

JACOB BURNS FILM CENTER

# Stories We Shared

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



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Jesse LaCascio



Paige Grand Pré



Jesse LaCascio



**Lynn Sobel**  
Chair, JBFC Board  
of Directors

## OUR YEAR TOGETHER

While we may have been physically apart for the first five months of 2021, we never lost our connection, thanks to the strength and support of our community.

Our members and donors sustained us throughout the COVID crisis with their generous gifts and kind words. We received hundreds of emails and letters from devoted friends encouraging us to stay strong. I can't begin to tell you how much these messages boosted our spirits and determination to keep doing what we do best. This particular note always warmed my heart: "Stay well, stay positive, and stay resilient."

*Resilient* is certainly a word that describes our brave and talented staff. Under the most difficult circumstances, they connected our community through film and conversation, supported emerging filmmakers, engaged students and teachers across the country, and raised the funds we needed to sustain our programs and campus. They were here for us when we needed them the most. And they will continue to bring our vital and vibrant programs to life.

An especially shining moment of the year occurred on Sept. 7 when Mary Jo (MJ) Ziesel joined the JBFC as the new Executive Director. Whether or not you've had a chance to meet MJ, you can read about her background (and some of her favorite films), as well as her excitement, hopes, and dreams for the JBFC on page 6. After getting to know her just a bit, I think you will understand why the board voted unanimously and enthusiastically to invite MJ to lead us as we embrace the opportunities and challenges ahead.

We hope you enjoy reading about all that we experienced and accomplished in 2021. Thank you for remaining by our side and helping to make so much possible. Together, we will continue to open hearts and minds through the power of film for many years to come.

-Lynn Sobel  
Chair, JBFC Board of Directors

# Memorable Moments from 2021

## JBFC Unveils New Virtual Marquee

The JBFC invested in a new virtual hub that provides easier and streamlined at-home access to the JBFC's stellar curation of new releases, repertory films, and our one-of-a-kind series. Curated by our talented programming team, the JBFC Virtual Marquee (powered by Eventive) went live on Feb. 12. It was instrumental in keeping our community connected to the JBFC during our closure.

## Projecting Light Through Darkness

In celebration of our reopening, we presented Projecting Light Through Darkness, which dramatically brightened the JBFC Theater. This vibrant installation, paired with a stunning and permanent upgrade to the Theater marquee, brought light to our corner of Pleasantville after an unprecedented period of darkness. This work, made possible by a generous gift from Suzanne and Robert Harwood.

## Reopening Our Doors to Our Community

We were thrilled to welcome our community back to the JBFC on May 12. It was a long and difficult 14 months, but thanks to the strength and support of the JBFC community, we were ready and eager to embrace this exciting moment. We completed multiple improvements to the facility in anticipation of our reopening, including the installation of bipolar ionization air purification units throughout the JBFC Theater and Media Arts Lab.

## Reopening Our Doors to Artists-in-Residence

We welcomed Melissa Lesh, along with her associate producer/assistant editor, Mallory Bracken, to the JBFC just a few days after we reopened. While in residence from May 15 to June 25, they worked on their film, a story of how two orphaned ocelots and the solitude of the rainforest help a young man and young woman overcome trauma. It was acquired by Amazon Studios for \$20 million, a historic amount for a documentary, as reported in *Deadline*.



Ed Coody



Lynda Sherman



Jesse LaGascio



Jesse LaGascio

## Congressman Mondaire Jones Visits the JBFC

We were pleased to welcome Congressman Mondaire Jones to the JBFC on Aug. 10 to highlight a \$20,000 National Endowment for the Arts grant in support of our Creative Culture fellowship program for emerging filmmakers.

## JBFC Welcomes New Executive Director

A highlight of our 20th anniversary was the arrival of Mary Jo Ziesel as JBFC's third Executive Director. Over two decades of leadership at American Ballet Theatre, Mary Jo (MJ) developed a thriving \$7M center of innovation serving more than 20,000 students. MJ's first day at the JBFC was Sept. 7. Meet MJ (see page 6)!

