

New York International Children’s Film Festival Announces 2021 Slate Of Feature Films; Fourteen Films From Fifteen Countries, Eight Premieres & Four Returning Filmmakers

NYICFF announced its feature film slate and jury for its 2021 edition, March 5-14. For the first time in its 24 years, the Oscar-qualifying film festival for children and teens will take place completely online, making its groundbreaking programming available to families across the United States. Passes go on sale to members on February 19, and to the general public on February 26 at nyicff.org.

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The 2021 feature film slate offers a direct reflection of the Festival’s mission to present films that highlight examples of both the myriad cultures and the shared humanity that comprise the world its audience lives in. This year’s selection places a particular focus on young people who connect with the past to shape their futures. NYICFF 2021 will take place online, allowing busy families to watch at their own convenience.

“We’re a little heartbroken that we can’t physically be with our audience this year, seeing their reaction to each film and engaging directly with them in the conversations that the films inspire,” said NYICFF Executive Director Nina Guralnick. “At the same time, I couldn’t think of a more vital moment to connect kids and families across the country with meaningful programming.”

“In this challenging cultural moment, young people are hungry for a sense of connection—to their histories, to each other, and to possibility—across races and cultures,” said Director of Programming Maria Christina Villaseñor. “The 14 feature programs in NYICFF’s 2021 slate provide a crucial connection for young audiences via deeply talented filmmakers who honor the intelligence of kids and families and capture their stories with nuance, thoughtfulness, and joyful promise.”

As in years past, NYICFF 2021 features a wide range of films spanning topics and continents: from a magical realist family drama in the Curaçao countryside (Buladó; International Premiere) and a land battle in the Mohawk Nation of Quebec (Beans) to time traveling 12-year-olds 70 years apart (The Fantastic Journey of Margot and Marguerite; North American Premiere) and an ecowarrior cat spirit (The Legend of Hei; World Premiere English Dub). The slate of bold new narratives, animated films, and true-to-life stories celebrates the intricacies and importance of representation and cultural identity.

“We’ve always felt a responsibility to present our programming to young audiences as a path to mutual understanding, to a heightened awareness of the world beyond their experience, and a deeper exploration of their own identity,” said Guralnick. “And we truly have something for everyone—if you’re seeking a madcap adventure to take you out of your pandemic routine or you want an entry point to a larger family discussion on race and identity, the Festival is an opportunity to discover worlds beyond your four walls.”

The Festival will welcome Karen Rupert Toliver (2020 Oscar-winning producer, Hair Love and EVP Creative Sony Pictures Animation) as a first-time jury member along with returning members Sofia Coppola, Geena Davis, Madeline di Nonno, Jorge Gutiérrez, Matthew Modine, Mark Osborne, Ira Sachs, Uma Thurman, and Nora Twomey. Feature filmmakers returning to the Festival to share their newest work include Steve Box (Moominvalley: The Hobgoblin Trilogy), Rémi Chayé (Calamity), and Max Lang and Daniel Snaddon (The Snail and the Whale, Zog & the Flying Doctors).

In addition to the slate of feature films, NYICFF returns with seven all-new short film programs full of the artful, charming, surprising, and important films it is renowned for curating from around the globe.

Select programs will be accompanied by Q&A conversations with filmmakers for audiences of all ages, fostering lively, thought-provoking engagement and conversation.

FEATURE FILM SLATE

BEANS CANADA

Tracey Deer, 2020, 92 min.
Ages 14+

In the summer of 1990, Beans, a sweet and studious twelve-year-old Mohawk girl, is suddenly forced to grow up fast and become her own kind of warrior when a land occupation battle creates a fierce stand-off between her indigenous community and the government. Torn between innocent childhood and reckless adolescence, she struggles to build her own identity amidst the chaos of the uprising and the injustice of a world that sees her as different even in her own land. Will she succumb to the pressures of a society intent on bringing her down? Or will she rise up to assert her strength and character?

THE BEARS' FAMOUS INVASION FRANCE, ITALY

Lorenzo Mattotti, 2019, 82 min
Ages 10+
French with English Subtitles

Based on the Italian book and beautifully animated in warm Mediterranean colors and bold shapes, this feature from Cannes is a whimsical allegory. Our narrators, an old storyteller and his young apprentice, the delightful Almeria, frame this wondrous tale of the great bear king Léonce and his clan. To find his lost son Tonino and food to survive the winter, he leads them down from the mountains and into the world of humans. The bears and humans exist together in peace – for a time.

