



NEW RELEASES

The Reason I Jump

The book *The Reason I Jump*, which was the springboard for this new film by Grierson Award-winning director Jerry Rothwell, was originally written by Higashida Naoki, a non-speaking autistic teen. Higashida describes his thoughts and perceptions with a vividness and expressiveness that defy common assumptions about the developmental disability, which is estimated to affect one in 270 people worldwide.

First published in Japan in 2007, the book gained popularity in the west after being released in an English translation by David Mitchell – author of *Cloud Atlas*, 2004 – and his wife Yoshida Keiko, themselves the parents of an autistic son. Though some reviewers and psychologists have questioned the methods behind it and challenged its authenticity, the book has nevertheless added impetus to a wider challenge to notions that have long caused the stigmatisation of the neurodivergent, including misconceptions about their emotional and imaginative capacities. In one of his comments in Rothwell's film, Mitchell has a frank explanation for that ugly history: 'Neurotypicals are rubbish at understanding anything that is not neurotypical.'

While Mitchell's point may be a harsh one, that limitation applies to some of this documentary's otherwise well-intentioned attempts to immerse its largely neurotypical viewership in the inner worlds of five non-verbal autistic individuals. In the case of Amrit, a young woman in Noida, India, the director isolates objects within the frame in close focus while blurring out the rest to simulate the nature of her visual perception, which she herself conveys in her remarkable artworks. For Joss, a young man in the English coastal town of Broadstairs, the film demonstrates his keen ear for green electricity feeder pillars by layering their distinctive electric hums into a dense soundscape.

Whether such tactics really put viewers inside these subjects' minds may be impossible to know given the communication gulf that can exist for Rothwell's non-verbal subjects. That may be why his film's most expressionistic sequences are not as affecting as less flashy scenes featuring two other subjects – Ben and Emma, two friends in Arlington, Virginia – reflecting on their close bond and showing off their knowledge of Juan and Eva Perón with the help of a digital device and their therapist's letter chart.

Equally moving is the film's portrayal of the love and dedication shown by these subjects' families, who share the hope that the world will learn to regard their children with the empathy they deserve. Another gulf – that of the availability of resources and supports depending on where these families are in the world – is highlighted by the story of the parents of Jestina in Sierra Leone and their founding of their area's first school for the autistic, part of their ongoing efforts to change the attitudes of neighbours who may perceive the challenging behaviour of an autistic child as evidence of demonic possession.

It is arguable that Rothwell's efforts to create sensory replicas of his subjects' experiences replace one faulty representation with another; even if that's so, his film is still a valuable and compelling addition to the growing canon of features and documentaries on the subject because of the ways it prioritises the perspectives of autistic individuals and their families. Indeed, the most thoughtful words here belong to Ben: 'I think we can change the conversation around autism by being part of the conversation.'

Jason Anderson, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2021

Director Jerry Rothwell on ‘The Reason I Jump’

Naoki Higashida’s descriptions of a world without speech provoke us to think differently about autism. For most of history, nonspeaking autistic people have been considered less than human: ostracised within communities, banished to institutions, even in some ages and places, killed en masse. Stigma is still a feature of most autistic people’s lives.

But Naoki’s evocative descriptions of the maelstrom of thoughts, feelings, impulses and memories which affect his every actions lead us, as David Mitchell writes in his introduction to *The Reason I Jump*, to understand that ‘inside the... autistic body is a mind as curious, subtle and complex as any.’ Naoki debunks the ideas often held about the autistic spectrum – that at one end there are geniuses and at the other fools. Instead he describes a magnificent constellation of different ways of experiencing reality, which for the most part, are filtered out by the neurotypical world.

For a filmmaker, this offers an opportunity to use the full potential of cinema to evoke these intense sensory worlds in which meaning is made through sounds, pictures and associations, as well as words. While no film can replicate human experience, my hope is that *The Reason I Jump* can encourage an audience into thinking about autism from the inside, recognising other ways of sensing the world, both beautiful and disorientating. I hope the film takes audiences on a journey through different experiences of autism, leaving a strong sense of how the world needs to change to become fully inclusive.

Why was making this film important to you?

The idea for the film came from producers Stevie Lee and Jeremy Dear, who are the parents of an autistic teenager (Joss, who is in the film). They had read Naoki Higashida’s book *The Reason I Jump* which had transformed their understanding of their son and they wanted to make it into a film.

When I was approached to direct it, I felt a strong affinity with the project. Autism has been very much a part of my life – both in my extended family and in my work. Back in the ‘90s I set up participatory media projects focused on disability rights and self-advocacy by people with learning disabilities – and my film *Heavy Load* in 2008 (also produced by Al Morrow) was about a punk band, some of whom were autistic. I’ve always been disturbed by society’s response to nonspeaking autistic people – who are constantly underestimated with labels like ‘severe’ and ‘low functioning’ which, as well as being misleading about people’s capacity to think and understand, also indicates a kind of hopelessness which increases marginalisation.

When I first read Naoki’s book it took me by surprise. So fluent and perceptive was the writing of this teenager that I – like some of Naoki’s reviewers –wondered how much his original words had changed through the process of transcription and translation. It certainly ran against the established idea that autistic people lack a ‘theory of mind’, something that had never matched with my experience anyway. Meeting Naoki was revelatory too. His capacity to use his alphabet board unaided to type thoughtful answers to my questions – whilst at the same time being subject to distractions, impulses, and apparently random associations, was extraordinary to observe. During our conversation he would repeatedly stand up and go to the window before sitting down again to type the remainder of whatever sentence it was that had been interrupted by this impulse. When I asked him what it was that drew him to the window, he typed ‘I watch the wheels of cars’. When I asked why, he typed ‘They are like galaxies rotating’. Think of that, next time you’re waiting for a bus.

