who has lived their entire life with a disability. And so there was never, I mean, we, I, you know, I never heard anyone, any member of our group who had a disability say, "Oh that's gonna be hard, I don't know if we can do it." It was actually people without disabilities who tended to say that or do that. So...

>> David Radcliff: Right. I think Hikari just gave a thumbs up in agreement. (laughs)

>> Hikari: I think that sometimes people are, yeah. Some actors who don't have disability demands more, than, right? And that going back to the scheduling and, as a producer, of what you have to be careful on and whatnot... Again, like, exactly what Alice said is, you know, we have AD who can schedule it. We can find a locations, we have a production manager who can just look for a one bathroom, you know? Yeah, accessible bathroom, just find a location around there. Like there's a way that we can create. So, but yeah, it's kind of funny to me sometimes, you spend so much time worrying about a person without a disability than people with disability and it's just all people, right? So, yeah, we, I think as a, with or without, we just have to be there, to be willing to help. And even if you're an actor, you're just there to create a positive environment rather than look at me, watch me, why I need this? I absolutely respect that. But the way you say it, the way you share your concerns and whatnot, it's all about communication. So as long as you are there, be positive minded, this is what we need, but I'll, you know, where you, we're here to make something great. Then we understand that. So we'll create that energy around it. So a positive vibe around it. So, yeah. It's always important to be there in the positive mindset.

>> David Radcliff: Yeah.

>> Hikari: Regardless.

>> David Radcliff: Anybody else wanna speak to that?

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: Two answers. One, trauma informed content is always more interesting. And two, the disability market is a trillion dollar market. So you're leaving a trillion dollars on the table. Why wouldn't you tap into that?

>> David Radcliff: I would also add that COVID is gonna change a lot of people's lives in ways we might not fully understand today. So the kind of life that you're living right now, you know, I'm saying this to the Sundance audience generally, might not be the life that you're living in a couple months. And so, the more we do to understand each other and fold these perspectives in and employ each other and lift each other's stories is to the benefit of everybody. On that note, I'm gonna close here with a question from Corey, hi Corey. He says, how do we get these conversations to the studio and network execs? This is a great question. Financier's, how do we get this conversations to them? The money people. A certain part of me thinks those of us are already interested in disability inclusive filmmaking can start creating a bubble of knowledge, but we need this conversation to move to the level of people who have the switch to green light. I mean, this is a whole, this could be a whole other panel in itself. Does anybody wanna speak to that? Getting these stories to put, I mean, beyond doing a Sundance panel that hopefully gazillions of people are watching, does anyone wanna speak to getting this message to places where it can really start moving us forward?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: I mean, this isn't, oh, sorry, this isn't like an immediate thing but what helped me was just getting my script out there and submitting to competitions. And it's not immediate, but once you start, you know, making it to like the near final round or even winning some of those competitions, people are gonna take notice. And so that's what helped me.

>> Nasreen Alkhateeb: So, what brought me to LA was an organization that's actually sponsoring this event called RespectAbility. And they have a lab each summer that actually puts filmmakers, content creators behind the camera, in front of those execs, in front of those gatekeepers to actually share your content and make those connections. So if you are disabled, if you are a filmmaker, if you're a writer, you're a DP, if you're a director, consider RespectAbility lab. The applications just opened.

>> David Radcliff: I wanna quickly ask our recent film school graduates, since so many of us out in the staffing world and the production world get tagged by our specific diversity category and get linked to like disability projects. What are the things that you wanna get out there and do so that somebody watching this can say, can think of you for something else? What are the big stories you'd like to tell? How do you brand yourself? Andrew. (laughs)

>> Andrew Reid: I don't let my disability define the stories which I'm trying to tell. I think it's just like an actor who gets pigeonholed into the same role every single time. You have to make a conscious decision as an artist that you are not gonna be put into that hole. And you have to show and prove, just like all individuals, that you have different stories, unique stories, beautiful stories that are worth telling and you have to fight for it and don't let anyone define you by your disability. And just continue with that mindset.

>> David Radcliff: Shaina, I suspect you're a comedy person?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: I am.

>> David Radcliff: Satire?

>> Shaina Ghuraya: Satire, comedy, all of it. And I echo those sentiments that Andrew said, like, I wrote my first script that didn't include disability at all just because I went through this thing where, you know, I was having a lot of family members say like, oh, you can only make content about this, like that's what you're good at. And that really, it kind of messed me up for a bit. And it was a good script that I wrote. But at the same time, I was like, I'm in this for representation of the disability community. That's important to me. And that's what I'm going to do. Yes, I can direct things that don't have people with disabilities or actors with disabilities, but at the same time, I want to, because we need representation now, our people have been oppressed for too long.

>> David Radcliff: I think that's a strong message to close out on, but I wanna thank all of you for this awesome conversation and for the projects that you've put out in the world. I had a really fun time getting to know each of these different perspectives on storytelling and disability. And so I hope we all keep in touch and I, you know, obviously an in-person format would have been awesome as well, but I'm so glad that this virtual format is able to open our conversation up to a lot of folks that might otherwise not have been able to be at Sundance this year. So thanks for engaging in this conversation with us today.