BULADÓ NETHERLANDS, CURAÇAO—INTERNATIONAL PREMIERE

Eché Janga, 2020, 86 min
Ages 11+

Papiamento and Dutch with English Subtitles

Headstrong Kenza lives with her father Ouirra and grandfather Weljo on a beautifully situated plot of land that doubles as a car wrecking yard on the coast of Curaçao. Father and son are opposites: Ouirra is a no-nonsense police officer with an eye toward the future, while Weljo finds meaning in the past through the spirituality of

his African ancestors and the island's native inhabitants. Meanwhile, 11-year-old Kenza seeks to find her own place, and identity. Her search takes flight as she gravitates toward the mystical traditions of her grandfather.

CALAMITY

FRANCE, DENMARK

Rémi Chayé, 2020, 85 min.

French with English subtitles

Ages 8+

It's 1863 and 12-year-old Martha Jane and her family are headed West across the United States in search of a better life. After her father is hurt in a serious accident, she takes charge of her siblings and learns to drive the family wagon. Utterly practical and bold, Martha Jane trades her constricting skirts for the ease of boys' breeches and never looks back. Her unconventional style and brazenness don't sit well with the pioneer community, and when the leader of the convoy wrongly accuses her of theft, she must run away to find proof of her innocence. In the Wild, she discovers herself and a world which shapes her into the mythical and mysterious Calamity Jane.

CURTAIN UP!

US

Hui Tong & Kelly Ng, 2019, 69 min.

English; additional dialogue in Mandarin with English subtitles

AGES 8+

All energy and opinion, 5th grader William seems excited to burst beyond his constraints, while his classmate Charlotte, a measured thinker, admits that sometimes it's easier to be scared than happy. But both students adore their theater class and are set to have a transformative final year of elementary school. This award-winning documentary follows a 5th grade class at PS 124 in New York City's Chinatown as they prepare for a big musical production of "Frozen Kids" and begin to discover their identities. Behind the scenes, nervous excitement and flubbed lines goofiness brushes up against stereotypes, family expectations, and post-graduation uncertainties. Through rehearsing for this American favorite, the young actors grapple with their Asian roots. Will they have to let something go?

JACKIE & OOPJEN

NETHERLANDS—NEW YORK PREMIERE

Annemarie van de Mond, 2020, 90 min.

Dutch with English subtitles

Ages 8+

Twelve-year-old Jackie has made Amsterdam's world famous Rijksmuseum her second home since her mother is always busy at her job there. As Jackie wanders the museum after hours, Oopjen Coppit, the woman depicted in Rembrandt's famous 1634 painting, suddenly steps out of the canvas and into the middle of the gallery. Used to keeping her cool and problem solving, Jackie instantly decides to take Oopjen under her wing and help her search for her missing sister. Oopjen, a woman from the Golden Age, finds the 21st century to be a big adventure while Jackie finally finds a true friend.

THE FANTASTIC JOURNEY OF MARGOT AND MARGUERITE

FRANCE—US PREMIERE

Pierre Coré, 2020, 89 min.
French with English subtitles
Ages 10+

Marguerite and Margot have a lot in common: both are 12 years old and missing their fathers. The one big difference? One lives in 1942, the other in 2020. Or at least that's the case until the discovery of a magical trunk in an attic that sends them traveling through time. Margot and Marguerite have something else in common: their father is no longer there, one vanished during World War II, the other is not living at home. With 70 years apart, they're embarking in a wild adventure to find their present, explore history and their families' memories, and not least of all manage the transition to becoming teens!

THE LEGEND OF HEI

CHINA—NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE/WORLD PREMIERE English-language Version

MTJJ Mutou, 2019, 101 min.
Ages 9 +

With an inky black coat, adorable mewl, and eyes as big as saucers, Xiao Hei is the cutest feline around. But don't let his good looks fool you, he's more than just a cat. When he meets up with a motley band of spirits—creatures and human-like beings with superhuman powers—Hei finds that he, too, is a spirit and shapeshifts from cat to kid form. His new friends train and challenge him in the warrior spirit arts, with the pressing goal of saving their beloved forest from developers destroying it in this lushly rendered tale. Evoking Studio Ghibli's ecological fables, *The Legend of Hei* is a winsome combination of heart, soul, fantasy, and an extraordinary adventure.

