

Festival aims to educate, enlighten

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The Rutgers New Jersey Jewish Film Festival is not known for its popcorn flicks. Though it occasionally screens light-hearted pieces, for the most part, the festival maintains a scholarly bent, presenting "issue"-oriented fare confronting topics such as gender, suicide bombers and the Holocaust.

This year's 10 offerings, which hail from Germany, Israel and Poland, among other countries, is no different. As always, says Karen Small, associate director of New Brunswick's Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, "We try to show films that reflect the Jewish experience."

The Bildner Center, part of Rutgers University, presents the festival each fall. Most films are making their New Jersey premiere.

But the mix of documentaries and features screening Thursday through Nov. 20 in North Brunswick are not all sweeping epics; many deal with relationships and use intimate storytelling to make larger statements about Jewish life.

"There's so much to learn," Small says. "A message of the film festival is not only (to expose) broader issues but (to explore) interpersonal relationships. "It's easy to put people into groups and see it as 'us' and 'them,' " she continues, but films such as "Another Road Home," in which Israeli filmmaker Danae Elon journeys to locate the Palestinian man who helped raise her, put those categories into question.

Another offering, "Sister Rose's Passion," about a Roman Catholic nun who has worked against anti-Semitism, even challenging her Church's doctrine blaming Jews for Jesus' death, helps audiences "look at them in a different way through film."

The festival does feature comedies, including the German "Alles Auf Zucker (Go For Zucker)," about two brothers — one a pool shark and the other an Orthodox Jew — who have been separated since 1961, when the Berlin Wall was erected.

"Some films entertain . . . But some also can educate and enlighten and maybe take a stand on something themselves," Small says.

"Rosenstrasse," about Aryan women and their protest of the imprisonment of their Jewish husbands in 1943 Berlin, is an example of that sort of steely individual courage the film festival highlights.

"You take a stand, and you never know when that might make a difference," Small says. "That's what education is — touching people's lives in order to make change."

Most films are accompanied by a lecture and a Q&A session with a professor or someone else who is knowledgeable about the chosen topic. Tickets are available at the Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, 12 College Ave., New Brunswick, and at Trio Gifts, 246 Raritan Ave., Highland Park, through tomorrow; tickets are available today through Thursday at the Regal Cinema Commerce Center, 2399 Route 1 south, North Brunswick. Directions are available by

calling (732) 940-8343. More information about the festival is available by calling the number in the information box above or by visiting the Web site listed at left. Here is the schedule:

- "Watermarks," 7:30 p.m. Thursday, 1:30 p.m. Sunday. Champion female swimmers barred from Austrian sports clubs. Diver Greta Stanton will make an appearance at both screenings.
- "Ushpizin," 10:30 p.m. Saturday, 4:45 p.m. Sunday. A newly Orthodox couple find themselves penniless on the eve of Sukkot.
- "Rosenstrasse," 7:30 p.m. Sunday. Aryan women's protest of their Jewish husbands' imprisonment.
- "Unzere Kinder (Our Children)," "My 100 Children," 1 p.m. Nov. 15. Children in a post-World War II Jewish orphanage in Poland; Lena Kuchler's journey to take abandoned and orphaned children to Israel.
- "Syrian Bride," 7:30 p.m. Nov. 15, 3:45 p.m. Nov. 20. A Druze bride faces the reality that once she marries her Syrian fiance, she will be unable to return to her family.
- "Another Road Home," 8:15 p.m. Nov. 17, 1 p.m. Nov. 20. Filmmaker on a quest to find the Palestinian man who helped raise her.
- "Paper Clips," "Sister Rose's Passion," 4:30 p.m. Nov. 15, noon Nov. 17. Tennessee school principal initiates a Holocaust project; Dominican nun challenges Church doctrine regarding the Jews and the death of Jesus.
- "Alles Auf Zucker (Go For Zucker)," 6 p.m. Nov. 17, 7:30 p.m. Nov. 20. Two brothers — a pool shark and an Orthodox Jew — separated by the Berlin Wall.