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FILM INDEPENDENT ANNOUNCES DIRECTORS CLOSE-UP SERIES PANELISTS

LOS ANGELES (JANUARY 16, 2026) – Film Independent, the nonprofit arts organization dedicated to fostering independence and inclusivity in visual storytelling, announced the return of the Directors Close-Up (DCU) series, taking place over two weeks beginning January 20. The signature program, now in its 25th year, is dedicated to exploring the craft of directing and celebrates many of the directors, writers and creators behind 2026 Film Independent Spirit Awards nominated film and television series through a series of live, online panels.

This year's DCU brings together an exceptional lineup of acclaimed creators from around the globe working across narrative and documentary film, as well as television. Following last year's format, each session will spotlight a specific Spirit Awards category and provide Film Independent Members with the opportunity to watch the conversation live and join the discussion by submitting their questions to the panelists. The series offers a rare behind-the-scenes look at the creative process shaping some of the year's most celebrated independent work.

"2025 was a great year for film and television and the Spirit Awards nominations reflect that," said María Raquel Bozzi, Senior Director of Education and International Initiatives. "From veteran filmmakers with wide international recognition to fresh new voices from around the world, this year's Directors Close-Up featuring the Spirit Awards nominees offers a unique opportunity to explore and discover the full spectrum of cinematic storytelling today, with the directors and creators behind these amazing films and shows."

This year's Directors Close-Up participants include:

Giselle Bailey, *Seen & Heard: The History of Black Television*
Kate Beecroft, *East of Wall*
Joe Bennett, *Common Side Effects*
Clint Bentley, *Train Dreams*
Phil Bertelsen, *Seen & Heard: The History of Black Television*
Cristian Carretero, *Esta Isla (This Island)*
Lloyd Lee Choi, *Lucky Lu*
Traci Curry, *Hurricane Katrina: Race Against Time*
Cherien Dabis, *All That's Left of You*
Sarah Friedland, *Familiar Touch*
Geeta Gandbhir, *The Perfect Neighbor*
Julian Glander, *Boys Go to Jupiter*
Bryan Fuller, *Dust Bunny*
Steve Hely, *Common Side Effects*
Hong Khaou, *Mr Loverman*
Tamara Kotevska, *The Tale of Silyan*
Julia Loktev, *My Undesirable Friends: Part I – Last Air in Moscow*
Carson Lund, *Eephus*
Angus MacLachlan, *A Little Prayer*
Lorraine Jones Molina, *Esta Isla (This Island)*
Elena Oxman, *Outerlands*
Charlie Polinger, *The Plague*
Alex Russell, *Lurker*
Ira Sachs, *Peter Hugar's Day*
Peter Scriver, *Endless Cookie*
Seth Scriver, *Endless Cookie*
Bret Sigler, *Citizen Nation*
Simón Mesa Soto, *A Poet*
James Sweeney, *Twinless*
Christian Swegal, *Sovereign*
Jack Thorne, *Adolescence*
Constance Tsang, *Blue Sun Palace*
Eva Victor, *Sorry, Baby*
Matt Wolf, *Pee-wee as Himself*

View the Directors Close-Up schedule and register to attend [here](#). You must be a Film Independent Member to join the panels live. Following the conclusion of the series, the conversations will be available on the Film Independent [YouTube](#) channel.

Past DCU panelists include Ben Affleck, Sean Baker, Radha Blank, Alfonso Cuarón, Lee Isaac Chung, Jonathan Dayton & Valerie Faris, Guillermo del Toro, Lena Dunham, Ava DuVernay, Jesse Eisenberg, Emerald Fennell, David Fincher, Greta Gerwig, Emily V. Gordon, Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, Eliza Hittman, Nicole Holofcener, Barry Jenkins, Richard Linklater, Steve McQueen, Kumail Nanjiani, Gina Prince-Bythewood, Issa Rae, Kelly Reichardt, Boots Riley, Josh & Benny Safdie, Justin Simien, Celine Song, Joey Soloway, Denis Villeneuve, Chloé Zhao, Benh Zeitlin and many more.

The 2026 Directors Close-Up is supported by the Directors Guild of America, SAGindie and

IMDbPro. The Film Independent Spirit Awards are supported by Premier Sponsor Lavazza Coffee, Principal Sponsor IMDbPro and Official Sponsor FIJI Water, with additional support from PEPSI. Easterseals Disability Services is the accessibility partner. The London West Hollywood and W Hollywood are the Official Hotels. Getty Images is the Official Photographer. Vision Media is the exclusive screening partner.

To learn more about supporting Film Independent's mission and programs or attending the Spirit Awards, contact Kate Walker D'Angelo at kwalker@filmindependent.org.

View this year's Spirit Awards nominees [here](#). Winners are selected by Film Independent Members. Membership is open to the public. To become a Film Independent Member for year-round benefits and be eligible to vote for next year's winners, please visit filmindependent.org/join.

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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