MAGIC LIGHT CELEBRATION: ZOG AND THE FLYING DOCTORS + THE SNAIL AND THE WHALE

UK, SOUTH AFRICA

Total program run time: 51 min
Ages 3+

ZOG & THE FLYING DOCTORS

NEW YORK PREMIERE

Sean Mullen, 2020, 24 min.

The winner of audience awards at NYICFF year after year, Magic Light Pictures gets a full spotlight this year as we feature their newest film and fulfill our audience's countless requests for an encore of *The Snail and The Whale*. *ZOG and the Flying Doctors* picks up where *Zog* left off, as Princess Pearl achieves her dreams of being a doctor. Together with *Zog* the dragon and Sir Gadabout, the flying trio criss-cross the kingdom giving vaccinations to creatures of all stripes. But Pearl's uncle, the orange-faced King, is doubtful and disapproving and ends up sick. Will he learn to trust in Pearl and science, and rethink what it means to be royal?

THE SNAIL AND THE WHALE

Max Lang & Daniel Snaddon, 2019, 27 min.

When a tiny snail (charmingly voiced by Sally Hawkins) longs to see the world, it hitches a ride on a great big, grey-blue humpback whale. Together they go on an amazing, gloriously animated journey, past icebergs and volcanoes, sharks and penguins, and marvel at the vast wonders of the world, and size seems like strength to the snail. But when the whale is beached in a bay, it's the tiny snail who just might save the day.

MOOMINVALLEY: THE HOBGOBLIN TRILOGY
FINLAND/UK—NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

Steve Box, 2019, 66 min.

Ages 5+

Moominmania is back at NYICFF with another exclusive installment of Tove Jansson's beloved characters come to life. The Moomin Hobgoblin Trilogy brings thrills and delight right from the start as Moomintroll finds a magical hat with some surprising properties. Next, Moominmamma turns her attention to the sweet and secretive tiny visitors Thingumy & Bob, and finally a mysterious precious gem sends the town into a tizzy.

MY DAD IS A HEEL WRESTLER

JAPAN

Kyohei Fujimura, 2018, 110 min.

Japanese with English subtitles

Ages 9+

9-year-old Shota's dad was a star top-tier pro wrestler until age and injuries dropped him to the kitschy B-league of wrestling. Shota believes his dad is still number one, until one day he makes the shocking discovery that his father is not a hero wrestler but Cockroach, the "heel", or villain, everyone loves to hate. Can Shota's father take off his mask and learn that there are more important things than saving face? Can Shota learn that real heroes don't always don the guise we think? Find out in this heart-warming, body-slamming, smile-inducing tale that lights up the ring.

NAHUEL AND THE MAGIC BOOK

CHILE, BRAZIL—NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

Germán Acuña, 2019, 99 min.

Spanish with English subtitles

Ages 8+

Life in Nahuel's seaside town revolves around the ocean, which makes his fear of water a challenge. What's worse, he can't help his fisherman father on his boat. One day, Nahuel finds a magical book, the Levisterio, that seems to offer a solution to this problem. But a dark sorcerer is after the book and captures Nahuel's father to set a trap. Guided by Fresia, a shaman's daughter, Nahuel journeys to rescue his father and find courage from within.

RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON

US

Don Hall & Carlos López Estrada, 2021

Rated PG

Walt Disney Animation Studios' *Raya and the Last Dragon* travels to the fantasy world of Kumandra, where humans and dragons lived together long ago in harmony. But when an evil force threatened the land, the dragons sacrificed themselves to save humanity. Now, 500 years later, that same evil has returned and it's up to a lone warrior, Raya, to track down the legendary last dragon to restore the fractured land and its divided people. However, along her journey, she'll learn that it'll take more than a dragon to save the world—it's going to take trust and teamwork as well.

SISTERS: THE SUMMER WE FOUND OUR SUPERPOWERS
NORWAY—NEW YORK PREMIERE

Silje Salomonsen & Arild Østin Ommundsen, 2020, 77 min.

Norwegian with English subtitles

Ages 7+

Vega, 9, and her wild sister Billie, 5, are going on an overnight outdoor hike in the lush Norwegian woods. The trip is full of exciting climbs, silly jokes, and happy trekking until Dad pulls one acrobatic stunt too many, falling into a cave and injuring his leg badly. Unable to move, he asks Vega and Billie to get help. Anxiously retracing their steps, they know that everything depends on them now, as Vega tries to keep them focused on the goal despite setbacks, surprises, and Billie's many distractions. They bravely face their fears, discover their superpowers, and find strength in their sisterhood.



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