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ANNUAL RUTGERS JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL TO RUN NOVEMBER 7–21

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – Tickets are now on sale for the 22nd annual Rutgers Jewish Film Festival, which will be held from Sunday, November 7, through Sunday, November 21. Presented in a hybrid format this year--all films will be available in the Virtual Cinema and five film screenings will be presented in person at Rutgers Cinema and the Princeton Garden Theatre. The festival features a diverse array of award-winning international films from the United States, Israel, Germany, and Switzerland as well as engaging online discussions with filmmakers, scholars, and special guests.

Virtual film tickets are \$11, and an all-access pass is available for \$95. Please note that some films have a limited time frame for online viewing and some are limited by geographic location. Tickets for in-person screenings must be ordered online through the theaters and will be available November 7. Campus screenings are free, but tickets must be reserved in advance. All guests must be fully vaccinated and wear masks in theaters. The festival is sponsored by Rutgers' Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life and is made possible by a generous grant from the Karma Foundation. For more information or to purchase virtual film tickets, visit **BildnerCenter.Rutgers.edu**.

The festival kicks-off on Sunday, November 7, with the opening night film *Wet Dog*, a moving German drama that explores complex issues of cultural and religious identity for a Jewish-Iranian teen living in a largely Arab and Muslim suburb of Berlin. The film is based on Arye Shalimar's provocative autobiography *Ein Nasser Hund*, and Arye Shalimar will discuss the film on Zoom on the festival's opening day. The in-person screening of this film is scheduled at Rutgers Cinema on November 13 at 8:00 p.m.

The festival features the East Coast premiere of the Israeli documentary *Muranow*, named for a Polish neighborhood with a vibrant Jewish past (pre-WWII) that continues to haunt its present. Director Chen Shelach will discuss the film on Zoom, in conversation with Nancy Sinkoff, professor of history and Jewish studies at Rutgers.

Two other powerful documentaries make their New Jersey debuts at the festival; The Israeli film *Marry Me However* is an important follow-up to the groundbreaking film *Trembling Before God*, which the Rutgers Jewish Film Festival screened in 2001. Twenty years later, the film explores the tremendous challenges for LGBTQ Jews who have entered into traditional marriages in order to comply with Torah laws and to be accepted by their families and religious communities. *Yerusalem: The Incredible Story of Ethiopian Jewry* tells the moving history of the Beta-Israel community, who kept their Jewish faith against all odds for thousands of years. Israeli director Levi Zini will discuss the film on Zoom. The in-person screening at Rutgers Cinema on November 21 is cosponsored by the New Jersey-Israel Commission.

The festival will feature online discussions with filmmakers who enrich and enhance the way the audience encounters the films: Director Becky Tahel will discuss *American Birthright*, her very personal journey to understand Judaism's perspectives on interfaith marriage; Israeli filmmaker Maya Sarfaty will talk about *Love It Was Not*, the riveting true story of an SS officer at Auschwitz who falls in love with and protects a Jewish prisoner—and her testimony thirty years later at his war crimes trial; Kurdish director Mano Khalil will discuss his new film *Neighbours*. Inspired by the director's own childhood, the film is set in a Syrian border town in the early 1980s and looks at the absurdities of war through a child's eyes.

Following is a full list of films, online discussions, and in-person screenings. Please check the website BildnerCenter.Rutgers.edu for updates on speakers.

FEATURED FILMS

American Birthright (USA, Documentary)

Cinema Rex (Israel, Short)

Here We Are (Israel and Italy, Drama)

Kiss Me Kosher (Israel and Germany, Comedy)

Labyrinth of Peace (Switzerland, TV Series)

Love It Was Not (Israel and Australia, Documentary)

Marry Me However (Israel, Documentary)

Masel Tov Cocktail (Germany, Documentary, Short)

Muranow (Israel, Documentary)

Neighbours (Switzerland, Drama)

Persian Lessons (Belarus, Russia, Germany, Drama)

The Tattooed Torah (USA, Family Short)

Three Mothers (Israel, Drama)

Wet Dog (Germany, Drama)

Yerusalem, The Incredible Story of Ethiopian Jewry (Israel, Documentary)

DOCUMENTARIES

American Birthright (USA, 2021, 66 minutes)

English • Director: Becky Tahel

How does one reconcile loyalty to one's culture while following one's heart? Judgmental of her sister's engagement to a non-Jew and confused about her own Jewish identity, writer and documentarian Becky Tahel embarks on a journey to understand Judaism's perspectives on love. She travels the world engaging with rabbis, religious experts, mentors, and family in a dialogue around love, faith, marriage, religion, and inclusiveness. What she finds ultimately changes the course of her life.

Speaker: Becky Tahel, Director

Pre-recorded discussion available online.

Love It Was Not (Israel and Australia, 2020, 83 minutes)

Hebrew, German, and English with English subtitles • Director: Maya Sarfaty

In this astonishing, but true, story, a Nazi officer falls in love with a Jewish concentration camp prisoner—a forbidden romance that would have decades-long repercussions. Captivated by her singing voice, SS officer Franz Wunsch falls in love with Helena Citron and saves her and her sister Roza from certain death in Auschwitz. Thirty years later, Citron receives a letter from Wunsch's wife asking her to testify on his behalf—at his war crimes trial. Featuring archival interviews with Helena and her sister and testimonies from people who knew them in Auschwitz, this remarkable film explores themes of survival, loyalty, and the nature of humanity.

WINNER: Best Israeli Film, Docaviv, Israel, 2020

Speaker: Maya Sarfaty, Director
Sunday, November 14, at 2:00 p.m.

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

Marry Me However (Israel, 2020, 63 minutes)
Hebrew with English subtitles • Director: Mordechai Vardi

Marry Me However explores the challenges and heartbreak for LGBTQ Jews who entered into traditional marriages in order to comply with religious laws and to be accepted by their families and communities. How do they live after divorcing their spouses? What role do religious institutions that encourage marriage at a young age play in these situations? This powerful film explores the conflicts they repressed; their faith and religious laws; children, family, and community; exposure to the broader society and search for a partner. It is a journey of self-acceptance and social activism, as they try to affect change in their religious environments.

NOMINEE: Beyond the Screen Award, Docaviv, Israel, 2020

EAST COAST PREMIERE

Muranow (Israel, 2021, 69 minutes)
Hebrew, Polish, and English with English Subtitles • Director: Chen Shelach

Do Jewish ghosts haunt Warsaw's Muranow neighborhood? Once a vibrant center of Jewish life, Muranow was turned into the Warsaw Ghetto—destroyed during World War II and then rebuilt on the site of its destruction. Today, thousands of Poles live in the green and spacious Muranow district, yet its dark past continues to haunt it. In this absorbing documentary, current residents discuss the spectre of its former inhabitants. Some believe the ghosts are literal, while others regard them in metaphorical terms. Many view them as an important reminder of the life, culture, and memories of the Jewish past

Speaker: Chen Shelach, Director, in conversation with Professor Nancy Sinkoff
Tuesday, November 9, at Noon

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

Yerusalem: The Incredible Story of Ethiopian Jewry (Israel, 2021, 90 minutes)
Hebrew with English subtitles • Director: Levi Zini

This powerful documentary brings to life the tumultuous, centuries-long journey of the Jewish Ethiopian community, “Beta-Israel,” as they finally find their way back to the heart of the Jewish people—Jerusalem. It is the story of an isolated Jewish tribe that kept its faith for thousands of

years, despite living in a hostile Christian environment. It is the story of ancient Jewish traditions as well as heroic actions and daring covert rescue operations. But, mainly, *Yerusalem*, is the story of a deep religious yearning, passed down from father to son for countless generations.

Speaker: Levi Zini, Director
Sunday, November 21, at 3:15 p.m.

In-Person Screening: Rutgers Cinema on Sunday, November 21, at 1:30 p.m.

DRAMAS

Here We Are (Israel and Italy, 2020, 92 minutes)
Hebrew with English subtitles • Director: Nir Bergman

This touching film from award-winning director Nir Bergman explores the challenges of parenthood. Aharon, a single father, has devoted his life to raising his autistic son Uri. Their gentle daily routine is disrupted when Uri's mother insists that it is now time for him to gain independence by moving into a specialized group home for young adults. On their way to the institution, Aharon decides instead to take one last road trip with his son, delaying their inevitable separation.

OFFICIAL SELECTION: Cannes International Film Festival, 2020

WINNER: 4 Israeli Academy Awards, including Best Director, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Screenplay, 2020

In-Person Screening: Princeton Garden Theatre on Thursday, November 11, at 1:30 p.m.

Kiss Me Kosher (Israel and Germany, 2021, 101 minutes)
English, German, Hebrew, and Arabic with English subtitles • Director: Shirel Peleg

Moran Rosenblatt (*Wedding Doll*, *Fauda*) stars in this delightful Israeli comedy that mines interfaith and cross-cultural relationships. Before she can marry Maria, her non-Jewish, German girlfriend, Shira must first convince her family that Maria's family were "good Germans" during the war. When Maria's parents arrive in Israel, the two families must overcome their vast cultural and religious differences, all of which are captured on video to full comic effect by Shira's younger brother who documents their interactions for a school project.

WINNER: Best German Film on a Jewish Theme, Berlin Jewish Film Festival, 2021

In-Person Screening: Rutgers Cinema on Saturday, November 20, at 8:00 p.m.

