

Comedians create what's believed to be PNW's first disability-focused comedy festival

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Dan Hurwitz, comedian and co-founder of The Disabled List, a collective of artists with disabilities. The Disabled List Comedy Festival happens Jan. 27-28. (Anthony Evans)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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As Dan Hurwitz performed stand-up comedy around the state, he saw that there were lots of nights focused around people of color and LGBTQ+ people. But he never saw a show with a focus on people with disabilities.

“We wanted to create our own space in the same way that other groups have created space for themselves,” he said. “Comedy and art can really connect people.” So together with another local comedian, Kayla Brown, he started a collective of artists with disabilities called The Disabled List. From invisibility, The Disabled List has built a community that can support its own comedy festival, happening for the first time Jan. 27-28. As far as they know, theirs is the first disability-focused comedy festival in the Pacific Northwest.

The Disabled List Comedy Festival, at Northwest Film Forum, will feature New York-based headliner Gibran Saleem and Seattle-based activist-rapper King Khazm as musical guest, supported by a different lineup of local and regional comedians each night. Everyone who will take the stage at the festival lives with some kind of disability, including both visible disabilities like using a wheelchair

and invisible ones like autism. But that is the only thing the diverse lineup has in common, and audiences can expect the same variety in the routines as at any other comedy festival.

“I assume that all the comedians will touch on disability. Disability is a part of all our identities, but it’s not the only part,” said Hurwitz.

The Disabled List started by hosting comedy shows featuring performers with disabilities at the now-defunct Pocket Theater in Seattle’s Greenwood neighborhood in 2019. They received a 4Culture grant to host a comedy festival, but when the pandemic hit, both projects skidded to a halt. Instead of a festival, they made a short film. “This Is Spinal Injury” is a mockumentary about disabled comedians trying to plan a festival during a pandemic. The film premiered at the Local Sightings Film Festival hosted at Northwest Film Forum in 2021. NWFF now houses monthly The Disabled List comedy nights.

“We try to be an incubator, to give an opportunity to people who didn’t have a forum or outlet,” says Hurwitz. This month, Hurwitz and Brown will co-host the long delayed comedy festival at NWFF. In addition to the headliner and musical set, Friday night’s show will feature four local acts; Saturday’s will open with a screening of “This Is Spinal Injury” and include three local acts.

The lineup includes Seattle scene regulars “Gretta Gimp” and Seattle International Comedy Competition veteran Cheri Hardman, as well as Crystal Liston, who got her start in comedy with The Disabled List.

With the festival, The Disabled List is trying to make both sides of the stage more accessible. In addition to providing a platform for disabled performers, they are trying to raise the bar for standards of audience accessibility. The festival is fully wheelchair accessible, with ASL interpretation and live captions.

“I do hope this festival can encourage people to be more intentional about making their shows accessible. By not being intentional, we exclude so many people from participation in the arts and enjoyment of the arts,” Hurwitz said.

As for the content, “we place a premium on not being hateful. These performers are all people we trust not to be jerks,” he said. “But there is edginess.” Audiences can expect sex jokes, and Disabled List performers are not afraid to talk about taboo subjects like suicide.

Rather than edginess, what Hurwitz says makes The Disabled List interesting is perspective. He relates his own experience of the first time he saw a deaf actor perform stand-up.

“Because she had a perspective I’d never seen before it made things different and fresh and new.” That’s what he hopes audiences can experience at The Disabled List Comedy Festival.

“The Disabled List Comedy Festival”

7 p.m. Jan. 27-28; Northwest Film Forum, 1515 12th Ave., Seattle; \$0-\$30 (sliding scale); 206-329-2629, nwfilmforum.org

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