Once you recognise the capacities of nonspeaking autistic people and how they have been systematically overlooked, then our terrible history – of institutionalisation, behaviour modification, killings – becomes all the more shocking. I hope the film can play a role in changing those misconceptions. The idea of neurodiversity – that we all perceive the world in subtly different ways-- is a powerful and important one, which I think helps build the bridges and solidarity we need for a more inclusive world.

Jerry Rothwell, Production notes, 2019

THE REASON I JUMP

Director: Jerry Rothwell
©: The Reason I Jump Limited, Vulcan Productions Inc.,
The British Film Institute
an Ideas Room, Metfilm, Vulcan Productions
and Runaway Fridge production.
Made with the support of the: BFI’s Film Fund
International Sales: Met Film
Executive Producers: Stewart Le Maréchal, Jonny Persey,
Peter Webber, Jody Allen, Paul G. Allen, Rocky Collins,
Jannat Gargi, Ruth Johnston, Carole Tomko
Co-executive Producer: Sara Edelson
Executive Producer: Lizzie Francke
Producers: Jeremy Dear, Stevie Lee, Al Morrow
Co-producer: Sam Payne
Production Co-ordinator: Karen Simon
Location Managers: Shernaz Italia, Neelima Goel, Amadu Lamrana Bah
Casting Director: Gemma Sykes
Based on The Reason I Jump by: Naoki Higashida
Translated by: David Mitchell, K.A. Yoshida
Director of Photography: Ruben Woodin Dechamps
Graphics: Hugo Moss

Editor: David Charap
Titles: Hugo Moss
Colourist: Gareth Bishop
Composer: Nainita Desai
Music Supervisor: Sarah Bridge
Sound Designer: Nick Ryan
Sound Recordist: Sara de Oliveira Lima
Re-recording Mixer: Ben Baird
Supervising Sound Editor: Nick Ryan
Dolby Technical Engineer: Rob Karlsson

Cast
Jim Fujiwara (the boy)
Jordan O’Donegan (voice of the book)

USA/UK 2020
82 mins

A Picturehouse Entertainment release

Content warning: this film contains flashing images.

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Relaxed Screenings: The Reason I Jump
Fri 18 Jun 14:30; Tue 22 Jun 18:10
Woman with a Movie Camera: Wildfire
Sun 20 Jun 18:40 (+ Q&A with director Cathy Brady); Mon 21 Jun 18:10;
Tue 22 Jun 14:40; Wed 23 Jun 20:50; Thu 24 Jun 14:45
Member Picks: Rumble Fish
Fri 2 Jul 17:30
Projecting the Archive: Trottie True (aka The Gay Lady)
+ intro by BFI Curator Josephine Botting
Tue 6 Jul 18:00
Silent Cinema: Nell Gwyn + intro by BFI Curator Bryony Dixon
Sun 18 Jul 15:30
Seniors’ Free Archive Matinee: Cabin in the Sky
+ intro by writer Marcus Powell
Mon 19 Jul 14:00
Experimenta: Born in Flames + discussion
Thu 22 Jul 18:00
Relaxed Screening (tbc)
Tue 27 Jul 18:00
Terror Vision: Children Shouldn’t Play with Dead Things
Thu 29 Jul 21:00

BAGRI FOUNDATION LONDON INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL

LIFF Opening Night: WOMB (Women of My Billion)
+ on stage Q&A with Srishti Bakshi and film critic Anna Smith
Thu 17 Jun 17:20
My Beautiful Laundrette
Fri 18 Jun 20:20
The Warrior + on-stage career interview with
writer-director Asif Kapadia
Sat 19 Jun 20:30
Ahimsa: Gandhi the Power of the Powerless
Sun 20 Jun 15:00
Searching for Happiness...
Tue 22 Jun 20:50
Nazarband Captive
Wed 23 Jun 20:45
A’hr Kayattam
Thu 24 Jun 18:00
The Salt in Our Waters Nonajoler Kabbo
Sun 27 Jun 15:00

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

First Cow From Fri 28 May
After Love From Fri 4 Jun
Gunda From Fri 4 Jun
 Fargo From Fri 11 Jun
The Reason I Jump From Fri 18 Jun
Nashville From Fri 25 Jun
Ultraviolence From Sat 26 Jun
Sat 26 June 14:20 + Q&A with director Ken Fero and
contributor Janet Alder
Supernova From Fri 2 Jul
Another Round From Fri 9 Jul
Jumbo From Fri 9 Jul
Deerskin From Fri 16 Jul
Girlfriends From Fri 23 Jul
Mandabi From Fri 23 Jul

LONDON SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

UK Competition 1: I Forgot More than You’ll Ever Know
Sat 26 Jun 21:00
UK Competition 3: Close Quarters
Fri 26 Jun 21:10
UK Competition 2: The Double Life Of...
Mon 28 Jun 17:45
UK Competition 4: Lessons in Survival
Tue 29 Jun 21:10
UK Competition 5: The Devil’s in the Details
Wed 30 Jun 17:50

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