

## Get Inspired by the New Documentary 'Janey Makes a Play'

A nonagenarian makes a musical that inspires an entire town

BY DEAN NELSON

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Janey Callahan-Chin

At age 80, Janey Callahan-Chin needed a new challenge. The retired preschool teacher wasn't getting any younger. Her town needed a boost. Some would say it was dying.

Rio Vista, California (Population: 7,360), a largely forgotten town nestled between Sacramento and San Francisco, had been shedding jobs and people for decades. But there was one thing Janey could do. She could write a story. She sat down at her typewriter and wrote a play—a musical. She wrote the songs and the choreography. She held auditions, secured a venue, and got the community to rally around it. The people loved it. And they wanted another.

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Jared Callahan graduated from Point Loma Nazarene University.

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Joel P. West—another PLNU alum—did the music for the 2015 Lily Tomlin film *Grandma* and leads the band Tree Ring.

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Callahan volunteered with the San Diego Film Fest in college.

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341 Kickstarter backers pledged \$21,920 to help bring this project to life.

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*Janey Makes a Play* will be released on DVD, Blu-ray, Hulu, and Netflix this fall.

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Janey's grandson, indie filmmaker Jared Callahan, had worked with fellow PLNU grad Destin Daniel Cretton on the Sundance-award-winning film *Short Term 12* and other projects. At age 90, while Janey was working on her 18th musical melodrama—this one about a small town trying to stay alive—Callahan got his own idea for a story. He followed the making of Janey's latest community theater production with a film crew, and the result is the documentary *Janey Makes a Play*, which was featured at the 2015 San Diego Film Festival and premiered this summer at the Digital Gym Cinema in North Park. It's available on iTunes and most other video-on-demand outlets.

It took five years and a Kickstarter campaign to produce the project. Local musician Joel P. West created the score.

Janey's play might be fiction, but the film is not. It features glimpses into real small-town lives—the athlete who wonders about whether participating in community theater will affect his reputation, adults who have been laid off and need a purpose to their day, teenagers who can't wait to move out of Rio Vista. It's funny, heartwarming, and tragic, all at the same time. *The Hollywood Reporter* called it "More Norman Rockwell than *Waiting for Guffman*."

And indeed that was the intent. Filmmaker Callahan hopes that when an audience sees Janey's life and the way she invests in her community, they'll be moved to consider their own lives: "If a 90-year-old still has so much to give, how does that speak to the rest of us?"

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