## 20th Anniversary Jewish Film Festival

In addition to an incredible roster of inspiring and thought-provoking films, we celebrated our 20th Anniversary Jewish Film Festival (Sept. 30–Oct. 14) with *Breaking Bread: Jewish Food Stories and Recipes*, a collection of evocative memories and delicious recipes from our community.

## Questlove and Summer of Soul

On Nov. 30, the JBFC welcomed musician, DJ, producer, podcast host, and author Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson for a special screening of his Oscar-winning debut film, *Summer of Soul*, which examines the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival. Questlove was joined by editor Joshua Pearson and producer Joseph Patel, as well as BAM President (and former JBFC programmer) Gina Duncan for a Q&A after the screening.



Ed Coody



**Executive Director  
Mary Jo (MJ) Ziesel**

sat down to answer a few questions about film, her life in the arts, and the JBFC's exciting continuing journey.

- 1. What is the first film you remember seeing in a movie theater?** *Disney's Fantasia*
- 2. What is your comfort film?** *Working Girl (1988)*
- 3. What drew you into having a career in the arts?**  
*I happened to take some political science classes while I was a music major at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Through them, I became passionate about giving women and girls access to opportunities to express themselves and create momentous change in their lives. Wanting to combine my love for the arts with my drive for community building, I landed in arts administration.*
- 4. Where were you born and raised?**  
*McFarland, Wisconsin.*
- 5. Who is your dream guest for a JBFC special event?** *Michelle Obama.*
- 6. What attracted you to working at the JBFC?**  
*The dynamic and enchanting Theater and the administrative staff, who are incredibly well informed and passionate about film and delivering the JBFC experience to the larger community. The JBFC's programming is unparalleled. Where else can you watch a Buster Keaton silent film and learn about undercranking on one evening and the next be transported by the James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim collaborations? The programmatic range is beyond comparison. I was equally drawn to the education programs for students and for teachers, and was impressed by the emerging filmmakers in our Creative Culture program.*
- 7. As you think about your career, which women leaders inspired you?** *I am inspired every day by my incredible colleagues, many of whom are women, who have carried and sustained this organization*

*through critical moments of growth, opportunities, and challenges. I am also inspired by mother, who fled North Korea by hiding in a fish truck. She taught me the importance of perseverance and a dedication to excellence through her resiliency.*

- 8. What's your favorite movie snack?**  
*Popcorn with butter in the middle and on top.*
- 9. What has been your favorite experience so far working at the JBFC?** *It's a tie between our Q&A with Paolo Sorrentino in March and our event with Kenny Loggins in May. Both showcased the power of creative expression, even across genres and mediums. I've also enjoyed getting to know the JBFC community. You would be hard-pressed to find more passionate film lovers who are eager to laugh, learn, and explore our world together.*
- 10. What has surprised you about working at the JBFC?** *The intricacies of both filmmaking and film exhibition and the extraordinary subject matter knowledge of all who pass through our doors.*
- 11. Who would you want to play you if your life was made into a movie?** *Margaret Cho.*
- 12. Where do you see the JBFC in the next five years?** *Our renovated Theater will welcome a wide and diverse variety of movie lovers, who will continue to expand their worldview through curated film selections and dynamic behind-the-scenes discussions. We also look forward to showcasing our commitment to the JBFC community with a wine bar, where film lovers can gather to exchange perspectives in a salon-style setting. We are excited to cultivate the next generation of storytellers at our world-class Media Arts Lab and look forward to bringing families and communities together through the shared experience of film.*



Lynda Shenkman

2001



2021

## 20th Anniversary Memorable Moments

Whether you have been with us since we started our journey in 2001 or joined us along the way, we hope you'll enjoy some of the meaningful, fun, and uplifting stories we shared and inspired over the last 20 years.

[CLICK HERE](#) to enjoy a walk down memory lane!

[CLICK HERE](#) to meet a few of the more than 3,000 special guests that have joined us over the last 20 years.



