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Press Contact: Seanna Hore, Ginsberg/Libby

seanna.hore@ginsberglibby.com

Gladys Santos, Ginsberg/Libby

gladys.santos@ginsberglibby.com

FILM INDEPENDENT ANNOUNCES 2025 FILM INDEPENDENT FORUM

**Annual event returns September 26-27 with Keynote from Gina Prince-Bythewood
moderated by Lena Waithe, a powerhouse lineup of panelists
and the 2025 New Wave Actors**

LOS ANGELES (September 4, 2025) — Film Independent, the nonprofit arts organization that produces the Spirit Awards, announced the 2025 Film Independent Forum, the preeminent annual event for independent filmmakers and content creators. Starting Friday, September 26, 2025, at the Directors Guild of America in Los Angeles, the conference will take place over the course of two days, September 26 - 27, 2025, offering candid, topical conversations focusing on current trends in the industry. A highlight of the weekend will be a Keynote address from Gina Prince-Bythewood, moderated by Lena Waithe, on Saturday.

“We’re honored to have Gina Prince-Bythewood as our Centerpiece Keynote. She fully embodies the independent spirit we champion. From *Love & Basketball*, her influential debut film 25 years ago, to *The Woman King* epic, she has established herself as a true visionary, working across film and TV, creating compelling work that is both personal and universal,” said María Raquel Bozzi, Film Independent’s Senior Director of Education and International Initiatives.

Designed to inspire and equip filmmakers with the tools, insights and connections needed to bring their projects to life, the Forum features a dynamic lineup of screenings, panels, workshops, one-on-one meetings, receptions, and valuable networking opportunities, all aimed to support and elevate independent storytellers. Sessions will explore best practices for fiction films and documentaries across all platforms, from theatrical screens to television and streaming outlets, while highlighting emerging tools and formats that foster innovation and creative risk-taking. In addition to panels and workshops, Industry Connect, the event’s signature 1-on-1 meetings with industry leaders and experts, will be held on both days.

The New Wave, presented in partnership with Film Independent, SAGindie, Easterseals Disability Services and Plot Shift Media, returns with a two-part program spotlighting the next generation of artists shaping independent film. Curated with guidance from all three partners, this year’s

conversations will highlight both the creative and professional challenges faced by emerging talent across the industry.

The program begins with New Wave Filmmakers, a roundtable exploring filmmakers' experience with the dual goals of making money while telling stories that can both entertain and inspire transformation. This will be followed by New Wave Actors, featuring a diverse group of talented performers who have broken into the industry and continue to deliver standout performances, including Isabel Deroy-Olson (*Fancy Dance*, *Dark Winds*), Jessy Yates (*Pulse*, *Me*), Marissa Bode (*Wicked*) and Michael Cimino (*Motorheads*, *Love*, *Victor*). Moderated by SAGindie Executive Director Darrien Michele Gipson, the New Wave actors will discuss how they continue pushing boundaries and fighting for more authentic and inclusive representation onscreen. A celebratory Happy Hour reception will close the program.

Now in its 20th year, the Forum continues to be the perfect space to meet and learn from independent filmmakers and executives who are calling the shots today, and to exchange ideas with peers in a very inclusive, festive and communal setting. Confirmed speakers include:

Esteban Arango, Director, *Ponyboi*

Marissa Bode, Actress, *Wicked*

Pamala Buzick Kim, Founder, mavenverse

Wendy Calhoun, Writer/Producer, *Empire*, *Justified*

Lisa Callif, Partner, Donaldson Callif Perez LLP

Daniel Cardone, Senior Manager Nonfiction Programs and Fiscal Sponsorship, Film Independent

Michael Cimino, Actor, *Motorheads*, *Love*, *Victor*

Andrew Corkin, Producer, *Rosemead*

Deniese Davis, Producer, *Insecure*, *One of Them Days*

Isabel Deroy-Olson, Actor, *Fancy Dance*, *Dark Winds*

Vera Drew, Writer/Director/Actor, *The People's Joker*

Aaron T. Edmonds, Vice President of Film, Hartbeat

Darrien Michele Gipson, Executive Director, SAGindie

Lauren Greenfield, Director, *Social Studies*, *Queen of Versailles*

Angela C. Lee, Director of Artist Development, Film Independent

Zoe Lister-Jones, Writer/Director/Producer/Actor, *Slip*, *Band Aid*

Adam Bhala Lough, Director, *Telemarketers*, *Deepfaking Sam Altman*

Lauren Mann, Producer, *Swiss Army Man*, *Joyland*

Missy Mansour, Producer, *LOOT*

Josh Mingo, Location and Permit Consultant, Legend Locations LLC

Sam Mirpoorian, Director, *Greener Pastures*, *Safe Place*

Sev Ohanian, Producer, *Sinners*, *Searching*

Alex Orlovsky, Producer, *Roofman*, *Lurker*

Shari Page, Program Director, Half Initiative

Nina Parikh, Director, Film Mississippi

Anayansi Prado, Director, *Uvalde Mom*

Chris Quintos Cathcart, Co-CEO, Unapologetic Projects

Brenda Robinson, Executive Producer, *Passing*, *United Skates*

Izzy Shill, Writer/Director, *Going Nowhere*, *Piggy at the Pool Party*

Annalisa Shoemaker, Producer, *To Kill a Tiger*, *Good Bad Things*

Sarah Strunin, Producer, *Jarypeo*, *burn*, *scar*

Steffie van Rhee, Producer, *Battleground*, *Earth to Michael*

Trevor Wall, Producer, *Ponyboi*, *Slanted*

Tre Wesley, Video Producer, IMDb Originals

Kit Williamson, Writer/Director/Actor, *Unconventional*

Jessy Yates, Actor, *Pulse, Me*

Ryan Zacarias, Producer, *War Pony, If I Had Legs I'd Kick You*

Forum passes are on sale now: \$149 for Film Independent Members, \$189 for non-Members and free for [Arts Circle Members](#). Arts Circle Members, [Filmmaker Pro](#) and [Secret Members](#) also receive priority registration for Industry Connect sessions. For more information about this year's Film Independent Forum, to purchase a pass and/or become a Member, please visit filmindependent.org/forum.

The 2025 Film Independent Forum is supported by Premier Partners Directors Guild of America, IMDbPro and SAGindie and Supporting Sponsors Film Mississippi, Plot Shift Media and ShotDeck. Easterseals Disability Services is the Accessibility Partner. Getty Images is the Official Photographer. eTech Rentals is the Official Technology Rental Provider.

ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT

For over 40 years, Film Independent has helped filmmakers get their projects made and seen. The nonprofit organization's core mission is to champion creative independence in visual storytelling in all its forms and foster a culture of inclusion, in support of a global community of artists and audiences who embody diversity, innovation, curiosity and uniqueness of vision.

In addition to producing the [Film Independent Spirit Awards](#), the organization supports creative professionals with [Artist Development](#) programs, grants and labs. Signature mentorship program [Project Involve](#) fosters the careers of talented filmmakers from underrepresented communities. Weekly Education events and workshops equip filmmakers of all ages and experience levels with tools and resources. International programs provide cultural exchanges and career-building opportunities for film professionals around the world. And year-round screening series [Film Independent Presents](#) offers a robust program of unique cinematic experiences, including screenings, conversations, Live Reads and Bring the Noise musical events.

For more information or to become a Member, visit filmindependent.org.

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