

Inside the World's Largest Youth Film Festival - ParentMap

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This year's National Film Festival for Talented Youth (NFFTY) includes a film about the Gum Wall by a 9-year-old filmmaker

By Gemma Alexander

Indie filmmaker Celia Jensen is usually shy, but she admits to looking forward to walking the red carpet again when her second film premieres at this year's [National Film Festival for Talented Youth](#) (NFFTY), held in Seattle from April 28-May 1. The audience Q&A after screenings is a different story. "It seems easy, but when all those cameras are pointed at your face, it's hard," Celia says.

Celia is age 9. At age 7, she was selected to screen her first film at NFFTY, a short called *Sweet Dreams*, making her the youngest director to walk NFFTY's red carpet that year. Although the third grader's second film, a documentary about the demise of Seattle's Gum Wall, will earn her a new record — she is the festival's youngest returning director — she wasn't thinking of the festival when she decided to make the film. She just wanted to document the last days of a favorite local spot. It's an urge that runs in the family.

"Our dad's a big movie geek," her older brother Kyle says. Their dad, software engineer Matt Jensen, says, "I have done video projects for a long time. When people talk about visual literacy, they tend to mean being consumers and trying to deconstruct advertising and not be manipulated. But these days, video is such a strong component of creation. Not only are there some stories that are easier to tell visually, but also that's where the audience is going. More and more segments of the population are just visual consumers."



Still from *The Secret Life of the Gum Wall*, a film by 9-year-old Celia Jensen, which will be screened at NFFTY

For *The Secret Life of a Gum Wall*, Celia says the tools were easy to use. She borrowed her dad's camera and a tripod, although he says the film could have been made with an iPhone. Because they were recording in a crowded public place, they bought a \$70 boom mic.

Celia describes the process of creation: "I like to go there and I record a bunch of stuff and some parts I don't care about. Then when I get back, I look at them and take them out. Then you have all the good parts, and you add a title to that and make it all fit so it makes sense. Then you send it in," she says. She used the Sony Movie Studios app to edit her film, then with her dad's help, uploaded the film to Vimeo and submitted it to NFFTY online.

Matt Jensen may have provided the tools and tech support, but Kyle was Celia's inspiration to take up the craft when his film *Growth Ray* was accepted to NFFTY in 2013.

NFFTY: The world's largest youth film festival



Young filmmakers at NFFTY. Photo courtesy of NFFTY

NFFTY has been connecting young filmmakers (the youngest ever is age 5, and filmmakers must be under 25) to audiences ever since three teenagers came together to produce a youth film night in 2007. Two of the founders were students or former students of the [Ballard High School Digital Filmmaking program](#) (NFFTY now offers an annual internship to a Ballard student.) The event quickly grew into a full-scale film festival.

NFFTY is now the largest youth film festival in the world. This year it will screen 227 movies from 24 countries and 33 states, with all screenings taking place at the SIFF Uptown in Seattle. Consistent with NFFTY's commitment to support women in film, 40 percent of those movies are directed by young women (more than triple the percentage of female directors found in Hollywood).

The festival offers filmmakers the opportunity to participate in panels, audience Q&A's, and networking opportunities in addition to screening their films. Outside of the festival, programming to support emerging artists, including screenings and professional-level workshops, takes place year round. NFFTY Creative is an affiliated production company that connects brands with emerging filmmakers.

This year NFFTY is also launching an annual screenwriting contest in which one young artist will win \$500 and five finalists will receive individual feedback from a panel of professional filmmakers.

What to see at NFFTY

Families can get a taste of the festival on Wednesday, April 6, when NFFTY will present a [free screening](#) of some of the best films from the 2015 festival at the Central Library at 6 p.m. The 2016 festival will run from April 28–May 1, with all screenings taking place at SIFF Uptown Theater except for the opening night gala, which will be at Cinerama in downtown Seattle.

“Forty percent of movies at NFFTY are directed by young women, more than triple the percentage of female directors found in Hollywood”

Parents should remember that just because the filmmakers are young, not all of their films are child-friendly (the Happy Hour shorts screening include a beer tasting). The full list of programs [can be found online](#) and parents should review the descriptions closely to be sure the selections are appropriate for their family.



Young viewers at NFFTY. Photo courtesy of NFFTY

Bring the Kids on Saturday, April 30 at 11:30 a.m. and **Lighten Up!** on Sunday, May 1 at 11 a.m. are both intended for all ages. Celia's short film *The Secret Life of a Gum Wall* will screen on Sunday, May 1 at 1 p.m. as part of the **Northwest is Best** focus on local filmmakers.

Although she is pleased to be part of the festival, Celia is not complacent, and has already moved from film to new projects, such as crafting. But she expects to return to film if the right idea comes along.

"I like how I have two lenses. I see through my eyes and the camera, and people get to share my point of view," she says.

If you go ...

Tickets: Tickets to individual screenings at NFFTY cost \$12 for adults and \$11 for youth under 24. Day passes are \$22 adult/\$20 youth (a significant savings if you attend three screenings). A full pass costs \$56 adult/\$52 youth. Buy any of these or other packages online. Prices increase closer to the festival.

Where: Except for the opening-night gala, which is at Cinerama in Belltown, all screenings are at SIFF Uptown at 511 Queen Anne Ave. N. in Seattle. Parking is available on the street or in adjacent pay parking lots and garages. The garage on Mercer and Third Ave. N. three blocks away is rarely full.

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