[THEME MUSIC]

NINA MOINI: What that sound means. It's time for the movie to begin. And if you're looking for a new place to catch everything from local indie films to old classics like *Space Jam,* there's a brand-new 36-seat micro-cinema theater opening up tonight on the East Side of St. Paul. The theater comes out of TriLingua Cinema, which has been running pop-up screenings for the last six years. It'll be in the same building as the East Side Freedom Library.

Joining me now to tell us more about the micro-cinema is TriLingua Cinema Executive Director Sidney Pisano and board member Kazua Melissa Vang. Thank you both for being here and joining us.

SIDNEY PISANO: Hello. Thanks for having us on.

NINA MOINI: Yay. So you've been around Sidney for six years. TriLingua has been doing the pop ups, and it sounds like that growth has been inching along a year after year. Can you tell us a little bit about how this all began and the work you've done leading up to now being able to open this micro-cinema?

SIDNEY PISANO: Yeah, it's a super exciting time. We got started back in 2020. Our current programming director, Geordie Flantz, was the founder of the organization and really saw during the pandemic, this need for community connectivity. And to get people back outside and in a way that was safe and responsible, but also just really loved the idea of bringing a movie theater back to the East Side.

There was a point in time where we had five or six movie theaters in the Payne-Phalen neighborhood, and at this point do not anymore. So it really started with this joy of bringing people together and bringing a movie theater back into the community and doing it in a way that was responsible in connective.

So the name TriLingua is a nod to the three most commonly spoken languages on the East Side-- English, Spanish, and Hmong. And so really trying to be representative and inclusive of the folks that live in our neighborhood and showcase all the beautiful culture and community that's here.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. You've done more than 100 pop ups now, which is amazing. And I think what you're saying, many can relate to that, especially during the height of the pandemic, people were craving and thinking about I think it's called a third space. It's not home. It's not work. It's where are we going to go to see people and meet new people and engage with others. And I love the idea of it being an intimate space of 36 people. I feel like you're even more likely to maybe strike up a conversation with somebody when there's less people.

How do you feel about that environment, Sidney, this idea of the micro-cinema? Some may have never heard of it.

SIDNEY PISANO: Yeah. It's kind of a funny concept to try to talk to people about. It really works for us where we're at. Having done this now for six years as a pop up, we've been able to do it in local rec centers or other libraries or schools, or there's the great East Side Sculpture Park and host 200 people at a time, potentially.

But there's something really special that happens that we've been able to see in a couple of the early test screenings we've done in the space that is just like this intimacy in the room when you're sitting right next to somebody, and you can hear what their reaction is to something that you might feel entirely differently about to talk about afterwards.

Or we've had a lot of fun hosting filmmakers in the space, and it's very intimate. So sometimes we're not necessarily having to use a microphone because we're just right with one another. And so being that close and engaged with each other feels so special.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. And it's also noticeable if someone's like aloud on their phone or doing something. So it gives accountability to everyone, like, you can see who's doing what.

Kazua, as a filmmaker, could you just talk about how you've been involved with TriLingua and just what it means to have a space like this for all local filmmakers in the area?

KAZUA MELISSA VANG: Absolutely. I happened to stumble upon TriLingua as being part of their programming a few years ago that they featured a film written and starred by Gregory Yang called *Modern Shaman,* but directed by Kang Vang. And my short *The Chaperones* was able to be programmed, and that was actually my first witness and a participation with TriLingua, and it was just amazing in terms of being a filmmaker and knowing that the film and the stories that I'm creating is being shown to the audience that I do want to see, which is the East Side Hmong Twin City community here in Minnesota.

And so it just felt right for me as a filmmaker to know that the stories that I grew up and that I experienced is also being now projected out for people to also experience. And TriLingua was able to bring that joy, but also that community to the short films and films that I either created or am part of making.

And I also had the opportunity to also teach the youth that was part of TriLingua program last summer, and they themselves learned how to, one, think of story, wrote a script, pre-production planned, filmed it with their friends and families, pull in their own resources. And then at the end, they also edit it and we premiered it last year for the fifth anniversary for TriLingua.

And to see that just the process of filmmaking and for the youth to learn how to do that because it is, for me, a really more solid and true way of collaboration in the art making that these youth was able to experience. And I loved it. It was so great.

NINA MOINI: That's amazing. So the work stretches beyond the cinema, beyond the screenings. Sidney, what can people expect tonight? I want to make sure in our last couple minutes that we've got time to talk about the grand opening, and then moving forward now that the theater is up and running, how can people take part?

SIDNEY PISANO: Yeah. So tonight's super exciting, the grand opening of our micro-cinema space. It's located within the East Side Freedom Library, which is another wonderful long time community partner and nonprofit organization on the East Side. So folks who come out tonight, you'll get to go into the micro-cinema. We'll have a loop of a short film playing in there that actually Kazua and one of our former youth program participants filmed and put together screening in that space, and we'll have a DJ, some free food from local vendors.

There's a local restaurant on the East Side, Burnt Chicken, who will be there, and Cajun Snow handing out some treats, and then a free screening of *Toy Story 5,* which will be super, super fun.

NINA MOINI: Cool. And then moving forward, Sidney, what will the schedules be like?

SIDNEY PISANO: So we'll be open every Friday, Saturday, doing screenings there. And then sometimes we'll do occasional programming Thursday nights in collaboration with the East Side Freedom Library. But we're hoping to still continue to do pop-up screenings and continue that community-based work moving forward too.

And there's plenty of ways that folks can get plugged in and support that work. How we started really was as just a group of neighbors and volunteers who cared about the East Side, who cared about building community and seeing film as this opportunity to bring lots of different kinds of people together. And we'll continue to do that. But now we've got this space and many more opportunities moving forward for folks to plug in there.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. The work continues. Sidney, Kazua, I want to thank you both for coming by the show. Congratulations on this grand opening. I hope you have a really great time tonight and this weekend. Thank you so much.

SIDNEY PISANO: Thank you.

KAZUA MELISSA VANG: Thank you.

NINA MOINI: That was TriLingua Cinema Executive Director Sidney Pisano and board member Kazua Melissa Vang.