>> Andrew Reid: All right let's do this. Hi everyone. I'm excited to be here. I am Andrew Reid. I will be your moderator today. I am a he/him and I am also -- to describe myself I am a person of color, and I am wearing a blue shirt, and I have brown hair and brown eyes. And I am excited to be here. So in celebration of the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we are talking to disabled directors leading the way. Directors with disabilities and what means working in media as we strive for better and more equitable industry. The first director that I am going to introduce today is Asha Chai-Chang. She was born in Long Island, New York, as the Jamaican, Cuban, Chinese, Jewish daughter to immigrant parents. Asha Chai-Chang is an actuary by trade, turned award-winning director slash writer with an invisible disability: tracheal stenosis. Miss Chai-Chang has been nominated and won numerous awards for her films that include but are not limited to best director, best humor, best ensemble, and best short film. In 2020 alone, Asha was named as winner of 2020's Flip the Script Filmmaking Competition, taking home awards for Best Director and Best Picture. She has been selected as a participant in the summer 2021 RespectAbility Lab Entertainment Professionals with Disabilities and was a finalist for the 2021 Blackmagic Collective All Access Career Initiative. She is a Woman of Color Unite #StartWith8Hollywood mentee, and is a member of the alliance with women directors. Miss Chai-Chang is a diversity in film advocate, a Slamdance programmer, and a founding member of UNSTOPPABLE sponsored by Hulu, a film program that features films created by disabled filmmakers and/or featuring talent with disabilities. UNSTOPPABLE has garnered the attention of YouTube, Google, Amazon Studios, IndieWire and ScreenDaily. Can you please turn on your camera Asha? Say hi, describe yourself. And, excited to jump in!

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Oh hey! Hi awesome people. This is Asha Chai-Chang here. I'm rockin curly hair. I'm a woman of color. I have my pretty Chai on, a white jacket, and a honey color onesie today. So I'm excited to be here on this panel.

>> Andrew Reid: Perfect, thank you Asha. Next director I'm going to introduce is Cashmere Jasmine, a first generation disabled Afro-Caribbean writer and director from South Florida who creates provocative surrealist dramas. Her brand is dramas, revolve around taboos and the complexities of identities being seen through lenses of class, race and sexuality and even criminality; deconstructing perceptions with her real life experiences and dark humor. Born to undocumented immigrants in South Florida, Cashmere Jasmine had goals of being a congress-bound attorney. Her aspirations turned into working in finance at Merrill Lynch after the 2008 recession. Ironically, kidney failure shifted her path out of necessity. Unwilling to let something like kidneys get in her way, her entrepreneurial spirit went into overdrive as she started a photography business using her early digital cameras to deliver photo and video assets. She learned everything she could about making media, from sales to pre and post-production. After bribing the DP of an agency into a cinematography mentorship, which we won't ask about, landing a small business grant, then encountering a series of unfortunate events, Cashmere's arduous journey led her from south Florida to Boston, to southern California where she creates film and new media with a dedication to featuring BIPOCs on both sides of the camera. She has produced award-winning shorts, "Bombs Bursting in Air," which screened at the L.A. International Film Festival in 2020, and "Weenie," screened at the Buffer Film Festival in 2019, primarily focusing on LGBTQIA+ and disability inclusive stories. Her next project on her slate is "Sia" in 2022, as she finishes post-production on her self-reflective identity series of shorts she wrote and directed, "Oreo," 2021. Please introduce yourself Cashmere, describe yourself, excited for you to be here.

>> Cashmere Jasmine: Hi there, thank you so much Andrew. My name is Cashmere Jasmine. I am currently in my office slash studio decorated with Banksy and portraits of Frida Kahlo and Basquiat. I am a woman of color, rocking some some honey colored hair along with a mustard colored shirt. And I'm really excited to be here, thank you again Andrew.

>> Andrew Reid: All right, thank you. The next director I'm going to introduce is Jennifer Valdes. Born in Queens, New York, she is award-winning independent filmmaker who has worked in the professional film industry for over 13 years. Jennifer is disabled and uses her strength determination and passion to make award-winning films despite her physical limitations. Jennifer is a director, producer, writer and professional video editor. She graduated from St. John's University with a Bachelor's degree in communications in 2005. Jennifer also worked at the New York Film Academy as a teacher's assistant in the video editing lab, where she helps students with technical computer programs, and taught Final Cut Pro video editing instruction classes to high school students. Jennifer first gained momentum in the indie film circuit for her slapstick, horror, comedy feature film "Jack 'O' Slasher" in 2012, which was distributed worldwide. Her unique and eccentric filmmaking style developed further with the release of her award-winning short, black and white, modern film noir, horror love story "Isabelle" in 2014. "Isabelle" won the audience choice award at the Macabre Faire Film Festival in 2015. Jennifer wrote and directed a short film called "Laid to Rest" in 2017. The film is a psychological, thriller, drama with themes of romance and domestic violence. "Laid to Rest" had its official NYC premiere at the Winter Film Awards Film Festival at Cinema Village Movie Theater, and was awarded the winner of the Winter Fair award for best horror short film in 2017. Please put on your -- Jennifer please put on your camera and say hey, and describe yourself.

>> Jennifer Valdes: Hi everybody, I'm Jennifer Valdes. I am a multi-racial woman with red hair, sitting in front of two monitors. I am wearing a black sweater with red buttons and a red necklace -- a red beaded necklace and Charisse earrings. And I'm so excited to be here with you all today.

>> Andrew Reid: Thank you Jennifer, we're excited to have you here.

>> Jennifer Valdes: Oh and my pronouns are her and hers. I apologize.

>> Andrew Reid: Nothing to apologize for. Thank you. All right, next director I'm introducing is Carmen Vincent, a freelance video editor and documentary filmmaker based in Chesterton, Indianapolis with a fire inside her to engage with diverse range of people and stories through her work. Carmen believes everyone deserves to feel understood in their own skin and commits to telling raw, often misunderstood stories that amplify, validate people's authentic experiences. She uses her experience with OCD and generalized anxiety disorder to pursue her work with empathy, curiosity and an open mind. Carmen holds a Bachelor's degree in digital media from Valparaiso University and participates in numerous professional organizations such as FWD-Doc, D-Word, Women in Media, IDA and others. She's a Nikon Storytellers Scholar, a participant in Adobe's Creator Camp and a proud recipient of Best International Director award at the Georgia Documentary Film Festival. Carmen, please turn on your camera and describe yourself and introduce yourself to the audience.

