UC SANTA BARBARA

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Jim Logan

Cinema Paradiso

Jeff Peepgrass, director of UC Santa Barbara's student-run Reel Loud Film and Arts Festival, faced some issues when he took the reins for 2021.

"Personally, my greatest challenge was directing an event I had never attended before," he said. "I was hired to be the director last year as a freshman at UCSB, but that was ultimately canceled because of COVID. This year I was able to have experience in my position, but I still hadn't actually attended a Reel Loud yet. It was very difficult to put everything together without an end result to reference."

No experience? No problem. Peepgrass and the team are about to pull it off.

This year's Reel Loud will be held Thursday, May 27, at the West Wind Drive-In at the end of South Kellogg Avenue in Old Town Goleta. Gate opens at 6:30 p.m. for an art show, interactive art exhibits and food trucks, and films screen at 8:15. Purchase tickets, which are $10 per car, here.

Now in its 30th year, Reel Loud returns with "Reimagine Connection" as its theme. After a year of isolation, the organizers decided art could bring people together again.

"My biggest take away from this year's festival is how important a role the arts have played in helping us weather these times," said Joe Palladino, an academic advisor in the Department of Film and Media studies who has been associated with the festival for 25 years. "Be that creating something on your own or sharing someone else[s work, an involvement in the arts help to solidify the connection between us

all.

“I think it is no small coincidence that this year we saw our largest pool of film submissions,” he added. “Hard times can feed the creative spirit. The students organizing the event have really shown resilience and the ability to pivot to these times. I am looking forward to sharing the excitement of the drive-in.”

In a “normal” year Reel Loud is held at Campbell Hall on campus with an art show outside. The student films, which are silent, are accompanied by live music. The vibe is electric. But with the campus closed, the organizers had to think on their feet, said Vidhisha Mahesh, the festival’s producer.

“Producing the festival this year has been a challenge in ensuring the safety and accessibility of all,” she said, “but I think that it’s freeing in a lot of ways. I like how, in line with our theme of ‘Reimagine Connection,’ we’ve had to reimagine the 30-year tradition of Reel Loud. We have our festival available both online, and are able to utilize this great resource close to campus, the West Wind Drive-In.”

Mahesh, a third-year film and media studies and psychological and brain sciences double major, said she and her team reimagined the way the festival works on multiple fronts.

“Something I’m proud of this year was creating an Artist Grant for Reel Loud,” she said. “After pitching this idea through a couple avenues, KCSB, the local radio station, caught on to it and agreed to fund us for it. We were able to give out 12 grants of up to $200 dollars to artists and filmmakers to make their projects.

“Making art, and especially films, requires a lot of money and resources, and it’s harder still during a pandemic and economic crisis,” Mahesh added. “I really think it’s important moving forward to keep this going, and to create a more equitable festival. I believe it contributed to us breaking our submission record for films, with 30 films submitted this year!”

Although there will be a socially distanced art show at the drive-in, live music will be absent. Peepgrass, a second-year film and media studies major, said that because of the venue, everything else has to be prerecorded.

“While this takes away from Reel Loud’s signature live performances,” he said, “it allowed our team to focus more on the artistic aspects rather than practicalities. I

believe this allowed the event to turn into something different and special.”

Mahesh and Peepgrass meet with members of the festival committees four to five times a week to ensure preparations are on track.

“Our committee has been working so hard for the past couple months to make this night possible,” Mahesh said. “The films and art that will be showcased really do tell a story of the past year — the isolation, the grief, the joy, the opportunity to change and imagine and everything in between.

“For me personally,” she added, “re-working and reimagining the festival and seeing people respond to it and send in their art has been a ray of hope through this very intense year. I’ve met so many amazing, creative people on the committee!”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.