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Independent Lens Announces New 2016-2017 Season

**Award-winning Documentary Series to Premiere
High-Profile Titles Co-Produced by the Series
Along with Festival Favorites**

**Slate Includes *Meet the Patels*, *Newtown*, *TOWER*,
The Witness and More**



From top: *Meet the Patels*. Credit: Four in a Billion Pictures. *Tower*. Credit: Illegal Films. *Newtown*. Credit: Courtesy of Derek Weisshahn.

(San Francisco, CA) November 14, 2016 - The critically-acclaimed, award-winning documentary showcase **Independent Lens** announced today its upcoming new season lineup, which launches on Monday, December 26, 2016, with the real-life cross-cultural romantic comedy *Meet the Patels*. Other titles include two films that explore tragic incidents of gun violence that shook the nation: *Newtown*, about the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary, and *TOWER*, about the 1966 mass shooting at the University of Texas. *The Witness* offers a fresh look into the notorious 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese, which quickly became a symbol of urban apathy. Race and identity — both cultural and personal — are explored in several films including *Accidental Courtesy*, a profile of an African American musician on a quest to fight racism by befriending members of the KKK; *Best and Most Beautiful Things*, about a young blind woman's journey of self-discovery; *Birth of a Movement*, about the racial uproar that surrounded the 1915 release of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*; *What Was Ours*, about Native Americans seeking to reclaim lost tribal artifacts; and *Real Boy*, the story of a transgender teenager on a journey to find his voice.

“We’re extremely proud to have again funded and co-produced the majority of films in the new *Independent Lens* season,” said Lois Vossen, Executive Producer of the series. “All of these documentaries pose a question powerful enough to elicit empathy in our viewers because they put you in someone else’s shoes, and provide an understanding of who we are and our place in the world. These filmmakers are both the storytellers and the journalists of our time. In a moment when our country may feel irrevocably divided



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these films spark conversations to help us find common ground.”

Since its inception, *Independent Lens* films have won 16 George Foster Peabody Awards, five Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, two Primetime and 11 News & Documentary Emmy Awards, and have received seven Academy Award nominations. *Independent Lens* won the 2013, 2014, and 2015 International Documentary Association (IDA) Award for Best Curated Series and is nominated again in 2016 in the same category.

Independent Lens airs Monday nights at 10:00 PM (unless indicated otherwise below) on PBS and all films are available for free online streaming the day after broadcast on the [Independent Lens](#) website. *Independent Lens* will also stream a selection of some of the most popular and award-winning films from previous seasons in the weeks leading up to the new season launch on December 26.

More information on the Winter/Spring lineup is below:

[Meet the Patels](#) by Geeta V. Patel and Ravi V. Patel

Monday, December 26, 9:00-10:30 PM ET

This true-life romantic comedy follows Indian-American actor Ravi Patel, almost 30, still single, and looking for love. With the help of his parents and his enormous extended family, Ravi enters the semi-arranged marriage system, embarking on a whirlwind of dates, enrolling in online matrimonial websites, and more, all while followed by his filmmaker sister. Witty and brutally honest, the film explores the questions with which we all struggle: What is love? How do we find it? And how do we keep it?

[Best and Most Beautiful Things](#) by Garrett Zevgetis

Monday, January 2, 10:00-11:00 PM ET

Off a dirt road in rural Maine, a precocious 20-year-old woman lives with her mother. Michelle Smith is legally blind and on the autism spectrum, with big dreams and quirky passions. Searching for connection, Michelle explores love and empowerment outside the limits of “normal” through a provocative sex-positive community. *Best and Most Beautiful Things* tells Michelle’s joyful story of self-discovery as a celebration of outcasts everywhere.

[Containment](#) by Peter Galison and Robb Moss

Monday, January 9, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

How can we contain some of the deadliest, most long-lasting substances ever produced? Left over from the Cold War are a hundred million gallons of radioactive sludge, covering a vast amount of land. Part wake-up call, part sci-fi graphic novel, *Containment* explores our attempts to plan for our radioactive future and reveals the startling failure to manage waste in the present, epitomized by the Fukushima disaster.