Lynda Shenkman

# Connecting Through Cinema

“ We have been members since the beginning. The Burns has been our home for films, series, and special events. We look forward to the next 20 years! ”

— Susan Stanley and Michael Esposito







## Delicious and Engaging Programs

### Film to Table

Nothing quite expresses Jewish culture—indeed, any culture—as much as its food and the experience of eating it with others. After a screening of the hopeful documentary *Breaking Bread*, part of the 20th Anniversary Jewish Film Festival, we celebrated with a delicious outdoor meal of Middle Eastern-inspired recipes from Chef Mogan Anthony of PubStreet on Oct. 14.

For a complete list  
of 2021 films,

[CLICK HERE](#)

### Life on the Stage: Conversation and Film

This dynamic ongoing series, curated and moderated by JBFC board member Dori Berinstein—four-time Tony-winning Broadway producer and an Emmy-award-winning director, producer, and writer of film and television—continued while we were closed. Virtual Q&As included *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* with director George C. Wolfe and actors Michael Potts, Colman Domingo, and Glynn Turman and *The Boys in the Band* with actor Zachary Quinto. On Sept. 13 Life on the Stage returned to the Theater with *On Broadway*, followed by a Q&A with Oscar-nominated filmmaker Oren Jacoby and Dori Berinstein.

Life on the Stage is presented in partnership with the Entertainment Community Fund.

“ Like every other member, I miss the simple pleasure of sitting in a dark and quiet theater at the Burns. The JBFC is an oasis. When it's safe to return, I will be the first in line. Thanks for what you bring to our community. ”

-Howie Schrage, JBFC Member



“ We need to know more about each other. The JBFC's film programs are a powerful tool to help make this happen. ”

-Anne Lloyd, JBFC member and donor

“ After months of zooming, I finally left my house to see a movie at the JBFC. It was fabulous! Thanks to all the terrific people at the JBFC for sticking it out this past year and a half so we can finally GO TO THE MOVIES!” ”

-Viviana Tul, JBFC Member



# Special Guests, Special Moments

Just some of the nearly 100 special guests who entertained, educated, and moved us this year.



**Julie Cohen**



**Mia Donovan**



**Viggo Mortensen**



**Betsy West**



**Noah Hutton**



**Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson**



**Pablo Larrain**



**Paul Schrader**



**Astra Taylor**



**Asghar Farhadi**



**Stella Abrera**



# Inspiring Students, Sparking Creativity and Innovation

“ By embracing the storytelling technology that students carry around in their pockets, the JBFC’s media education programs inspire young people to communicate and succeed in our highly visual and digitally connected world. ”

—Ron Howard, *Director and JBFC Board Member*

# An Unwavering Commitment to Media Education

The **Jacob Burns Film Center** is dedicated to teaching literacy for a visual culture. In a world filled with screens, JBFC media education programs engage over 10,000 teachers and students each year through viewing and creating experiences that explore how to be critical of what we watch and intentional with what we make. We are guided by principles of accessibility, representation, and empathy building. JBFC education programs and resources encourage critical thinking, creative collaboration, and social-emotional learning. Through the power of sharing stories, our programs inspire students of all ages to engage with and learn from communities beyond their own.



## Expanding Our Scope and Reach

Due to COVID, we were forced to close our doors on March 13, 2020. While the theater complex reopened on May 12, 2021, the Media Arts Lab remained closed to students until March 30, 2022. During this time, we had to immediately adjust our approach to teacher training and support, as well as content delivery. We seized the opportunity to further develop, pilot, implement, and expand our media education programs on a national level.

“ Thank you so much for a wonderful post-viewing discussion. Our fifth graders loved the short films and were really thoughtful about the themes and filmmaking techniques. They were very engaged in the discussion, too. Thank you again for a wonderful virtual field trip. We can't wait until we can come back to the Theater! ”

—Elizabeth Condon-Kim, *Mt. Kisco Elementary School*

## A Campus Without Borders

While we are dedicated to our local community, our virtual programs provide us with the opportunity to continue to expand nationally.