>> Carmen Vincent: Hi everyone. I'm really really grateful to be here with you all today. It's such a great group to be part of. My pronouns are she/hers, and I'm a white woman with long blonde hair pulled back in a ponytail wearing a blue and purple floral t-shirt.

>> Andrew Reid: Amazing. Thank you very much for being here. Appreciate it. And the next director I'm going to introduce is Alaa Zabara. So, an independent, hard of hearing, Yemeni American director and cinematographer. Drawn to the power of photographs from an early age, she started to document the daily life around her through the use of camera. These documentations became her conversation with, and introduction to, the world. She became attracted by the ability of cinema to change the hearts and minds of an audience, highlight the stories that need to be told, and to amplify the voices of the voiceless. Her approach to telling stories is, through vision, to challenge herself in telling stories that come from personal experience and have a representation of what is usually untold or hidden. She expresses her take on the world creatively, insightfully and humanely. She likes to play with perception and nudge the audience that they are watching something established by an Arab hard-of-hearing woman. Rather than trying to surprise the audience, she strives to unveil the potential connections to the characters or the story, creating a new view of their own lives. She wants them to relate to her not as a filmmaker, but as a human, filling the distance that comes between each of us. Alaa is one of the MiFILM 2021 Branded Lab Fellows to demystify the process of working in the commercial industry, and was a semi-finalist for the Paxeros 2020 inaugural WCCDP to direct a spot for Subaru. Alaa, please turn on your camera and introduce yourself to the audience.

>> Alaa Zabara: Hi everybody. Thank you. My name is Alaa. My pronouns are her and she, and I'm so excited to be here with you guys and also for the rest of the conversation. Thank you!

>> Andrew Reid: Perfect, thank you. And last but not least I have Ben Fox, the founder of the blindDANCE Film Festival is returning to filmmaking after previously giving up on a lifelong dream. Only a few months after being featured amongst the first class of the GEN-Y Sundance Summer Workshop and having his short film premiering at the Gen-Y Theater during the 2001 Sundance film festival, Fox was diagnosed with a progressive eye condition. Fox then turned to print journalism. Fox draws much from his experience working as a city council beat reporter for a small town award-winning newspaper. He also often worked with the chambers of commerce for the paper. This work led to business consulting and also opening a small business creating custom media press releases and marketing plans. Technology has advanced to the point where software and tools are becoming accessible to the blind and visually impaired. As such, Fox is back to filmmaking full-time. He's returning to film with a flurry of shorts created over the past two years, leading up to the creation of a feature film "See Sedona Blind," premiering in festivals this summer. Fox has worked internationally, creating media and launching creative initiatives in both Tokyo and Mexico, in addition to collaborating with artists all over the world. He has partnered with some great teams to unite filmmakers who are blind, and they are creating a film festival specifically to show the world what the Working While Blind Film Crew can do. Please turn on your camera Ben and introduce yourself.

>> Ben Fox: What's up everybody, my name is Ben Fox. I'm a mixed race male. I've got long hair I'm really proud of, I've been growing out for a couple years. Behind me is a camera and a collection of cool stuff from different movies I love. Really happy to be here, this RespectAbility lab and this group is world class. Honored to be a part of it, thank you.

>> Andrew Reid: Amazing, we're excited to have you here as well. So everyone can now turn on their cameras, all the panelists, and I'm going to start with asking all the panelists individual -- general questions about all of our experiences as directors. If anyone who is watching this has any questions, they can put it in the Q&A chat box and we will address those at the end of the panel. But the first question I want to ask all of our panelists today is: what inspired you to become a storyteller and what motivates you to keep going? And all of us can, you know -- I love just the conversation, anyone can jump in, everyone's going to answer this question. So whoever is feeling bold first can go ahead, and then I'm going to start picking people. [Chuckles] So what inspired you to become a storyteller and what motivates you to keep going?

>> Alaa Zabara: I guess you can just press it or you're gonna --

>> Andrew Reid: No, just go ahead you want a conversation and then everyone's gonna answer this. Raise hand and I'll pick -- I'll call you next.

>> Alaa Zabara: Okay okay. So I can just start. So it's very interesting what inspired me, because I was not able to see characters like me on TV. That's what really inspired me and made me want to tell stories, that I wanted to see people like me. And I wanted to grow something to be motivated by. And the other thing that inspired me to become a storyteller is because, you know, I grew up hard of hearing in Yemen. And most of my life I could not hear things around me, as you said. So these things became conversations to me. That's how I was able to learn about the world around me, capture the story that -- through the perspective of a hard of hearing person, you know. And then I realized that, one day, my perspective is different from the hearing person. How can you understand what I understand? And that's why I wanted to tell stories that can be understandable for me, people with disabilities, you know, a person of color, and a Muslim woman as well, and coming from a different background as well. And I think I just wanted to show different sides of the world that comes in. That's what inspired me the most. I apologize -- I didn't -- go ahead, I'm sorry.

>> Andrew Reid: I was gonna say you didn't finish the second part of that question. What motivates you to keep going? I think that's a very important part that people need to hear. [Laughs]

>> Alaa Zabara: I guess I answered that.

>> Andrew Reid: Who's next? All right, Jennifer.

>> Jennifer Valdes: Hey, so I would say -- I became physically disabled right after I graduated from film school. So I already had a passion to become a film director and I didn't allow my limitations to stop me from creating the things that I felt were important to get out there in the world. I agree with Alaa, as far as wanting to see more people like me, different characters that are underrepresented, represented on screen. You know, the struggles that I've had to deal with in my own life are definitely things that inspire my work. I like to explore the darkness within characters and also within myself. You know, there's a lot of emotion that you have to go through when you're a young person and you have to adapt your whole life to a new way of living because of a disability or, you know, because of a very large change in your life. And I made all of my films after I became disabled, so I had all the training to do it before, but I didn't allow the actual car accident that I was in to stop me from living my dreams. Like, I made several award-winning, you know -- I've directed several award-winning films. And I'd say that, you know, to push myself -- it's all passion. I feel like I belong on set. I feel like, you know, like my -- my work needs to exist in the world, you know. So I guess if you have that passion, you just have to push yourself, you know, to create what you believe in. So that's what, you know, I just forced myself to do it.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah no, I totally get that. I feel sometimes the same way, having a strong sense of belonging on set makes me feel very comfortable. Thank you Jennifer. Who's next? Oh, there we go. Asha, all you.

