# Press reviews of **STAND UP** by Mari Sanders

**"A poignant, dynamic and dazzlingly lucid first feature film about a young woman catapulted into the world of disability. A pure and brilliant film"**

(Click for full review)
*Fabien Lemercier*
cineuropa

**"Thanks to its fluid, perceptive writing and finely rounded performances, the film offers an unusually convincing view of the volatile day-to-day moods and back-and-forth progress structuring the life of one disabled person, without presuming to speak for many others. Refreshingly direct (and) audience-friendly film."**

(Click for full review)
*Guy Lodge*
VARIETY

**"Stand Up is a sweet and affecting film that soars thanks to the heartfelt performances by Zemene and Buringa and to Sanders' authentic and refreshingly optimistic narrative."**

(Click for full review)
*Franck J.Avella*
THE CONTENDING

**"There are films that arrive quietly and stay like a pulse under the skin. Stand Up is one of them. One where humor and grief coexist without asking permission, where identity is not resolved but continuously rebuilt."**

(Click for full review)
*Francisca Romero*
SPANGLISH cinema

**"Stand Up is a fantastic film that is insightful, emotionally engaging, and exceptionally well crafted. "**

(Click for full review)
*Dominic La-Viola*
Four Time Film School Dropout

**"A deliberate reversal of a historical practice in cinema"**

(Click for full review)
*Jorge Pereira Rosa*
C7NEMA

## DISCOVER MARI SANDERS INTERVIEW WITH THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

The Hollywood Reporter

**The importance of a film as STAND UP by Mari Sanders**

STAND UP is a feature film, made from the perspective of people with disabilities. It's director Mari Sanders' experiences and main characters Lucia Zemene's and Daan Buringa's personal stories that shaped the narrative.
They would like to be very clear that they don't want to dramatize their personal disabilities. Disability is an important theme in the film, but we want to avoid being caught in the "personal drama" or "overcoming disability" narrative.
Vera doesn't "overcome" her amputation. Xander hasn't "risen above" his wheelchair. What interests us is far more nuanced: how does disability shape identity, community, and intimacy? Those are the questions the film sits with, without resolving them neatly. We're much more interested in talking about the culture we portray: the crip community, the pride, the humor, the sex, the grief. The film doesn't ask audiences to feel sorry for its characters or to admire their resilience. It asks them to recognize these characters as fully human, messy, funny, angry, and in love.

A useful comparison: we wouldn't ask a filmmaker without a disability to constantly explain how their able-bodied experience shaped their work on a personal level. There's a bigger story to tell about disability and society.

We also did lots of efforts to make the whole film production as accessible as possible, what resulted in rethinking the filmset and production process.
Also, an interesting fact: as far as we know, we are the first ever film portraying a disabled actor as non-disabled using stunt doubles and VFX in the first 10 minutes of the film. For us this is an important statement, it has been the other way around for far too long.

**Director Statement**
In STAND UP, I reveal a world that often goes unnoticed: the lives of young people with disabilities, their challenges, their culture, and their perspectives. The film examines the difference between being born with a disability and acquiring one later and explores how such an event reshapes a life and an identity.

At the heart of the film is a question: to what extent does a disability define who you are? Is it something to downplay, as Vera's friends do? Something that demands extra care, as her parents believe? Or something to claim boldly, as Xander and his friends do? Vera must navigate these perspectives to find her own answer.

My inspiration is personal. Born with a disability and a wheelchair-user, I spent my early years in special education, connecting with others navigating similar paths. At art school, I discovered that this perspective opened an artistic goldmine. STAND UP is my first fiction film on the theme, combining fiction with documentary elements to portray life with a disability precisely and poetically.

Another source of inspiration is how people around a disabled person respond. Almost everyone who acquires a disability experiences friendships fading. As Vera puts it: 'The disability is, in a way, yours too.'
Every actor portraying a character with a disability also has one in real life — an artistic choice essential for authenticity, and one that nurtures an overlooked pool of talent. Different characters were based on people from 'crip communities' in the US, UK, and the Netherlands, united by a proud embrace of disability as identity.