In 2021, we served:

**14,539**  
STUDENTS

**221**  
TEACHERS

**116**  
SCHOOLS

**61** of these teachers  
are from outside Westchester County,  
including **18 states** beyond New York

**45%**  
from under-resourced  
schools

All education  
programs were  
**FREE**

For a complete list of our 2021 education partners,

[CLICK HERE](#)





## Image, Sound, and Story

Now completely virtual, **Image, Sound, and Story** prepares teachers to integrate viewing and creating media into their literacy instruction and classroom culture. In turn, students become creators, innovators, and storytellers. New lessons are added monthly with each centered on a different curated short film or clip. By providing a presentation-ready interface, direct teacher support, HD video, and easy searching, we are enhancing our commitment to empowering teachers to bring story fundamentals and film and media literacy into their classrooms.

## Short Film Library

We curate and maintain a presentation-ready collection of short films and paired discussion guides. The films we select are from across the country and around the world and amplify underrepresented voices. In sharing stories from a spectrum of experiences, students build empathy with new perspectives. These films also allow universal experiences to emerge—family, identity, coming of age, and discrimination.



## Classroom to Screening Room

We invite teachers to share films from a film library that features a culturally relevant collection of stories from around the world. These animated, documentary, and narrative films invite students to engage with new cultures and build empathy through memorable characters and personal stories. Screenings are followed by thoughtful and lively discussions moderated by film educators and current and former Creative Culture fellows.



As of March 30, 2022, **Classroom to Screening Room** is being offered once again as an in-Theater experience, which includes post-screening discussions with JBFC Educators, filmmakers, and special guests, as well as pre-and post-screening discussion guides.

## Professional Development

In the fall of 2021, we began offering online professional development experiences equipping teachers to introduce film discussion and filmmaking into their classrooms. Topics included: How to Discuss Film in the Classroom, Film Production Process: An Overview, and Interview Techniques, Tips, and Tricks. Any teacher looking to dig deeper was invited to a free one-hour professional development consultation with JBFC Faculty.

“ Through the JBFC’s curriculum, students learn the craft of visual storytelling as they develop the skills that are necessary to navigate rapidly changing and challenging needs of the 21st century. It also provides teachers with the opportunity to become participants, learning alongside their students.” ”