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Asha speaking. Yes, for me, I grew up watching PBS. I also consider myself very fortunate that every time I saw something of interest that I wanted to try, whether it be gaming, ballet, you know, growing up, like, actually going to operas. I was really fortunate enough to do that growing up. And I felt like every time I would do these activities, I would then go on TV and I would see characters of color not shown doing these things. And I'm like, but I know I'm doing it and I have friends that are interested in them. And why aren't we talking about these experiences? Why aren't these stories being told? So like, that motivates me to keep going, the fact that there's so many untold stories, so many perspectives that are not being seen in the mainstream. So that's what makes me push even harder. Like, I know that we're making films in the indie space. Yes, I'm excited. But I'm like, come on mainstream, get with it! Like, there's so many people of color who, in particular I'd say that people of color or people in the disabled community that are doing some amazing things and they're just not really being seen. So that's what motivates me to just keep going and keep creating films, for sure.

>> Andrew Reid: No, I totally get that. I mean, I was actually in the movie theater recently and I was very frustrated that every trailer was either, you know, an IP that I've seen before or --

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Right?

>> Andrew Reid: So I am happy that [laughs] you're pushing for original storytelling. All right, who's next? All right, there we go. I see a wave, Cashmere.

>> Cashmere Jasmine: My journey was a little bit different. I was definitely going to go into law and I graduated high school after being homeschooled and went off to college and was positive I was going into an environment where I was suddenly going to be surrounded by people who loved philosophy and so on. Suddenly it felt like I was having trouble translating things that I thought were important conceptually to people. And that just continued to grow and eventually I went to Washington DC with Hillary Clinton's advisor and I was really horrified -- I studied political science in college -- And I was horrified to feel like as opposed to our political system representing those who needed representation most, they were more so concerned with what felt like a game of football, red against blue. And people of color or people who were disenfranchised kind of fell in between. And so I was trying to figure out and bring together some way to make these stories more important. How do we bring to the forefront these marginalized voices so that they can be seen and heard, because if our political system can't see them or hear them or comprehend them, then we have to reach out to the hearts and minds of the people. And this was that arena. And so after I went to Merrill Lynch and I found out my diagnosis and got sick, I was working for a music video director in Miami and I was doing his finances and he gave me a chance to start writing concepts. And I was reading these scripts. And I grew up with like Caribbean parents and they were always like kind of like, you know, TV puts rocks in your brains, pick up a book. You know, do something productive. But as I was reading these scripts -- maybe some -- a lot of them probably didn't get made, but there was real meat in here. There was real complexity, these characters had voices. And it just kind of lit a fire of, like, okay so what's missing? How can I bring this to the screen? How do I bring this to life? What makes something popular and what makes the part of the zeitgeist so that it affects a human being? And so it was -- it's been a journey because then I really had to deal with being disabled. And the stories changed. Suddenly it was like, oh, there's a parallel here to those people who are being disenfranchised in those stories, endless politics. And I know that it was always, like, kind of complex to figure out how to make it happen, but that was what drove me. And as I continue, like, I've had this wonderful opportunity to work with Sundance and really dig into, like, where my concepts are from. Why am I telling these stories? I realized that to get -- that's why I lean towards surrealist imagery. I feel like it's interesting without the weight, without getting up on a -- what do you call the box where you're, like, talking at people?

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Soapbox.

>> Cashmere Jasmine: That's it! [Laughs] And suddenly you get to see the inside of someone's thoughts and feelings and emotions and their motivations. And suddenly we go from being a Black person, POC, BIPOC, mentally disabled, or dealing with a physically disabled, and suddenly you are just one individual who has all of those things a part of it and you're telling the story that people are seeing. So that's -- what brought me to it and getting so close and seeing that it's possible, and being surrounded by so many incredible people doing the exact same thing. To tell a story and to realize it's not just me makes me feel like I understand it's now universal and all we have to do is to keep pushing to get our voices heard. So yeah.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah no, I love that. Thank you Cashmere. And I do think it's very important for people to know that they're not alone on the journey and that we're all just individuals. And I think that's great. So yeah, next it's -- I'm just gonna pick now. Carmen. [Laughs]

>> Carmen Vincent: Hey. I mean I feel like I'm still working out this answer with my therapist honestly. Like, I feel like

>> Andrew Reid: That's alright.

>> Carmen Vincent: No. I grew up a pastors kid. My dad's a pastor, so I feel like I internalized this pressure that wasn't really there to listen to other people's stories and kind of stay quiet about myself. And I found a lot of comfort in hearing about people's experiences. And I don't know, I just kind of grew up the listening ear that everyone told their problems to. So that was -- and also, like, the only way my family would really connect is in front of the TV. Like, that was our together time, was watching a movie or a documentary or a TV series. That was the time where I felt, like, close to my family. So I think I also internalized that and I've transitioned from wanting to make narrative films now to wanting to be a documentary filmmaker through and through because of an internship I got to do in Bethlehem Palestine, where I saw the Israeli Palestinian conflict with my own eyes and realized, you know, just how misrepresented it is in the media. So I just recently found out that the things I've been struggling with all my life are disabilities, so I'm still learning how to incorporate that identity into my storytelling. But all I know is that I keep going because it's almost like a compulsion. It's an obsession and compulsion, which is funny because I have OCD. So it's just something I feel like I have to do. Otherwise what's the point of being here, you know?

>> Andrew Reid: No, I appreciate that Carmen. And you know it's actually funny about the parent thing. I actually found films were a really good way for me to connect with my parents as well. Although I don't show them very many movies because my dad always falls asleep now and it really upsets me.

>> Carmen Vincent: My dad does the same thing. [Laughs]

>> Andrew Reid: It hurts me on the inside. But thank you for your answer. I appreciate it -- and your honesty. And then last but not least, Ben, tell me your thoughts.