[What Was Ours](#) by Mat Hames

Monday, January 16, 10:00-11:00 PM ET

For the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho tribes living on the isolated Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming, new contact with lost artifacts risks opening old wounds but also offer the



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possibility for healing. A young Northern Arapaho journalist and a teenage powwow princess travel with an Eastern Shoshone elder to search for missing artifacts in the vast archives of a museum. There they discover a treasure trove of ancestral objects, setting them on a journey to recover what has been lost.

The Witness by James Solomon

Monday, January 23, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

On March 13, 1964, 28-year-old Kitty Genovese was repeatedly stabbed on a street in Kew Gardens, Queens. Soon after, *The New York Times* published a front-page story asserting that 38 witnesses watched her being murdered from their apartment windows — and did nothing to help. *The Witness* follows the efforts of Kitty's brother, Bill Genovese, as he launches his own investigation into his sister's life and death. In the process, he makes startling discoveries about the crime that transformed his life, condemned a city, and defined an era.

Birth of a Movement by Susan Gray and Bestor Cram

Monday, February 6, 10:00-11:00 PM ET

When D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* opened in 1915, the unrepentantly racist film was met with widespread protests by African Americans, led by W.M. Trotter, the Harvard-educated African American editor of *The Guardian* newspaper. The film, which would lead to a national resurgence of the KKK, unleashed a battle still raging today about the First Amendment, censorship, race relations and representation, and the power and influence of Hollywood. Featuring Spike Lee, Reginald Hudlin, Jelani Cobb, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and others.

Accidental Courtesy: Daryl Davis, Race & America by Matt Ornstein

Monday, February 13, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

Musician Daryl Davis has a peculiar passion — meeting and befriending members of the Ku Klux Klan in an attempt to change their minds. In his travels, he's collected robes and other artifacts from men who have left the Klan after meeting him, building a collection story-by-story, person-by-person. *Accidental Courtesy* follows Daryl across the country as he meets with current and former Klan members, as well as young black activists who question his unusual form of racial reconciliation.

TOWER by Keith Maitland

Tuesday, February 14, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

On August 1, 1966, a sniper rode the elevator to the top floor of the University of Texas Tower and opened fire, holding the campus hostage for 96 minutes. When the gunshots were finally silenced, the toll included 16 dead, three dozen wounded, and a shaken nation left trying to understand. Combining archival footage with rotoscopic animation in a dynamic, never-before-seen way, *Tower* reveals the action-packed untold stories of the witnesses, heroes, and survivors of America's first mass school shooting, when the worst in one man brought out the best in so many others.

[The Bad Kids](#) by Lou Pepe and Keith Fulton

Monday, March 20, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

At a remote Mojave Desert high school, extraordinary educators believe that empathy and life skills, more than academics, give at-risk students command of their own futures. This coming-of-age story offers insight into how education can combat the crippling effects of poverty in the lives of these so-called "bad kids."

[Ovarian Psycos](#) by Joanna Sokolowski and Kate Trumbull-LaValle

Monday, March 27, 10:00-11:00 PM ET

In the barrios and boulevards of East Los Angeles, a unique all-woman bicycle crew has started a movement to reclaim the streets. *Ovarian Psycos* rides along with them, exploring the impact of the group's brand of feminism on neighborhood women and communities as they confront injustice, racism, and violence.

[Newtown](#) by Kim A. Snyder

Monday, April 3, 9:00-10:30 PM ET

On December 14, 2012, a disturbed young man committed a horrific mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, that took the lives of 20 elementary school children and six educators. Filmed over the course of nearly three years, *Newtown* uses deeply personal, never-before-heard testimonies to relate the aftermath of the deadliest mass shooting of schoolchildren in American history, documenting a traumatized community still reeling from the senseless tragedy, fractured by grief but driven toward a sense of purpose.