—Tara O’Gorman, *Casimir Pulaski School Teacher, Yonkers*

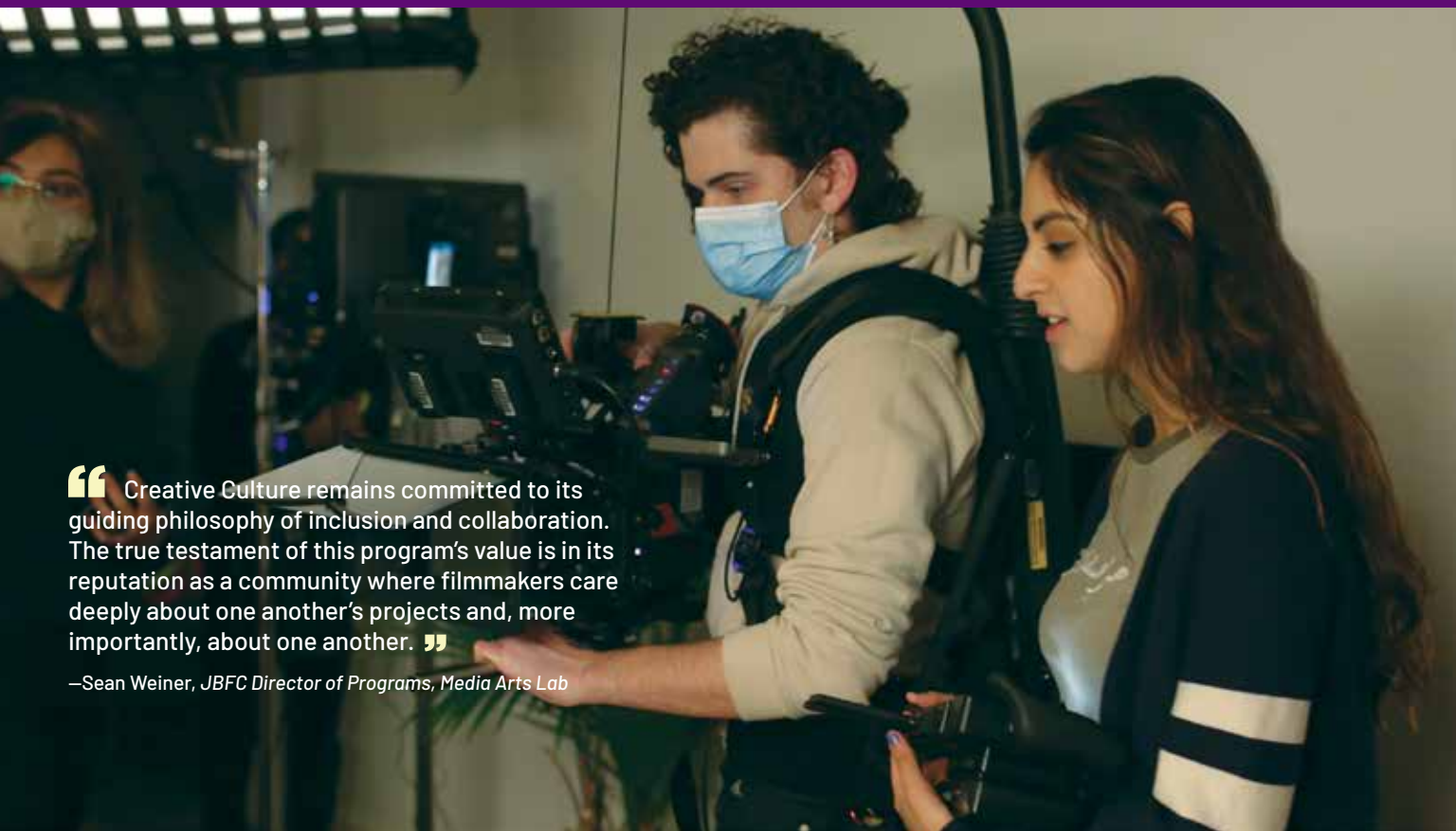


Iman Humphries

Kerwin Marselle



# Cultivating Community, Championing Diverse Voices



“ Creative Culture remains committed to its guiding philosophy of inclusion and collaboration. The true testament of this program’s value is in its reputation as a community where filmmakers care deeply about one another’s projects and, more importantly, about one another. ”

—Sean Weiner, JBFC Director of Programs, Media Arts Lab

# Creative Culture

Creative Culture is a fellowship and residency program that fosters a diverse community for filmmakers in the region, across the country, and around the world. Donor-funded fellowships and residencies help ensure that people from every economic background have access to this important experience.

## Fellowship

The fellowship program connects emerging filmmakers to industry jobs and opportunities. Fellows are given 10 months to produce two short films in a collaborative community that meets for weekly seminars and critiques. Along with a stipend, they receive access to production equipment, postproduction workspace, mentorship, and our industry network.

## Residency

The Jacob Burns Film Center provides four- to six-week residencies for narrative and documentary filmmakers actively working on the writing or postproduction phase of a film project. The residence for visiting artists is conveniently located next door to the Media Arts Lab.



“ To have a small collective of filmmakers who are all very talented and smart and ambitious helping each other, that creates something really special. ”

—Lauren Minnerath, *Creative Culture Fellow*

# JBFC 2021 Creative Culture Fellows



Karina Dandashi



Katelyn Rebelo



Andrew J Rodriguez



Hannah Whisenant



Rebecca Blandón



Sophia Feuer



Marcie Lacerte



Ramiel Petros

[CLICK HERE](#) to meet current and former fellows.

SPRING 2020

FALL 2021



## Creative Culture Fellowship Program At a Glance

- Since 2016, a diverse group of 44 fellows, over half of whom identify as women, people of color, and/or LGBTQ+, have produced 67 short films.
- Four of these films were Oscar-qualified and many have been selected by renowned national and international festivals and media outlets, including Sundance, Berlinale, SXSW, The Criterion Channel, HBOMax, and POV Shorts. The JBFC created a Film Festival Support Fund to help offset each fellow's film festival submission fees.
- In addition, each year, the JBFC facilitates networking opportunities for fellows at the Sundance Film Festival.
- At the conclusion of each semester, fellows premiere their films at a celebratory screening in Theater 1 (250 seats) for members of their families and cast and crew, as well as industry professionals, JBFC donors, and community partners.