>> Ben Fox: So, you know, likely like I'm in here is, as kid I had one question and that was: what if I can never find a way to express myself to other people? And the rest of my life has been trying to do just that. And for me, filmmaking, and storytelling through filmmaking, and interacting with other creatives has been the most successful way to express myself. And I have to absolutely, you know, shout out to so many other filmmakers out there that have gone already and they have given their heart and, you know, put their heart and soul, if you will, really, into creating things to share for us. So I can say: who's seen fight club? Right, and you're like okay yeah. But one of my favorite movies and I actually want to take a moment and say: who's seen Last Samurai? Last Samurai, now that movie is my favorite movie. I have a couple favorite movies but that's my favorite. And you know, I use that movie a lot to reference to my family and friends, like, how I'm feeling. It's like okay, it's like when he's preparing for battle that he really wishes he could turn and run the other way, but he's got to go and meet his fate that's coming towards him, because he loves other people. That's what it's about. And suddenly, whether you saw Last Samurai or not, you're there with him. You're there with me as I tell you about it and we're there together. And that's the point. So I believe that filmmaking brings people together and it's moments that we take a moment and stop. Like Carmen said, that's where -- she's there with her family. As we come together it's easy to come together on things we love, and art gives us that moment. So why did I become a filmmaker though specifically and really what is it about for me right now in the future? It's the blindDANCE film festival, because I don't know if you've ever had a moment, especially those of us in this amazing Lab where we're learning about the things you can do. And the people that are the pioneers -- thanks guys -- and everybody else there holding the mesh together that's this industry. You know, for me, I thought that I couldn't make films. That's why I went to print journalism and I started telling stories that way. And little by little I started seeing other people that were blind like me or going blind. And when I finally went to pick up my white cane and get white cane training, the people I met that I love, that care for me and wanted to give me advice said: "do anything in the world but filmmaking, because you're going blind. And that's an oxymoron, you can't go and make films --" And then I realized one thing, this is really the fire in my belly every single day. Because, I mean seriously, because my heart sank that day and when I needed -- when I really needed somebody to be able to say hey, you know what, here's some people that are blind that are making films and they're great. I couldn't find any at that time. I know some now. There's some amazing filmmakers that are blind out there. But now today, they can say when they're going to get their white cane training and a job advisor says to, young people coming up or people of any age go blind, coming up: "what do you want to do?" and somebody says I want to make films. Instead of saying well I can't find any -- the first thing they'll say is go find us some examples and bring it back. They'll get online, they'll find some examples and they'll be able to take that to their job advisor. That's the fire in my belly. And a few times when I wondered if it was really really really possible, I looked online and I found RespectAbility, and I'm grateful for that. And every single day when I've logged into these classes, each one of you guys that I've heard from already, I just want to let you know whatever -- I get mushy, and I didn't even cry this time -- but seriously, I look forward to making films with you all. Thank you for this opportunity.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah thank you Ben. And I think there's a lot of truth in what you said. I also am a fan of the Last Samurai and Edward Zwick, that director. And yeah, I also do get fired up sometimes when people tell me I can't do something, because, you know, I think sometimes we forget we're here today by people who thought that there was walls that needed to be broken so we can continue to grow and expand in this world. Sometimes I think people get too comfortable and, you know, we underestimate how far we can push ourselves as individuals when we really set our mind to something. So I'm all for that mentality. And yeah no, thank you for your response. Well thank you group. The next question I'm going to ask you is what advice do you have for directors making their first film? And what I'm going to do this time is I'm going to go reverse order of how everyone answered. So Ben, you're gonna start it off this time.

>> Ben Fox: Can you state that question once more please and listen with the ears of a guy who's about to answer? [chuckles]

>> Andrew Reid: Absolutely, what advice do you have for directors making their first film? And keep in mind they may have limitations, what have you, just overall general what advice do you have for a director making their first time -- what was it like on your first film, what mistakes you made?

>> Ben Fox: Yeah, so anybody that that isn't creative, man oh man ladies and gentlemen everybody, so anybody that's in legal or in project management, you're going to love this answer. But anybody that's creative, like I wish I'd leaned in when I heard this before because people say this all time. Get everything written down. Get everything written -- not in a contract, necessarily, that's good too, because here's a quote and then I'll get right back to my statement. I came up with this by the way through my first film -- feature film. "A contract is only a bookmark in time amongst good people agreeing that, right now, we agree on this. And we pass it around, everybody reads it and we discuss what these different terms are." That's all contract really is. Because in a week from now, the value of time may change, the weather may change, equipment may fall and break. I mean, my gosh, whose job is that to go out and replace the camera if it falls and breaks if it wasn't insured -- or what if it is insured, because by the way, the Working While Blind film crew, we insure all of our gear. Why? Because we're working while blind. But you know what I didn't think of? What happens if you drop something that you need replaced in the moment, and it's a multi-thousand dollar piece of equipment, and you have a five-week lag period before your insured cameras are replaced. Whose job is it to get that done? Now if you're working with the studio or something like that maybe someone else can answer that question. If you're going indie style, amongst friends, you've got like financiers even. Unless you're, like, multi multi-million dollar flush budget, you drop a camera, you probably want to know, it's not in the contract necessary but just written out like, hey what's gonna happen if that happens. All right, enough with, like, dropping the cameras. Literally, like, what's -- what's the protocol for pretty much any random thing you can think of? Who does your logistics? Anybody that goes to film school -- here's something -- I didn't go to film school but here's something I learned about my friends that have been telling me things that they learn at film school. There's a reason they have a glossary of terms. It's probably important you know what those different terms are for communication purposes. Not to show off. So when somebody tells you something about a best way, you don't go like yeah yeah, that means some guy's a nice person. Communication purposes. So writing things down, passing them around the inner circle, making sure everybody understands what their -- not responsibilities -- because you're like literally just like "hey if this doesn't get done I'm not planning on doing this, let me know now so I can make sure it's done," in writing. So I said it like 25 times, because my whole thing is I love to do projects with people I love. And I'm just assuming we're going to make it work. We have general understandings, right, on this feature film I just worked on. But it would have been nice to have everything, just really understood in writing, because I think people stay best friends that way.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah, I fully agree. I think planning and communication, as much as that as you can do in the pre-production process or even prior, regardless of it's your first film or a film I'm working on now, I think it really does pay off, so I think those are very very true words. Carmen, what advice do you have?

