

DIRECTORS' NOTE



It goes without saying that 2020 has been a very challenging and different year for everyone, the Philadelphia Film Festival and the Philadelphia Film Society included. At the beginning of the year, my biggest concern was finishing and unveiling the improvements we were making to the Philadelphia Film Center, namely our new café bar in the lobby and the completely redesigned Albert M. Greenfield Student Screening Room in the former Black Box space, while continuing to plan out additional exciting renovations to the Film Center entrance, lobby and third floor space. Then the pandemic hit.

Unfortunately, the Film Society as an organization sits at the intersection of multiple circles that were hit hardest by the pandemic, being a small business and arts and culture non-profit existing in an industry (film presentation) that has been shut down entirely, it has been a very perilous time for the Film Society. The Film Society closed its theaters on March 12th, and they remain closed with no determination as to a reopening date at present. Nearly 70% of the Film Society's revenue derived from ticket sales, concessions, and related exhibition-linked revenues, and with no means to earn that revenue while theaters remain closed, we experienced an unprecedented drop in earned revenue. While we moved towards offering new films in our virtual cinema while hosting Q&As, discussions and events via online platforms such as Zoom, Facebook group discussions and Discord, the derived revenues were minimal. In response, the Film Society cut costs wherever possible, and ultimately had to reduce the full-time staff by 50% while minimizing expenses wherever possible. With these actions and the success of our Save Our Screens campaign in July, the Film Society has been able to navigate the uncertainty and remain operational, with an eye towards the 29th Philadelphia Film Festival.

We remained steadfast from the day we closed our theaters onward that the 29th Philadelphia Film Festival would take place as intended. At the time, we hoped to still produce the Festival in the same way we had in the past. As months progressed and the pandemic continued, it became clear that this would not be possible. Instead, we audited to the new hybrid model we've introduced to you, with the majority of the films available via our digital streaming platform as well as nightly safe social distanced screenings at the PFS Drive-In at the Navy Yard. While the Festival is certainly different, and we very much miss the traditional social aspects of our Opening and Closing night parties, the Festival lounge, the conversations in lines and lobbies throughout the 11-day event and more, we're thrilled at what we've delivered for the 29th Film Festival.

Our digital streaming platform will make the Festival more inclusive and accessible than ever, removing the locational barriers to entry, creating access to the Festival for people throughout the greater Philadelphia area and beyond, without concern for the availability or cost of transportation while also expanding upon previous theater space limitations as to both the total amount of films being shown and the total amount of seats available for attendance. We are excited to offer more than 75 films available on our digital streaming platform, more than any other film festival this fall, paired with another 14 films as part of our PFS Drive-In nightly screenings. Moreover, we're incredibly proud of the quality and depth of the program, which stands equal to the stellar line-ups of our most recently completed Festivals, despite the new format. I feel confident you'll be talking about many of our films for the upcoming months and bragging to friends that you saw them first when the hype of awards season begins.

At the Film Society, we often talk about our mission, using the unique power of film to inspire, engage, educate and, of course, entertain. Given the ongoing state of the world, we believe there's no more important time for the Festival. The Festival is full of films that will help serve as an escape from the concerns that haunt our day-to-day lives at present, taking audiences on journeys to other cultures, times, and worlds. There are films that will make you laugh, films that will make you cry, and most importantly, recognizing our proximity to the upcoming elections, many films that will serve to help educate and inform on critical issues facing society. We've curated a complete program with something for everyone. The choices now are up to you.

We recognize that there is a lot of difficulty and uncertainty at present, and we greatly appreciate your willingness to spend your time and money supporting us. We very much hope you enjoy the 29th Philadelphia Film Festival, be it from your couch or car, and we look forward to seeing you all again sometime in the near future at the movies.

The signature of J. Andrew Greenblatt, written in black ink in a cursive, flowing style.

J. Andrew Greenblatt
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The signature of Michael Lerman, written in black ink in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Lerman
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR