

Rutgers N.J. Jewish Film Festival set to open Nov. 1

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[Event will bring 14 films to Regal Cinema Commerce Center in North Brunswick](#)

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Film is an international language, but New Jerseyans need not travel to Cannes or Tokyo or even Utah to find a festival with a varied and sophisticated lineup of movies.

Running Nov. 1-10, the tenth annual Rutgers New Jersey Jewish Film Festival brings 14 films to the Regal Cinema Commerce Center on Route 1 South in North Brunswick.

The schedule includes two films making their North American debuts, and others that have been well received elsewhere in the world without finding their way into local multiplexes. Tickets are \$10, with discounts for seniors and students.

Based in Rutgers' Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, the festival has grown steadily over the decade. Filmmakers, expert speakers, performers, television episodes and a film short supplement the features, helping make this year's event larger and "more celebratory," said center associate director Karen Small, who also runs the festival.

"One of the hallmarks of our festival has always been diversity," Small said, and this year's lineup reflects the careful screening process.

She and the members of the selection committee viewed more than 100 films with the goal of choosing a group that reflects "various elements of the Jewish experience." The winners come from a half dozen countries, with content ranging from universal to intensely personal.

The film industry is suffering along with the rest of the economy, with effects falling especially hard on some of the smaller film distributors the festival worked with in the past, Small said. But its Rutgers connection provides cachet, as well as access to speakers from the university and elsewhere, enabling organizers to turn screenings into full-fledged programs.

One of Small's favorites is *Amnon's Journey*, a truly cosmopolitan work from French director Jean-Marie Hosatte. Working in Hebrew, French and English, Hosatte chronicled violin maker Amnon Weinstein's search to retrieve and restore instruments.

"He went around searching for violins that were connected to the Holocaust, instruments that still existed even though the musicians had been killed," she said.

The movie's second screening will close the festival on Nov. 10, and feature a performance by Israeli violinists Guy Figer and Shir Levy, accompanied by pianist Anna Khanina.

The other continental debut, *Valentina's Mother*, by Israeli directors Arik Lubetzky and Matti Harari, arrives from festivals in London and Berlin, where it won acclaim for "beautiful, haunting" performances by Ethel Kovinska and Sylvia Drori.

Kovinska plays an elderly Holocaust survivor who becomes fixated on her Polish home-care aide, Drori, who happens to have the same name as a beloved childhood friend.

The festival does not ignore the topical. Eran Riklis' *Lemon Tree* features the great Arab Israeli actress Hiam Abbass, probably best known to American audiences from *The Visitor*. In a film loosely based on real events, she plays a widow who goes to court to fight for her lemon grove after a defense minister moves in next door and wants the trees removed for security reasons.

There's also the retro, with the documentary *Yoo-Hoo Mrs. Goldberg* looking back to the days of radio and then early television through Gertrude Berg, creator and star of "The Goldbergs." The festival also will screen TV episodes of the long-ago dramedy.

Another documentary, *Refusenik*, may bring the shock of recognition for some viewers. The subject is the human rights struggle to get the Soviet Union to allow Jews to emigrate, an effort that ultimately impacted New Jersey and New York as well as Israel, Paris and other places.

"I can remember going to Washington for a huge demonstration, I don't know exactly when it was, but probably the late '80's, to free Soviet Jews," Small said.

Seeing such events chronicled on-screen is "a great example of how activism can make a change," she said.

For the full festival schedule, other information or to purchase tickets, please follow the links from [the Bildner Center website](#).

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<http://www.newjerseynewsroom.com/movies/rutgers-nj-jewish-film-festival-set-to-open-nov-1>