>> Carmen Vincent: Yeah, I think the biggest lesson I've learned so far is it's so important to know the difference between attachment and commitment. Whereas you can get really stuck as a filmmaker and as a creative person being attached to a certain outcome, such as, I want my first film to go to Sundance, where if your film doesn't go to Sundance you feel like a complete failure. But if you try to challenge those attachments and instead reflect on your commitments, then you realize well, why did I want to go to Sundance? So people see my film. There are other ways to have people see your film. So as long as you, you know, reflect constantly on your commitments and your goals and try not to be so, I don't know, be so strict on, like, the way that that needs to happen. I feel like that's just healthier for all of us creatives in our journeys. And it leads to unexpected great things happening.

>> Andrew Reid: Carmen you're so right. You know, it's so funny. I actually -- I watch the Oscar shorts every year, and some of the Oscar shorts don't even go into many festivals. Like they could get rejected from all the festivals, like all the eight -- you know, the supposed top eight or what have you. And then they're nominated. I mean Feeling Through, I don't know if you saw that, but I mean, I know I love that short. And I know it didn't screen at Sundance or this, you know, Slamdance or any of those you.

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Slamdance!

>> Andrew Reid: Oh it did Slam Dance, yes. [Crosstalk]

>> Asha Chai-Chang: I had to come through because we love Feeling Through.

>> Andrew Reid: There we go, fact checking me. I love it. But not Sundance, correct?

>> Asha Chai-Chang: I don't know. Not Sundance, but Slamdance, yeah.

>> Andrew Reid: But what I was trying to say is that there's a lot of films that are very successful, there's different avenues for success. You could sweep the festivals, you could still get -- you know you may not get rejected by a bunch, you could still get nominated for Oscar or you may not get into anything, but an agent or a manager loves your short and you get signed with representation. There's just so many different avenues for success and I think it's really important to think about that, and also as well so, to repeat what you said, rejection is a part of the game and like don't be disheartened. I think that's excellent advice. Cashmere, what are your thoughts?

>> Cashmere Jasmine: I'm going to tell you what every mentor I had told me. And it was always very point blank. It was: "shoot it." If you -- need to change your script to make a location work, if you have to --you are in charge of this. Shoot it. Make it happen. No matter how small or whatever the actual -- the range of it can be. And I think there's another quote, I think it's like James Cameron. He said "the moment that you pick up a camera you're a director." And that's -- I think that's a beautiful way to start and to think about it because it's tough if you can get overwhelmed by everything else. If you can just focus. Laser focus. Make it happen.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah no, I think that's an age-old, you know, wisdom. Like so many people are afraid of making the jump and just, like, just do it. You know? Even if it doesn't come out the way we expect, kind of a tribute to what Carmen said, you -- there's some form of disappointment maybe, just do it. And you learn from it and you grow from it. I mean, definitely as a storyteller, trial and, you know, success and failure are all intertwined in this industry. So I totally agree. Asha?

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Oh yes sorry about that. I didn't mean to just jump in and fact check. But you're right --

>> Andrew Reid: Oh you [unintelligible] and please anyone jump in at any time too and fact check me. [Laughs] I don't have my list of facts all in front of me. The message still applies. [Crosstalk]

>> Asha Chai-Chang: No it really does. No, your knowledge, like, that insight really does apply because I remember, you know, well I guess I'll use it, I mean right? We're talking about Slamdance Unstoppable and, you know, and the fact that we're highlighting filmmakers that are disabled. Right, we had, that was the first -- for Feeling Through in particular, that was blind deaf actor leading in a film that went all the way to the Oscars. And you're right, you know, where it might have been overlooked by other film festivals, we saw the magic in it. We saw how amazing it was for them to overcome those differences to make such an amazing film. And that's another thing, too, like, to be leading into how to make your film. So utilizing the resources in front of you. Like you said, just make it. Complete it because just that is a phenomenal feat. That's advice I would give. I would also say from the director standpoint, I think people feel like -- I mean outside looking and they're like "oh, I'm a director when I get to set" but I think it's way before then, right? All the communication, all the preparation before you get to set, you're already a director. When you're on set in production, you're a director. And once you leave, please understand that film follows you. That is your technological baby. Like [laughs] you're learning from it, yes, but people are gonna be like, oh yep, I did direct that, that was me. You know. [Laughs] So make sure that it's a story that really fits into your brand. Make sure it's something you're really passionate about when you're directing it. Not just like, "oh it's gonna pay this money" or something else. Like make sure you really have an actual connection to what you're creating. And with that said, if you are able to actually secure a crew to work with you, work with an attitude of gratitude please. Consider yourself fortunate that you're even in a space to create. Consider yourself fortunate to even be alive to create and tell your story, or if it's not your story, a story that needs to be told. So attitude of gratitude and remember that's your technological baby. So take care of it.

>> Andrew Reid: No, that's so true, Asha, like, directing starts way before. And I always -- my personal motto is actually that, you know, I try to communicate and plan -- just contributing to what Ben said earlier -- as much as I can. So in pre-production I get what I need in production, so post-production I'm actually excited to enter the edit bay and play through my footage, and not have it be just a nightmare of like, okay, let me try and stitch together and salvage this. If we can do our job in production and pre-production, post-production I think is the most exciting actually part of the filmmaking process. So I totally agree with that. Jennifer what are your thoughts? Oh -- there we go.

>> Jennifer Valdes: Hey, I agree with what everybody's saying. Definitely make the film that you want to make. If you're passionate about it, do it. There are a ton of resources available even if -- people are making camera phone movies. So if you think that you don't have professional equipment, I wouldn't let that stop you from creating your vision. Keep up with all the the latest technology, all the latest programs and cameras. You know, oftentimes when we're independent, we -- we work in every single department. You know, we have to do our own lighting and camera setups and, you know, shot lists, and all these different things, that we have a hand in every single department. So I would say just keep learning. You know, everything's always changing in this industry. Don't let -- you know, don't be intimidated by the fact that people are making these multi-million dollar movies. I made my first film for five thousand dollars, it was distributed worldwide. And you know -- like I think Cashmere had said, like, if you if you're shooting somewhere and you can't make it work, change it up somehow. Like, it was freezing outside, so we ended up building a set inside that looked like it was outside. Like, you know, filmmaking is hard. It's really hard. So you have to really want it. And go for it. If it's really something that you want and yeah. It's -- like Asha said, it's gonna follow you, it's attached to your name. Make it something that you're proud of, that you're proud to put forth as your intellectual property. I agree with what everybody else is saying. And don't give up. Do whatever you have to do to make it. You know, even if it takes five years, you know -- and make it right, that's also something that I've learned. I've rushed projects that shouldn't have been shot just yet, just because I couldn't get it out of my brain, because my head -- I think the way that I think, it's like the film is finished in my brain. So I think in the form of camera angles, you know, and setups and things. And my brain just kind of, like, presses play and there's the film and then I have to kind of piece it together. So yeah I was just trying to make the point that this is a difficult industry, you know. Go for it and create, create, create, and learn as much as you can. Thank you.

