WRIF Board of Directors

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Annual Report 2019

For 15 years, WRIF has demonstrated our belief in the unique power of film to draw diverse communities together to inspire, educate, raise awareness, and motivate change. 2019 brought exciting new growth in WRIF’s film and multimedia offerings and community engagement, expanding WRIF’s unparalleled year-round support for independent film and media arts in the Upper Valley.

15th Annual WRIF Festival 2019

WRIF celebrated 15 years of Revolutionary Cinema at White River Indie Festival 2019 in White River Junction, Vermont, May 31–June 2, 2019, showcasing 16 documentary and fiction films by filmmakers selected for social relevance and artistic excellence. This year’s festival was directed by Christine Porcaro with the full involvement of WRIF’s working Board of Directors as advocates and sponsors for selected films and events. Concentrated in the village of
White River Junction, WRIF 2019 offered attendees an intimate 3-day immersion in the art and impact of independent film and media making, incubating creativity while building community. For the fourth year, WRIF partnered with Northern Stage Theater to present festival screenings and events at the Barrette Center for the Arts. Opening night documentary film *Amazing Grace* about the legendary Aretha Franklin sold out the 240-seat Byrne. The interest in seeing this historic film was so spectacular that the Festival in conjunction with WRIF 365* organized a free second screening for the community in partnership with Hartford High, again filling the ~500-seat venue.

Additional highlights from White River Indie Festival 2019 include:

- **Bringing the World to the Upper Valley & the Upper Valley to the World**
  The Selection Committee, comprised of Board and community members, invited a highly curated selection of films from around the globe and right here at home that reveal the currents that connect us and the urgent stories of our times, from *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness* (Pakistan), *Styx* (Austria), and *White Right: Meeting with the Enemy* (U.K.), and *The Modern Jungle* (Mexico/US) to regional films *Little Beeri’s March* (VT, John Griesemer and Faith Catlin), *The Grand Bizarre* (VT, Jodie Mack), among many more. Full WRIF 2019 program is available at: [http://www.wrif.org/past-festival-programs/](http://www.wrif.org/past-festival-programs/)

- **Opening Night Gala**
  The highly-attended fundraising opening night gala was made possible through new partnerships with Jarvis Antonio Green, producing artistic director of JAG Productions, and host venue The Village at White River Junction, kicking off the 2019 Festival with live music and celebration on the roof-top.

- **WRIF Works! Film & Media Arts Education**
  Fulfilling our mission to support independent and youth film and media making and makers, WRIF Festival 2019 offered WRIF Works! These educational workshops conducted by renowned filmmakers, critics, film scholars, and media partners VPR and NHPR were presented alongside festival film screenings to incubate creativity in our community. Youth and local filmmakers from the *Freedom & Unity Youth Media Contest* and *48-Hour Film Slam!* were offered free WRIF Works! tickets to encourage participation. Workshop topics:

  1. **From Ideation to Realization: Creative, Innovative, Low-Budget Filmmaking** – moderated by Jane Applegate, Faith Catlin, John Griesemer, Jesse Kreitzer, & Ben Silberfarb
  2. **How to View Film** – moderated by Gerd Gemuden, David Sterritt, and Harriette Yahr
  3. **Podcasting & The Art of Storytelling** – Angela Evancie and Andrew Parella
  4. **What is a Screenplay?** – moderated by Harriette Yahr and UVFilmWorks
  5. **Tales from the Hollywood Trenches** – with Tom Ropelewski, moderated by Harriette Yahr
• **Freedom & Unity Youth Film Contest**  
Supporting the next generation of filmmakers, WRIF once again hosted the Freedom & Unity Youth Film Contest with open submission for high school and young adult filmmakers in the state of Vermont. Of 51 submissions, 17 films were selected with awards totaling over $5,000 to support youth filmmakers in advancing their education. Winning films were screened at WRIF 2019 and again at Middlebury Film Festival in August 2019. Filmmakers were invited to attend and participate in all filmmaker events at WRIF 2019.

• **New Media to Inspire Environmental Stewardship**  
In partnership with former WRIF board member and New York-based filmmaker/media artist Liz Canner, festival goers experienced THE LOST CITY OF MER, a 3-D Virtual Reality sci-fi mystery prototype breaking ground in living narrative where participant choices affect the outcome of the story, inspiring users to reduce their carbon footprint to restore a magical lost civilization.

