

wexner center
for the arts

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Six Years in the Lives of Five Families Fighting Childhood Cancer
A LION IN THE HOUSE

Local Premiere Screenings at the Wexner Center May 16–17

Acclaimed Documentary by Ohio Directors Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert
World Premiered at Sundance in January

Panel Discussion with Filmmakers and Health Care Professionals May 21

COLUMBUS, OH—"Your child has cancer." Hearing these four words will profoundly change a family's life, plunging them into a world of uncertainty, emotional upheaval and excruciating decisions. Every year in the United States, approximately 12,500 children and adolescents are diagnosed with this disease. Each will have a unique experience in confronting the disease and the treatment, but all will embark on a journey that is bewildering, terrifying, nearly often unbearable, and certainly quite unlike anything most people associate with the normal experience of childhood. The families of the children will join them on their harrowing odyssey. Regardless of outcome, no one involved will ever be the same again.

From the trauma of diagnosis to the physical toll of treatment, from the stresses that can tear a family apart to the courage of children who face the possibility of death with honesty and humor, rebellion and dignity, the documentary ***A Lion in the House*** is an unprecedented portrait of this life-altering experience captured in all its complex dimensions. As the film compresses six years into one narrative, it puts viewers in the shoes of parents, physicians, nurses, siblings, grandparents, and social workers as they struggle to defeat an indiscriminate and predatory disease. Directed by **Yellow Springs filmmakers Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert**, and co-produced by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the **local premiere of this documentary will be held in the Wexner Center Film/Video Theater, 1871 N. High St. in Columbus, Tuesday and Wednesday, May 16 & 17 at 7 pm.** Tickets are \$6 for the general public, and \$4 for Wexner Center members, students, and senior citizens (available at the Wexner Center Ticket Office, 614 292-3535). **The four-hour film will be shown in its entirety both nights (with an intermission).**

A **panel discussion** featuring the filmmakers and medical professionals will be held on **Sunday, May 21 at 1 pm.** Moderated by Mike Thompson from WOSU Public Media, the panel includes Cheryl Boyce, Executive Director of the Ohio Commission on Minority Health; Rob Emrich, founder of Road of Life: Cancer Prevention for Kids (Columbus); Dr. Tom Gross from Children's Hospital (Columbus), Division Chief of Hematology and Oncology; Lois Hall, Program Coordinator at Comprehensive Cancer

Control, Ohio Department of Health; Pauline King from Ohio State's Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital, Children's Program; and Jeff Lycan of Ohio Hospice and Palliative Care. **Admission is free.**

The premiere screenings and panel discussion are cosponsored by WOSU Public Media. The film will be shown on WOSU.TV in two parts, June 21 and 22 at 9 pm (the film is also airing nationally on PBS those days as the finale of PBS's Independent Lens series), and the panel will be taped for airing on WOSU as well in late June.

A TWIST OF FATE

The story of the film's genesis, as well as its unfolding aftermath, is a mirror of the pervasive reality of cancer. Several years ago, Dr. Robert Arceci, a prominent oncologist, contacted Yellow Springs, Ohio-based filmmakers Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert to suggest that they make a film about childhood cancer. Dr. Arceci had been inspired by the film *Hoop Dreams*, and sought to find filmmakers who could make a similarly styled long-form-narrative documentary that follows families facing childhood cancer. At that time, Dr. Arceci had no idea that Bognar and Reichert had just seen their own teenage daughter through a year of chemotherapy and radiation. Anxious about going back into this world, yet drawn to a subject that had so deeply touched them, the filmmakers accepted Dr. Arceci's offer to take up residence on wing 5A of Cincinnati Children's Hospital, where he was chief oncologist. They would spend much of the next six years documenting five children and their families to create *A Lion in the House*.