>> Andrew Reid: I totally agree with all of that, 100%, and in my own personal experiences as well, I resonate with that, so -- Alaa, what do you think?

>> Alaa Zabara: You know, I think this is a question that I would usually ask, [laughs] but all these advices are very -- I agree with all these things. Something that I learned from my own experience when making my first short film, which was in the same time I was doing it for my senior thesis. So I decided to kind of go outside of my -- doing this as a school project and do it as a professional experience. And I realized that this is something that I wish people would tell me, so I hope that people can take it, is when you want to do your first film or whatever it is, maybe know yourself. Know yourself as an artist, you know? You want to know, what's your voice, what's your genre that you want to go. What is your -- what's your gift? That we're so talented with so many things, we can become cinematographers, directors, editors and producers because, you know, when you're independent, when you come underrepresented, you kind of do all these things. But there's one thing that you're really good at. So try to focus on that. Know yourself. Know your art voice and then from there, just keep going and never think of the result. I used to think always think about the results and be like: "oh my god, I want to make this film, I want this film to be in this type of festival." This and this and this. But that is -- kind of affects my artistic style because it makes you think like: "oh there's a festival that takes this type of film, that I have to change my story and I don't want to do that." So I think you want to focus on your story first, and then, when it comes to the festival, the programmer somehow will speak and take it for you. Like for example, for me, I never expected that my film would be coming to Bentonville Film Festival. And I was like: "What? Okay! I didn't expect that." That's because they spoke -- my story spoke to them. So my [unintelligible] will make the noise for everyone else. And I guess this is something that I will try the first time on. To just kind of keep going. And the hardest part of everything is to have faith. It's very hard to believe in yourself and to have faith while everyone around you are not, you know, supporting or supporting those type of stories. So you just -- gotta keep going and love the dirt. You gotta love the dirt. If you love the dirt you -- I mean I enjoy doing the dirt. I look for the dirt more than just professionalism and all that stuff. This is more fun actually. I don't really look for perfect equipment and all that. [beep] [unintelligible] So these are my advices. Just keep going, find yourself, find your voice, find out who you are, and just be yourself.

>> Andrew Reid: No, I 100% agree. I don't think there's any -- you know, I think sometimes feel as a director, just because, you know, you are the creative director on set, like there's nothing that, you know, you're a part of everything. You know, you're in every single department. So there is no job that is -- well I personally feel -- below you. Like, whatever you need to get done to push the story forward, you push it forward, you know? So -- because ultimately at the end of the day we're all trying to create something that we're not only proud of, but everyone -- the team can, you know, all share it and be like, I was a part of this, you know? If my team shares it, that's how I know personally. I'm like: "Wow. We did well." You know? We created something that we're all proud of which always makes me happy. So my next question is a fun one. What exciting things are you all working on now as directors? And I want to hear the dish, the dirt of what everyone's working on. It could be nothing -- that's totally fine. Everyone -- you know, I'll say this actually, not everyone. A huge part of being a director is the waiting game. I actually have nothing going on between projects. So that's totally fine. So you could say: "you know Andrew, I'm in the waiting game for the next thing." But if you are doing -- working on something, yeah, you know, tell me --what it is. And we'll reverse orders. Alaa, it's back at you. [Laughs]

>> Alaa Zabara: Okay so I'm back again. So you know, I'm working on multiple projects right now, because as an artist I just keep myself busy no matter what. Whether it's about money or not, you just gotta keep creating something. Funny thing, tomorrow I'm actually shooting a music video. So I'm a cinematographer. Basically I'm very [unintelligible] with this panel and then I have to finish up, go pick up the equipment, and do all the crazy things. But other projects that I'm working for the long term. In the short term then, I'm trying to write a story that speaks in the perspective of a mother to a disabled child when it comes in the middle eastern perspective. So this is something -- I'm the early stage of it. I'm writing it. Hopefully, you know, like upping the game for that. And I guess these are the other projects. And then lastly, there's a -- recently I finished shooting a documentary short that I was selected for the national -- the Arab American national museum. They were selected, a couple of filmmakers make a short film that speaks about being in different identities. And you know that I'm hard of hearing, but I'm also carrying a different identity as being an Arab Muslim. So I -- I'm trying to be open with other subjects of stories that can help me to grow as an artist. So yeah, these are the things that I've worked at, I guess that's it. But hopefully I can keep shooting.

>> Andrew Reid: That's great. You know, I thought you know, I'm gonna say the waiting game. But you know, you got a lot going on, that's great, all right. Jennifer, next -- And congrats on Bentonville by the way. That's awesome.

>> Alaa Zabara: Thank you!

>> Jennifer Valdes: Hey, yeah. I'm doing a lot of writing too. I'm working on writing a serial killer drama kind of series. And I'm also on the other end of the spectrum writing a dance movie with people who are disabled, who -- I'd actually like to get disabled dancers working in the movie. So I've got that in development in my brain. But I'm trying to get a job working on some sort of production. So if you guys know of anything, I don't know, I mean, I just want to be on set. I want to, you know, I'd ultimately want to direct as a professional director, but I really just want to be on set and work in different positions and work on some kind of a web series or streaming series, TV show, really, you know, film. I just want to get that industry experience. I have plenty of indie experience, but, you know, I really just want to, you know, get myself out there in a full-time basis and just be on set every day and live on set. And it's kind of my dream just to be working in the industry, you know, professionally. So I'm going to keep at it, giving my resume out and, you know, working on that.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah no, Jennifer, I mean, I think one thing people neglect as a director is that so much of it is just pushing yourself and trying to get on set. And it's crazy how often as a director you are not on set compared to everyone else who is on set. [Laughter] The sound designer gets a job every single day. The DP jumps from one project to another. You know? The editor, the visual -- they all are on set actually, ironically enough, oftentimes more than the director. So you know, I always say one big thing that I personally tell people as they're learning filmmaking is lean on the people who are on set more often than you sometimes, because there's going to be things that they know and ultimately it's a team. It's all about team. So it's okay to say sometimes as a director: "I don't know, I don't know which lens I want. Can you give me some options?" You know? These are okay questions to ask. I actually think it makes you a better director. So -- and I agree also as well. Just trying to push yourself so you can have more opportunities to be on set. So that's awesome. Thank you Jennifer. Asha.