[SEED: The Untold Story](#) by Jon Betz and Taggart Siegel

Monday, April 17, 10:00-11:00 PM ET

Few things on Earth are as miraculous and vital as seeds but, in the last century, 94% of our seed varieties have disappeared. Follow the journey of passionate seed keepers around the world determined to protect our 12,000-year-old food legacy. Featuring Vandana Shiva, Dr. Jane Goodall, Andrew Kimbrell, Winona Laduke, and Raj Patel.

[The Last Laugh](#) by Ferne Pearlstein

Monday, April 24, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

The Last Laugh proceeds from the premise that the Holocaust would seem to be an absolutely off-limits topic for comedy. But is it? History shows that even the victims of the Nazi concentration camps themselves used humor as a means of survival and resistance. *The Last Laugh* weaves together an intimate portrait of Auschwitz survivor Renee Firestone alongside interviews with influential comedians and thinkers ranging from Mel Brooks, Sarah Silverman, and Gilbert Gottfried to authors Etgar Keret and Shalom Auslander.

[National Bird](#) by Sonia Kennebeck

Monday, May 1, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

National Bird follows the dramatic journey of whistleblowers determined to break the silence around one of the most controversial issues of our time: the secret U.S. drone war. The film gives rare insight into the American drone program through the eyes of veterans and survivors. Plagued

by guilt over the killing of faceless people in foreign countries and suffering from PTSD, the veterans decide to speak out publicly, despite the possible consequences.

[The Prison in Seven Landscapes](#) by Brett Story

Monday, May 8, 10:00-11:00 PM ET

More people are imprisoned in the United States at this present moment than in any other time or place in history, yet prisons themselves have never felt further away or more out of sight. A film about prisons in which we never see an actual penitentiary, *Prison in Seven Landscapes* unfolds as a cinematic journey through a series of ordinary places across the America where prisons affect lives.

Forever Pure by Maya Zinshtein

Monday, May 15, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

Beitar Jerusalem F.C. is the most popular and controversial soccer team in Israel, the only club in the Premier League never to sign an Arab player. Midway through the 2012-13 season, a secretive transfer deal by the team's Russian owner brought two Muslim players from Chechnya to the team. Through the story of one tumultuous season in the life of this famed club, the film offers a dramatic window into modern Israeli society.

They Call Us Monsters by Ben Lear

Monday, May 22, 10:00-11:30 PM ET

In California, violent juveniles between 14-17 years old can be tried as adults. Typically, they are accused of heinous crimes — murders and attempted murders — that leave their victims' families shattered. What is our responsibility to these kids? Do they deserve a second chance? Follow the journey of three young offenders residing in the Compound, a facility that houses Los Angeles' most violent juvenile offenders, each facing adult sentences for their crimes.

[Farmer Veteran](#) by Alix Blair and Jeremy M. Lange

Monday, May 29, 9:00-10:00 PM ET

On a mission to find purpose and a place to heal, U.S. Army combat veteran Alex Sutton begins farming on 43 acres in rural North Carolina with the help of his young fiancée, Jessica. Rated 70 percent disabled by the Veteran's Administration for PTSD incurred over multiple deployments in Iraq, Alex relies on a multitude of prescription meds to help regulate his drastic changes in mood. The reality of farm life, easily romanticized at the outset, begins to take its toll as demanding work irritates old wartime injuries and the isolation keeps him on high alert.

Also scheduled to premiere on *Independent Lens* this summer is [Real Boy](#) by Shaleece Haas, the coming of age story of Bennett Wallace Gwizdalski, a charismatic 19-year-old with dreams of musical stardom. The film follows Bennett through the first two years of his gender transition from female to male as he grapples with newfound sobriety, struggles to repair a strained relationship with his mother, and seeks support and mentorship from his musical hero, the well-known transgender folk singer, Joe Stevens. The broadcast date for *Real Boy* will be announced at a later date.



About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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