• **Extending the Conversation, Deepening the Impact**  
As viewership trends toward home-based media “consumption” via streaming platforms, WRIF’s role in offering communal viewing and fostering community dialogue has grown in importance and urgency. WRIF 2019 films were **introduced** by sponsoring Board and community members for context and relevance and followed by **Talk-Backs** and **Panel Discussions** with filmmakers and audiences, including via Skype.

• **Retrospectives**  
Special screenings directed audiences to revisit significant films from cinema history, including Todd Haynes’ 1995 film *Safe* in discussion with **acclaimed film critic and scholar David Sterritt** and CinéSalon’s Tribute to Jonas Mekas.

• **At the Junction of the Arts: The Queen of Soul and Love of Opera**  
Inspired by WRIF Festival 2019 opening night film *Amazing Grace*, in which Aretha Franklin’s love of opera was revealed as a source of her artistic inspiration, WRIF partnered with Jarvis Green (JAG Productions) and The Village at White River Junction to host a follow-up community event with opera singers Barrington Lee and Tiffany Abban invited from New York City to perform and elucidate their art for Upper Valley audiences.
• **Streamlined Ticket Sales Online**

WRIF moved ticketing to online platform Eventbrite, improving the ease of reserving and communications with audiences. Through Eventbrite, we estimate our **WRIF Festival 2019 audience attendance** conservatively at **800+** and more than **170** attending **WRIF Works!** workshops and special **Queen of Soul and Love of Opera** event.

**WRIF 365***

**WRIF 365** presents screening events throughout the year to **focus attention on important issues** and **catalyze community engagement and activism**. Under the leadership of Board member Jill Michaels, WRIF 365 partnered in 2019 with government agencies, non-profits, and community arts organizations to extend the impact and open channels for audience action.

**January 2019 – Incarceration in America:** Feature film *Gideon’s Army* traces three young public defenders in the South who dedicate their lives to people others want to forget; presented with **animated shorts from the ACLU** depicting the impact of mass incarceration on prisoners and their families. Presented in partnership with **Robert Sands, VT Law School** professor and former Windsor County DA with panel including a member of the Hartford Select Board and local public defenders.

**February 2019 – Black Women’s Voices:** Documentary *Sighted Eyes/Feeling Heart* tells the story of pioneering playwright, “artist, activist, visionary, and rebel” Lorraine Hansberry (*A Raisin in the Sun*). Presented in partnership with Jarvis Antonio Green/JAG Productions and timed to correspond with JAG Fest, an annual presentation of plays-in-process by African-American playwrights with 2019 devoted to all women playwrights.

**March 2019 – Restorative Justice at Home:** Documentary film *Coming Home* tells the stories of five people trying to reintegrate into their Vermont communities after serving prison sentences. Filmmaker Bess O’Brien assembled a panel including representatives from the Hartford Restorative Justice/COSA program, the local Dismas House, and an ACLU staffer who graduated from the COSA program to discuss innovate approaches to these challenges.
1st Annual MADE HERE Showcase

A first of its kind statewide collaboration, WRIF under Nora Jacobson’s leadership partnered with Vermont International Film Festival (VTIFF) and Vermont PBS to present a showcase of films from the northeast region encompassing Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, upstate New York, and Quebec. The resulting showcase of 27 films premiered at VTIFF in October 2019, coming to White River Junction for a special “mini-fest” November 1-3, 2019 at the Gates-Briggs Opera House. Films were shown in thematic blocks with moderated post-show talk-back conversations.

WRIF hosted visiting filmmakers in homestays and at the Hotel Coolidge. Breakfast Discussions facilitated by local filmmakers and WRIF leaders Nora Jacobson, Harriette Yahr and Samantha Davidson Green were open to the public and encouraged dialogue among filmmakers with curious audience members. After-Hours Parties and generous concessions throughout the screening days in the Briggs Opera House lobby cultivated a festive community environment for valuable conversations to continue. Sponsors Mascoma Bank, Bissell Foundation, Geraldine Jacobson and Bill Stetson made it possible for WRIF to offer MADE HERE by donation, attracting $1300 in doorway contributions.

This pilot project ushers in a new vision for WRIF that emphasizes participation and attendance of filmmakers as essential to fulfill the festival’s unique role as a catalyst for the creative growth of film and media makers, stimulant to our local creative economy, and forum for deep engagement by audiences.