>> Asha Chai-Chang: I agree. So the first thing I noticed when you asked the question about projects, I'm like, what did my NDA say? [Laughs]

>> Andrew Reid: That's okay! You can say you have a secret NDA project that I cannot talk about. Yeah, and that is cool, that is cool. [Laughter]

>> Asha Chai-Chang: But I will share. So my production company, Love My Productions, yes, follow us online and on, like, social media. We're actually building out to gain more funding for projects. So that's one thing that I'm working on. So that's like an overall. And then within that, so spoiler alert, which, actually is in a distribution deal right now to have mass, like, worldwide distribution. And it's that -- now that film had went to so many different film festivals, I'm really proud. And with that, we're actually expanding out this series. So to continue out with a couple of episodes to make into a whole series. And so that's what we're in development with right now. Also, I have a feature film that's in development and -- fortunately, right, [laughs] That Get is the title right now and I'm actually just -- I got some advice actually from RespectAbility. So I'm hoping to collaborate RespectAbility with on working on that. Of course we're gonna have disabled talent in the film. Hello! So that's in the works right now and it's more of a -- it's a dramedy rom-com, which I never really, like, usually do rom-coms. But it's good to stretch, right? It's good to stretch as a director. Yes. So I'm writing and directing that. And of course, still programming for film festivals. So I'm actually a co-captain for the Slamdance Unstoppable program this year, so I have some reviewing to do. I just wrapped doing all, like, the judging for Doc NYC. And I'm saying that because I think they're gonna actually throw some more films -- I gotta be careful about saying that I already did it. And one more thing, okay -- and then also All by Design. It's currently in film festivals right now. So our next stops are at the Hip Hop Film Festival, Greater Cleveland Underground Film Festival, Flick Flair, which is more, like, a market -- so it's more about, like, actually marketing the film out there. So distribution talks for that film as well. That's a lot, okay.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah no, that's all great. And Asha, I think you bring up -- I think unintentionally as well, an excellent point of, you are directing, you are trying to sell your projects, you are a programmer. I think a lot of people think as well, just because you're a director, I have to be the creative director on set and that is all I do. That is not the case at all. I think everyone learned from all of you today is that you have your hands in many things, and being creative director and the helm of your individual projects is one thing, while being able to juggle all these different avenues in which you creatively express yourself or you help other creatives. I think that's really awesome. Cashmere?

>> Cashmere Jasmine: Yeah, I gotta just kind of reiterate that too. Like, we're a community and we help each other, it builds us up, and there's no negative to doing that. So I actually got hired recently to be a DP on Stone Fate. And it's a web series that is -- an Afrofuturist themed web series. So I'm super excited for, like, being able to create some visuals with that. And then I just finished producing Sia. Which was a LGBTQ story based on, kind of, once again layering these concepts of finding love, losing love and dealing with it all with a revolution in the background. And that's another place where I'm, I think we're going to be able to play with some of this surrealism, some of this more -- less tactile visuals. And then after that, I am -- I just got the funding, so I don't know if it's been announced yet, so I can't -- I don't know if I can say it. But so I'm gonna be working on pushing forward a film that is very close to my heart. It's about my little brother who's paranoid schizophrenic. And in -- during the Ferguson-ish situations, he went and attended a protest and ended up getting arrested. And I won't get into, like, a lot of the details there but the man who went into jail, I never really met him again. And for me -- and so this is my -- I mean, I talk to him, he's my good friend, we're together all the time. So it's like, this is what I imagine his inner world was, like, going through something like that. Even if he can't really verbalize it. And I'm really -- it's going to be a tough one to get into. But I think I wanted to make his inner world -- a western. So I'm really exploring a lot of different, like, genres and like just excited for what happens next.

>> Andrew Reid: Thank you Cashmere for sharing that. And yeah, no, good luck with the DP gig and then good luck with taking on that project with your brother. I'm sure it will be very meaningful and I think it's something that a lot of people, you know, would love to watch. So yeah, thank you for that. Carmen.

>> Carmen Vincent: Yeah so my day job quote unquote, to pay the rent, is freelance video editing, which I absolutely love. And I have a great mix of non-profit and commercial clients right now, so I'm feeling really good about that side of my career. But also I've been working on a documentary for the past year and a half-ish called Teacher Patience. And it's about a small town Indiana family's efforts to educate first responders and the wider community about Down syndrome and other disabilities. So people can learn more about that at teacherpatients.com. I'm the director, producer, editor, fundraiser. We're currently trying to raise money to finish it, so if anyone knows anyone. [Laughs] But yeah. That's what I'm working on.

>> Andrew Reid: Jack of all trades on that one, huh?

>> Carmen Vincent: Yeah.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah. [Laughs] And I think we've all been there as well. We've all been the director, the producer, the writer, the soundy, the editor. And I think there's no shame in that and saying that as well. Because as director I think it's very important to understand all the disciplines as much as you can. So yeah, no, I think that's great. And Ben, what are you working on?

>> Ben Fox: I'm excited to announce a partnership with the Able Artists Gallery in Tallahassee with the blindDANCE Film Festival. And we will be there once a month doing a short 10 minute feature, like, short feature 10 minute film on one of their artists each month. And that'll be put together in a compilation for the blindDANCE film festival at the end of the year. And I'm also really excited to tell you guys that I've got my very first feature script that's, like, not a documentary film that I'm working on. And Jennifer, it's a horror film called "Orbs: The Lights That Can See You." And it's about these orbs that show up and haunt these people that are blind, living at a blind training school. And the catch and the funny twist is this: the eye doctor keeps telling these guys, well, you guys have heard of Jon Benet's syndrome, right? It happens to most people going blind, as they're going blind they see these weird flashes of lights and hallucinating stuff like that, it's part of the process, so they don't realize they're actually being haunted by real life ghosts until it's too late.