# JBFC 2021 Artists-in-Residence



**HANA MIRE**

Somalia Middle East Bridges Artist-in-Residence



**JUDE CHEHAB**

Close Up Artist-in-Residence



**ILIANA SOSA**

Social Justice Artist-in-Residence



**MELISSA LESH & MALLORY BRACKEN**

Focus on Nature Artists-in-Residence



**ALLISON SHILLINGFORD & J BIRD LATHON**

Black Public Media Artists-in-Residence



## Connecting Creative Culture with Our Media Education Programs

J Bird Lathon and Allison Shillingford met with more than 50 visual arts students at the Denzel Washington School of the Arts in Mount Vernon to share their creative process for *The Ride*, an animated oral history about a young girl's first experience with lynchings in Vicksburg, MS, in 1933.

“ Being able to truly focus on a project in an environment so enabling and empowering is truly a rare gift of an experience. Being selected to become part of the JBFC family is highly motivating and in some ways a validation of the work we are doing with *The Ride*. Just as importantly, the staff has been a valuable resource as well. They have been as supportive as they have been inquisitive, and the JBFC's dedication to engaging with communities aligns with our own. We plan to be a part of the JBFC's continuing efforts. ”

—J Bird Lathon



## Creative Culture Artist-in-Residence Program At a Glance

- Since 2009, the JBFC has hosted 65 residents from 22 countries and 11 U.S. states, ranging from breakout artists to renowned filmmakers including Academy Award winner Bong Joon-ho.
- The residencies are by invitation only and curated in partnership with peer organizations including Sundance Institute, Chicken and Egg Productions, and Black Public Media.





Jesse LaCascio



Jesse LaCascio

# A Tribute to Our Community

As a community, we come together to learn, laugh, discover, create, and inspire. When our doors closed, our steadfast community of members, donors, and film lovers opened possibilities. During our darkest of days, we were sustained by the generosity of thousands of people who share our dedication to human connection through film. We will continue to embrace opportunities and challenges, while opening hearts and minds, thanks to our engaged and resilient community.



Jesse LaCascio



Ed Brady



Thank you for remaining by our side and helping to make so much possible.

## A Salute to Our Donors

“ I can't tell you how happy I am about the reopening news! Smiling from ear to ear! Can't wait to see you all!

— Craig Safian, JBFC Member and Donor

”



## Annual Giving

JAN. 1, 2021–DEC. 31, 2021

We rely on annual gifts over and above membership support to sustain our vital and vibrant programs. The generosity of our donors this past year was inspiring, with many people increasing their annual gifts at a time when we needed their support the most. The Jacob Burns Film Center thanks the thousands of individuals, foundations, and corporations who support our film, media education, and artist programs through their annual gifts. While we deeply appreciate all gifts at every level, we are pleased to recognize our major annual supporters.

[CLICK HERE FOR LIST](#)

## JBFC Together

MARCH 13, 2020–MAY 12, 2021

Just a few days after we shut down, we launched JBFC TOGETHER to help us confront a deep and unimaginable crisis. We relied on the strength and support of our community to meet the financial burden of sustaining our programs and campus without earned income. A generous and devoted member of our community, who wishes to remain anonymous, stepped forward and matched all contributions to JBFC TOGETHER dollar for dollar up to \$100,000. In total, 1,284 donors contributed \$502,711 to JBFC TOGETHER, helping us to secure the funds we needed to withstand the shutdown.

[CLICK HERE FOR LIST](#)

## 20 Years Together: Sharing and Inspiring Stories

2021 YEAR-END GIVING CAMPAIGN

Our devoted community inspired the JBFC Board of Directors to match ALL year-end contributions received by December 31 dollar for dollar up to \$100,000. We are profoundly grateful to all of our donors for their thoughtful and generous contributions to our year-end giving campaign.

