

STAND UP

a film directed by *Mari Sanders*



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Starring **Lucia Zemene, Daan Buringa, Kendrick Etmons**

Produced by **Ineke Kanters and Lisette Kelder**

Co-producers: **Amanda Livanou, Katerina Tzourou, Robert Kievit**

Productions companies: **The Film Kitchen, NEDA Film, BNNVARA, ERT**

Productions companies: **LOCO Films**

Countries of production: **Netherlands, Greece**

Format: **Fiction**

Running time: **95'**

Premiere: **6th June 2026 at TRIBECA**

Supported by: **Netherlands Film Fund, Netherlands Film Fund Production Incentive, Eurimages, CoBO, BNNVARA, E.K.K.O.M.E.D. Greek Film Centre, ERT, Creative Europe - MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Filmmore & Camalot Holland Film Meeting Award, Municipality of Rotterdam**



LOGLINE

After an accident leaves her in a wheelchair, Vera (23) no longer fits into her old life. Drawn into the world of Xander (22), a young man who has always lived with disability, she must decide whether to keep fighting to belong where she once did, or risk claiming a place in a world she never imagined for herself.



SYNOPSIS

Vera (23) drifts through life partying with friends, dreaming of solo travel and freedom from obligation. One night out, she's hit by a truck and wakes up in a rehabilitation center, an amputee in a wheelchair. After the accident, she feels completely disconnected from her body.

At the rehab center, an ecosystem of adapted housing, activity spaces, and a pool, she meets Xander (22), a wheelchair-user since birth and aspiring stand-up comedian. He draws her into his circle of disabled friends, people who wear their disabilities with pride. Vera and Xander grow close, but their feelings stay unspoken. For Vera, choosing Xander means choosing a life defined by disability and she's not ready for that.

Back home, her parents and friends smother her. Her old life no longer fits. Xander's world is the one place she feels at ease. After a party thrown by his friends, they end up in bed together, nerve-wracking for both. Xander has never been with anyone. Vera doesn't know what her body will feel. The encounter is awkward and raw; instead of connecting, they collide. Vera's pent-up anger erupts and she lashes out. Xander leaves, wounded.

Her physical therapist pushes her to identify what truly matters. That night, Vera finds Xander failing on stage at a comedy club. She follows him to his dressing room. There, finally, they let each other in, naming the grief neither has dared to touch. The conversation ends in a quiet kiss. For the first time, Vera feels genuinely connected: to Xander, and to herself.



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.



DIRECTOR'S BIO AND FILMOGRAPHY

Mari Sanders (b. 1988) is a Dutch writer/director. Across shorts, documentaries, and television drama, his work consistently explores disability culture, identity and the lonesome traveler searching for belonging. He is artistic director of Wild Lam, a talent program for disabled actors and artists. Stand Up is his debut feature.

Filmography:

Rue Des Invalides (2012) — short fiction

Sync (2013) — short fiction

Go Daan Go! (2014) — short fiction

80% Disabled (2017) — documentary short

Mooi Geweest (2018) — TV fiction, [link](#)

Wheelchair Roadmovie: Over the Thresholds of Europe (2019) — documentary series, [link](#)



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