>> Jennifer Valdes: That's brilliant.

>> Ben Fox: [laughs] Yeah, yep. Anyway I've been telling -- we have a producer named Yoni Frager and he's done some pretty cool stuff in horror. I've been telling him about you, Jennifer.

>> Jennifer Valdes: All right, well we'll see what happens. I mean it's -- it actually sounds like something that I could personally connect to. I love things with a important message and creepiness attached, you know?

>> Ben Fox: Yep and we're going to be raising awareness about the different types of vision. Because as these orbs chase me down the hall, or one of the other characters, I have this little tunnel of visions. I'm, like, looking around for it and you'll see my point of view. Or other people's weird, like, different types of -- not weird, but people don't know about the different types of blindness. So yeah, raising awareness big time.

>> Jennifer Valdes: I can see it already. I think it's a fabulous wonderful idea. I love it. We'll talk, we'll talk on that. [Laughs]

>> Andrew Reid: You know, thank you for that Ben. Yeah, we are -- coming close to running out of time, and I know we have -- we have one or two questions that we -- if we can rapid fire, if anyone wants to jump in and answer, please go ahead and do. Yeah, so let's go to -- I have a question from Amy, and her question is for everyone, I'm not picking, jump in if you feel like you have it. "After being able to push themselves against all adversities, how is anybody able to cope with this COVID around the limitating possibilities, despite their strong determination and drives?" So being able to push themselves against adversities and how are you able to cope with COVID -- the COVID limiting your possibilities despite your strong determinations and drives? Does anyone have an answer for that question?

>> Carmen Vincent: I mean, I'll jump in. I started my own business as a way to support myself, my own freelancing business. So that was my way to pivot during COVID so I could still make my own money.

>> Andrew Reid: Wow, that's awesome. Anyone else? [Crosstalk]

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Oh sorry, Cashmere go ahead.

>> Cashmere Jasmine: I think that COVID also opened up a lot of doors where we might have been kind of stuck, where suddenly now everybody needs more accessibility. Suddenly you're getting -- we're getting into those floodgates. And so our eyes are really opened a bit more now about how do we accommodate everybody. So it's -- there's negative and positive, definitely.

>> Andrew Reid: Asha?

>> Asha Chai-Chang: Yes, I agree with pivoting, as well as utilizing the accessibility tools that we have now, right? Shout out to Zoom. [Laughs] I actually created -- directed, go figure huh -- directed a music video during the pandemic where we each -- where I decided to, like, direct virtually. So I decided to create, like, tutorials on how to do the dance and how do I want the shots to look, and like, everything I normally would say as a director. But I made it in one little video, everyone watched and followed and we were able to make a video that looked seamless. You know? And so everyone's thought like: "oh my god how did they get the dance on point? And how they get this and the outfits are the same?" I'm like, a lot of prep. And then, you know, being there in that editing space and getting it together. And it was a fun way for us to all connect and still be creative. So I wasn't -- I didn't stop creating just because of us being different places and so I took it as -- I changed it into an advantage point for us to actually still create in, you know, in the midst of COVID. So, that was my way of doing it.

>> Andrew Reid: That's great. Anyone else have any thoughts on that question? No? Yeah, but in general --

>> Jennifer Valdes: I would say that it was challenging but, you know, it made us all stronger in our relationships. And also, you know, they have all different kinds of compliance on set. If you don't feel safe, you know, wear a mask is what I could say. You know, there are things that you could do to protect yourself. You know? Like, I have an autoimmune disease and I wear a mask sometimes. You know, and don't let anybody else's view of the situation affect how you feel about your own safety, I would say. You know, and they do have different protocol and things and -- temperature checks and different things. So I would say keep yourself safe as best as you can. You know? And just create. And like everybody, else said, they have all these different tools to speak virtually, and Zoom, and different meetings and things. And a lot of people took this time to make movies during the pandemic, because they were so bored, they didn't know what to do with themselves. They said, let me set up cameras. So it was a, you know, an opportunity for learning and development, you know, for future projects. So I would say that it was a challenge but I think we all handled it pretty well.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah no -- I agree with that Jennifer. I shot in COVID and yeah, I was definitely bored. So it definitely was a help. You know, being creative in COVID definitely helped me, you know, expedite the 2020. [Laughs] That's for sure. I have one more question that I want to ask everyone that we were asked is, why do you think there is a raising interest in disabilities and film using actual inclusive actors?

>> Ben Fox: Because people are curious and it's time. And because nobody can tell the story like we can tell the story. And people can sense authenticity up close in person or between miles and miles and streaming screens. Yeah.

>> Asha Chai-Chang: And to add to that, because disabled actors are talented as anything. So we -- so we're like, why aren't we being seen? Let's authentically tell our own stories and we're pushing for it. As I'm gonna say -- it's happening because we're advocating for it and we're being intentional about actually hiring disabled actors. That's why it's happening.

>> Andrew Reid: Yeah, I 100% agree. Anyone else?

>> Alaa Zabara: I'm gonna jump in and say what I think from what I see. I agree, I mean, Asha and Ben, with what they're saying. I also think that it's because I think the industry and Hollywood needs new stories. We have been seeing a lot of stories over and over again, and then we can, you know, see stories. I mean, I love Superman, heroes, Avengers and all. This is really great, but we need stories that hold human -- humanity. That can talk about that. Emotions and all that. And I think that's why they need us, real humans to tell our stories and tell it the right way. Just naturally. And I think that's why.

>> Andrew Reid: Awesome, no I think those are all great answers, team. And I actually I think that we are at our wrapping up point. I could spend another hour talking to all of you. I have resonated with a lot of your words. I know, I've experienced them on some level personally. But it makes me feel good, and knowing that you're all going through the journey, and we're going together as a team and we're continuing to move forward and to tell stories that have yet to be told. And to have people watch it, more importantly as well. I feel like that's the biggest thing. Like to bring it out there and for people to respond. So I just want to say thank you to everyone. Thank you to all these amazing directors. Continue to push forward, and I look forward to the next time we converse. It was truly a pleasure.