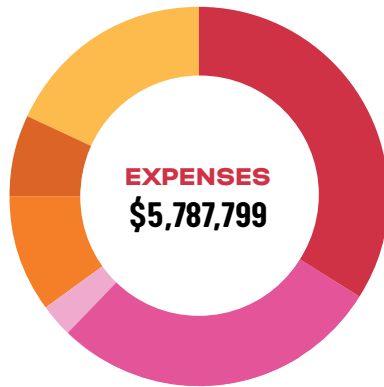
[CLICK HERE FOR LIST](#)

“ We’ve missed seeing movies at the Jacob Burns (you have the BEST popcorn!). I’m a true believer that film has the power to change the world, and we’ve been regular supporters of the JBFC. I was happy to see this match opportunity so we could increase the impact of our donation. Thank you to everyone at JBFC for all that you do. We value having you in our community and are so happy to support you! ”

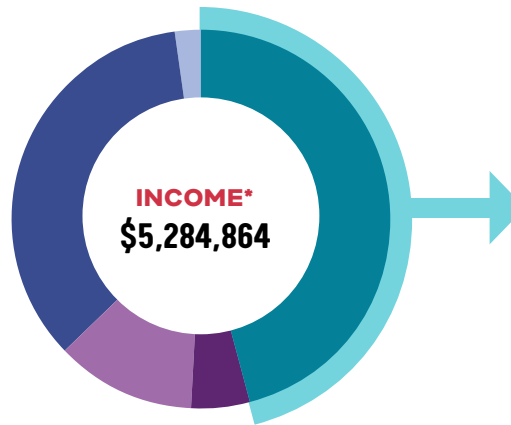
—Kate Brady & Eric Wheeler, *JBFC Members and Donors*

# Operating Financials

FY 21: OCT. 1, 2020–SEPT. 30, 2021

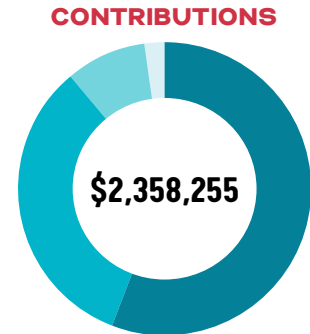


- Film Programming–34%
- Education–28%
- Artist Support–3%
- Management–10%
- Fundraising–7%
- Depreciation –18%



- Contributions–45%
- Investment Income–36%
- Membership–12%
- Tickets/Concession Sale–5%
- Other–2%

\*Does not include COVID Relief



- Individuals–54%
- Foundations–35%
- Government–9%
- Corporations–2%

[CLICK HERE](#) for a copy of the 2021 audited financial statements.

For further information, please contact Judy Exton at [jexton@burnsfilmcenter.org](mailto:jexton@burnsfilmcenter.org) or 914.773.7663, ext. 414.



The JBFC is proud to receive support from



### Matching Gift Partners

The JBFC gratefully acknowledges the following partners, which generously matched their employees' gifts.

- AkzoNobel
- AllianceBernstein
- Benevity Giving Platform
- Gartner Matching Gift Program
- Lone Pine Capital
- Mineral Technologies
- Regeneron Pharmaceuticals

Your gift to the Jacob Burns Film Center can go even further in supporting our film, media education, and scholarship programs, as many companies will double or even triple employee donations. Check with your company to see if your gift to the Jacob Burns Film Center qualifies for matching funds. If you have any questions about securing a matching gift, please email Allie Garner at [agarner@burnsfilmcenter.org](mailto:agarner@burnsfilmcenter.org).



Jesse LaCasola



Jesse LaCasola

 JACOB BURNS FILM CENTER

## MEDIA ARTS LAB/EXECUTIVE OFFICES

405 Manville Rd.  
Pleasantville, NY 10570  
914.773.7663

## THEATER

364 Manville Rd.  
Pleasantville, NY 10570  
914.747.5555

## RESIDENCE FOR VISITING ARTISTS

5 Grant St.  
Pleasantville, NY 10570

[burnsfilmcenter.org](https://burnsfilmcenter.org)



[CLICK HERE](#) to meet the JBFC staff

[CLICK HERE](#) for a list of the JBFC board of directors

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**