

INTRO BY GARTH MATIERE:

A short film featuring all Deaf actors is being shot and produced in Regina.

It was put together by the Deaf Crows Collective.

The collective aims to express the Deaf experience through art.

Most of the collective identify as Culturally Deaf, meaning they participate in the Deaf language and culture but are not always fully Physically Deaf.

Being a collaborative effort between an all Deaf cast and mostly-hearing crew, this film is unlike anything you've seen before.

The CBC's Jennifer Francis got a chance to visit the set.

START OF PAK:

fx street noises outside soundstage

There's a lot going on outside of the Creative Saskatchewan soundstage.

-- It's a busy city street -- bustling with its usual car noises and nature sounds...

fx quiet set noises

...Inside, It's much different.

Cast and crew quietly prepare for the second last day of shooting for a film called Fable Deaf.

It is an indie art film which bridges the genres of magical realism and fantasy.

The set is dark, with a large green screen along the back wall.

In front of the camera, there is bridge and some water.

Wreckage of wood and other materials surround the bridge, going back about six metres to the green screen in the back.

The only source of light comes from two dimmed stage lights and a small screen.

That's where Director Chrystine Ells sits.

fx some chatter with Ells asking someone to move a structure

Ells is a member of the Deaf Crows Collective,

This film has little to no speaking.

The actors use sign language and gestures.

The gestures make it easier for everyone to understand.

Ells herself is not deaf, she considers herself an ally within the Deaf community.

When creating the film, there were a lot of issues the collective wanted to focus on including Deaf culture, Deaf literacy and Deaf education.

0:30 clip ELLS deaf crows "For me I'm a visual artist and a director so my focus is always on telling stories visually and visual storytelling and using visual elements in storytelling. We kind of meshed together by making visual stories that are appealing for deaf audiences because so much is held in the imagery, but also not needing to use a lot of signing or narration that needs to be interpreted for hearing audiences."

The message of the film is important to everyone.

Fatima Nafisa is an actor in the film.

She is culturally deaf and this is her first experience acting in film.

She says the film presents itself as a warning to the Deaf community of what could happen if languages like ASL are not passed on from older Deaf generations, to younger ones.

Nafisa uses sign language while an interpreter translates her explanation on the importance of the message.

0:26 clip Fatima "The deaf people pass on this learning to us. The older deaf, they generally pass this language on. And so, if we don't have a deaf community how are we going to learn? If the deaf community is ignoring the younger children or if there is an emphasis from the hearing

community on lip reading and speech, we won't have a future. The whole emphasis here is on respect that hearing people need to listen to what the older deaf are saying about their experiences."

The film also touches on the importance of bilingualism.

This includes both ASL and English within Deaf culture.

Joanne Weber is an artistic director with the Deaf Crows collective.

On set, she provides ASL consultations and makes sure things are culturally appropriate while following Deaf protocols.

She says the Deaf community has historically experienced oppression.

Weber is deaf, but she CAN talk and speak very well.

She says this helps her fit into the hearing world.

However, as she is more comfortable with sign language

She speaks through an interpreter.

0:37 clip Weber "When I became bilingual, woah that was game changing for me. I had a deep sense of satisfaction, I found my place in the world. The point of the film is to show that bilingualism, ASL and English, is okay and we want to have all of the options. So this film focuses on how we can provide support for ASL and deaf culture."

Ells says the film has multiple layers.

It also touches on other aspects including multiculturalism within Canada and Saskatchewan.

She says all of the cast are immigrants, which she says represents the immigration into an older Deaf community.

Multiculturalism, along with age gaps and generational knowledge are all a part of the 15-minute film.

0:40 Clip ELLS "It's just kind of looking at a multi layered influx of new energy of cultural influences, age, younger people, children and what happens when those two energies, the desire to hold onto the past and tradition and that really strong stuff that is promoting and supporting the culture for a hundred years or many more probably. What happens when that comes into conflict with these new influences?"

Communication between the deaf cast and mostly hearing crew is almost seamless.

Nafisa says the experience on set has been VERY special and that is due to the relationship building between the deaf and hearing members on set.

0:21 Clip Fatima, "I've really enjoyed being here on set. Some of our crew are hearing and they are learning sign language with us. I don't read lips well so it's been nice to have that ability to learn from each other. They're learning sign from us and we're really communicating with each other and figuring out ways to do that."

Weber says in general, the arts community is very understanding and supportive of Deaf culture.

0:37 Clip WEBER "We need to have hearing allies and partners. It's been really heart touching looking at these partners that we've had from the arts community. It seems like the art community gets it, they get it very quickly they understand what we require and what we're feeling and what we need and what we want. They get it, they are so excited to learn sign language, they are so supportive. The arts community has just been amazing in that regard, they are ahead of the rest of the communities honestly."

For CBC radio, I'm Jennifer Francis in Regina. >>>>

EXTRO:

That was the CBC's Jennifer Francis talking about a new film with an all-Deaf cast. The film is shot and produced in Regina and will be released in the summer of 2022.