We are looking ahead!

WRIF has several exciting developments in 2020 to share:

• SAVE THE DATE! White River Indie Fest 2020 is coming earlier this year from May 6-10 at the Gates Briggs Opera House. The festival is also expanding to a 5-day format to better concentrate audiences and expand our special events, panels, and workshops.

• A home base for WRIF! – Starting January 1, 2020 WRIF will open an office on the 3rd floor of the Gates-Briggs Building in White River Junction. Office hours to be announced soon. We are excited to have a space of our own to work, meet, and welcome the community.

• WRIF 365: Elections – Fitting the civic concerns of the election year ahead, WRIF 365 aims to focus programming on the theme of Elections in 2020. WRIF 365 will explore additional programming to bring challenging and catalytic films to our community on a year-round basis in partnership with local organizations.
• **MADE HERE** – WRIF aims to continue our new partnership with Vermont International Film Festival and VT PBS to curate and present a showcase of high-quality regional films.

• **Board of Directors Transition** – WRIF salutes long-serving Board members President Michael Beahan, Vice President Nora Jacobson, Bill Stetson and WRIF 365 leader Jill Michaels as they transition to the newly forming WRIF Advisory Council.

The Board welcomes *new members* **Samantha Davidson Green** (Board President, filmmaker and film educator), **Johanna Evans** (Board Vice President, Hop Film Programming & Operations Manager), **Jarvis Antonio Green** (JAG Productions Producing Artistic Director), and **Marcos Stafne** (Board Development Committee Chair, Montshire Museum of Science Executive Director) with continuing Board service and stewardship by **Liz Blum, Gerd Gemün den, Lamar Moss** (Treasurer and Secretary), **Amanda Montenegro, Craig Sterritt**, and **Signe Taylor**. The Board wishes to thank Lamar Moss for his interim stewardship.

**Reaffirming our long-term strategic goals:**

The WRIF Board continues its efforts to fulfill the long-term goals set out in our 2018 Annual Report, namely:

1. To achieve **organizational stability and longevity** by moving WRIF from a primarily volunteer-run organization (in which board members presently serve as festival directors, chief fundraisers, and program developers) to one with a **paid part-time, year-round Executive Director**. This person will spearhead the WRIF festival, WRIF 365, the Freedom & Unity Youth Film Contest, fundraising and long-term strategic planning, creating a more unified vision for the festival and WRIF’s year-round programming in partnership with the Board.

2. To **develop our offerings**, with expansion of WRIF 365 to **engage more diverse sectors** of the Upper Valley community with thought-provoking independent films and media experiences unavailable through other channels; issue-driven films to **galvanize local action** on social justice, climate change, and gender equity; **support innovation** in film and hybrid media arts; **foster a creative hub for film and media arts** professionals in our region; and contribute to the **local creative economy**.

3. To **shift WRIF onto more solid financial ground** by developing longer-term fundraising strategies and expanding our donor base to ensure organizational stability and longevity. Hiring an Executive Director by necessity increases our annual budget for 2020, but this position is also the essential resource that will allow WRIF to grow into its next phase as a durable film and media arts organization of cultural, economic and social importance to our region and beyond.

**WRIF THANKS our 2019 Donors & Sponsors!**

The Byrne Foundation, the NH Charitable Foundation, the Leslie Center for the Humanities, the Stettenheim Foundation, Mascoma Bank, the Bissell Foundation, the Boatwright Foundation, Deecie Denison, Ben & Jerry’s Foundation, Moving Image Group, Chelsea Green Publishing,

As WRIF enters its 16th year with major changes and transitions ahead, we reaffirm our founding conviction that the stories we tell in film and media *matter,* perhaps now more than ever in our cultural dialogue. WRIF envisions our role evolving in the near future as a significant partner in the creative community taking root in White River Junction, Vermont with national and global reverberations. We look forward to a vibrant year engaging Upper Valley film lovers and makers as we grow together.

*With thanks* to Michael Beahan, Nora Jacobson, Jill Michaels, Christine Pocaro, Signe Taylor, Jarvis Green, Lamar Moss, and Sue Deatt for their contributions to this report and to the vast network of funders, emeritus board members, advisors, and community supporters who enable our work.

*Respectfully submitted on behalf of the WRIF Board of Directors,*

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