But their journey through the world of cancer was not yet over. *A Lion in the House* received the honor of being the longest film ever chosen for the prestigious Documentary Competition at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival in January. As they arrived in Park City, Utah to premiere their film, Julia Reichert received devastating news about her recent medical tests and a diagnosis of lymphoma. Currently undergoing aggressive treatment for a rare form of the disease, Reichert along with her partner Steven Bognar are forging an even deeper bond with the subjects of their film. Though Reichert and Bognar had left Sundance after only three days, the families in the film took leadership of the film and the Q & A discussions following screenings. *Variety* called the film "astonishing" and "immensely rewarding," concluding that the film's "cumulative effect is nothing short of humbling, cathartic and even euphoric."

Bognar, a past Wexner Center Residency Award recipient in Media Arts, received an Individual Artist Award as part of the 2006 Ohio Arts Council's Governor's Awards for the Arts. Two-time Academy Award nominee Julia Reichert is currently a professor of film at Wright State University in Dayton. Reichert and Bognar collaborated as

producers on the fictional feature film *The Dream Catcher*, and both became Rockefeller Foundation Fellows in 2003.

FIVE COURAGEOUS FAMILIES AND THEIR MEDICAL TEAMS

A Lion in the House focuses on the stories of five children: Alex, a 7-year old bundle of energy; Tim, a mercurial, quick witted 16-year old; Justin, amiable and stalwart at 19 despite ten years of fighting the disease; Jen, a serious, quiet 6-year old; and Al, a wry, quicksilver 11-year old. Bogнар and Reichert were given complete access to the children, their families and the medical teams treating them, resulting in stories with extraordinary detail. By taking their cameras inside hospital rooms, family homes, and staff meetings of the doctors and nurses, the filmmakers give audiences a chance to witness families and medical professionals as they wrestle with difficult questions and negotiate a plan of action in a field where there are few guideposts and fewer guarantees.

Due to the recent changes in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy and security laws, videotaping in any hospital is much more restricted. Bogнар and Reichert could not have created such an unflinching portrait of the ups and downs of battling childhood cancer without the foresight and cooperation of the Cincinnati Children's hospital; its staff, caregivers, physicians; and the children's families.

"Cancer goes hand in hand with huge uncertainty," said Bogнар. "As we were filming, we saw how hard so many of the choices are, not only for the families but for the doctors as well. This movie, like real life, all happens in the present tense, so the doctors did not know what the outcome would be of the treatments that they discussed on camera. Now that we are fighting Julia's cancer, the experience we gained is helping us, every day, to chart our own course."

Julia Reichert recalls, "We were present for intimate, scary, inspiring and altogether heart-rending events. Points of view often diverged and nerves frayed as very hard decisions were faced every day. But everyone we observed cared deeply, no one was a bad guy, everyone was trying their best. Witnessing their courage, their commitment, their persistence and their tremendous heart was an incredible inspiration to me as we filmed, and it has been an incredible source of strength and wisdom for me since my own diagnosis."

NATIONAL OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

A web site for *A Lion in the House*, www.itvs.org/outreach/lioninthehouse, includes discussion materials, fact sheets, video clips from the film, outreach resources, and more. A specific outreach project, targeting young adult survivors of childhood cancer, has also been launched in conjunction with the film. The “Survivor Alert” project, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, will engage and inform young adults of their risks and responsibilities as cancer survivors. This project’s website is www.survivoralert.org.

PRODUCTION AND FUNDING CREDITS

A Lion in the House is a co-production of Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) with funding provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Lance Armstrong Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Program for Media Artists, The Ohio Arts Council and The MacDowell Colony.

A Lion in the House was produced and directed by Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert. It is a co-production with the Independent Television Service (ITVS). Executive Producer for ITVS is Sally Jo Fifer.

WEXNER CENTER FILM/VIDEO SEASON SUPPORT

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ABOUT THE WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The Wexner Center for the Arts is The Ohio State University’s multidisciplinary, international laboratory for the exploration and advancement of contemporary art. Through exhibitions, screenings, performances, artist residencies, and educational programs, the Wexner Center acts as a forum where established and emerging artists can test ideas and where diverse audiences can participate in cultural experiences that enhance understanding of the art of our time. In its programs, the Wexner Center balances a commitment to experimentation with a commitment to traditions of innovation and affirms the university’s mission of education, research, and community service. For more info: wexarts.org.

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