



RICHMOND INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Public statement: Regarding RIFF's decision to program the doc feature, *Affirmation Generation*

On Saturday, Sep 30th, RIFF screened the documentary feature, *Affirmation Generation*, as one of its 195 films that was accepted into the 12th annual festival held Sep 26 – Oct 1, 2023. In doing so, there were differing views about whether this was acceptable given the diverse perspectives among the general public, Transgender and LGBTQ+ communities. Organizations contacted RIFF along with our partners, venues, and Sponsors two days leading up to Saturday's screening by email, phone and social media. After giving it careful consideration, RIFF chose to move forward with the screening on Saturday. The decision was based on the following:

RIFF believes in the power of dialogue, and we welcome everyone to participate in the festival. At RIFF, we do not program based on personal opinions, and instead seek an unbiased and beautifully diverse approach in our programming. The films are submitted, judged, and reviewed, and those that get into the festival are in competition like many industry festivals in the country.

*Beginning in the spring, the festival reached out to various organizations with invitations for discussions, cross promotions for films and orgs, and joining efforts to create enriching experiences that reflect our richly, diverse community. In some cases, we extended invitations for participation in panels and in Q & As. This was also the case for the film, *Affirmation Generation*. Produced by a member of the LGBTQ community, it examines a few people's experiences with medical, physical, and mental health during or after gender transition. We recognized there are many other stories or experiences, and conducted outreach in the spring and summer in an effort to welcome all to the film screening and any discussion that followed, including possible engagement to join the conversation and offer differing views. The festival conducts this outreach for many of our documentary films each year in an effort to bring as many people to the conversations as possible.*

"When it comes to art, I believe we can experience the power of connection and possibility. Something special happens in the theatre when people come with hearts and ears postured to listen and a willingness to share in others' stories as well as our own. It is my view that acknowledging one person's story, voice, or art doesn't mean we dishonor another's. We have the capability within us to hear and value them all. When it comes to the many important topics that documentaries raise, bridging differences and building empathy remains our goal." says Heather Waters, RIFF Founder & Producer.

At RIFF, we believe exchanges that take place through the arts are important to the human experience, and we want to honor freedom of expression and people's stories. We acknowledge that in some ways the world has become a divisive place in recent years, and at RIFF we aim to be a bridge and provide a welcoming environment for all. If not RIFF or through other festivals and the arts, then where?

The screening on Saturday was held without incident at the Byrd Theatre. The festival continues to embrace all of our LGBTQ+ communities in dialogue, and we welcome all stories and voices.

For more information, visit www.rvafilmfestival.com