Neighbours (Switzerland, 2021, 124 minutes)

Kurdish, Hebrew, Arabic, and Turkish with English subtitles • Director: Mano Khalil

Set in a Syrian border village in the early 1980s, the absurdity of war is viewed through the eyes of six-year-old Sero. He attends school for the first time and meets the new teacher whose goal is to make Pan-Arabic comrades out of the Kurdish children. He forbids the Kurdish language, orders the veneration of Assad, Syria's president, and preaches hate of the Zionist enemy—the Jews. Based on his personal experiences, director Mano Khalil uses humor and satire to craft a poignant film that depicts a childhood that finds light moments between dictatorship and dark drama.

WINNER: Jury Prize, San Francisco Film Critics, San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, 2021

Speaker: Mano Khalil, Director

Thursday, November 18, 4:00 p.m.

In-person Screening: Princeton Garden Theatre on Tuesday, November 16, at 7:00 p.m.

Persian Lessons (Belarus, Russia, Germany, 2020, 127 minutes)

German, French, and Persian with English subtitles • Director: Vadim Perelman

Gilles, a young Jew from Belgium, narrowly avoids execution by a Nazi firing squad when he claims to be Persian, not Jewish. Sent to a concentration camp in Germany, the lie temporarily saves him, but then Gilles is assigned a seemingly untenable task: to teach Persian to the SS officer in charge of the camp's kitchen, who dreams of opening a restaurant in Iran once the war is over. The film, by Vadim Perelman (*House of Sand and Fog*), is based on the short story *Erfindung einer Sprache* by Wolfgang Kohlhase.

OFFICIAL SELECTION: Belarusian entry for Best International Feature Film, 93rd Academy Awards

Speaker: Vadim Perelman, Director

Monday, November 15, at Noon

RETURNING FESTIVAL FAVORITE

Three Mothers (Israel, 2006, 106 minutes)

Hebrew, French, and Arabic with English subtitles • Director: Dina Zvi-Riklis

This suspenseful and poignant tale follows the Hakim sisters--Rose, Flora, and Jasmine--triplets born in Alexandria, Egypt, whose family fled to Israel in 1958. Their saga is one of powerful love and deadly deceit, played out in three languages and across three generations. Rose,

passionate and outspoken, is a singer whose performances in French, Hebrew, and Arabic provide a musical backdrop for the web of intrigue, passion, and long-held secrets revealed in the film. Loosely based on the director's family, the film stars Gila Almagor and Rivka Raz.

NOMINEE: Best Cinematography and Best Wardrobe Design, Israeli Academy Awards, 2006

WINNER: Best Actress and Best Cinematography, Jerusalem International Film Festival, 2006

OPENING NIGHT FILM

Wet Dog (Germany, 2020, 103 minutes)

German with English subtitles • Director: Damir Lukacevic

Solheil is 15 when his Jewish-Iranian family moves to Wedding, a predominantly Muslim suburb of Berlin. He spends years hiding his Jewish identity to fit in with the Turkish and Arab gangs. When he is finally exposed, he suffers an identity crisis: “For the Germans I was a Turk, for the Muslims a Jew, and for the Jews a criminal from Wedding,” he writes in his provocative memoir.

Speaker: Arye Shalicar, Subject of film

Sunday, November 7, at 5:15 p.m.

In-Person Screening: Rutgers Cinema on Saturday, November 13, at 8:00 p.m.

TV SERIES

Labyrinth of Peace (Switzerland, 2020, 6 episodes, 50 minutes each)

Swiss and German with English subtitles • Director: Mike Schaerer

Episodes 1-3: Available November 7-14

Episodes 4-6: Available November 14-21

Inspired by true, yet little-known events, this gripping mini-series set in post-WWII Switzerland effectively challenges the myth of Switzerland's neutrality during the war. Looking forward to a bright future, Johann is poised to modernize his father-in-law's troubled textile company, while his young wife Klara cares for displaced Jewish children, and Johann's brother Egon works for the attorney general's office to capture Nazi fugitives. All three realize that their future success depends on ignoring or actively colluding with former war criminals.

WINNER: Best Female and Male Lead Actors, Swiss Television Awards, 2020

Speaker: Petra Volpe, Writer and Series Creator

Sunday, November 21, at 5:00 p.m.

SHORTS

Free

Cinema Rex (Israel, 2020, 6 minutes)

Hebrew and Arabic with English subtitles • Directors: Eliran Peled and Mayan Engleman

This captivating animated short film about a famed 1930s Jerusalem movie house features a young Jewish boy and an Arab girl who become friends through their discovery of the magic of films.

WINNER: CANAL + Youth Award, Annency International Animated Film Festival, 2020

Free

Masel Tov Cocktail (Germany, 2021, 30 minutes)

German and Russian with English subtitles • Directors: Arkadij Khaet and Mickey Paatzsch

A Russian-Jewish teen living in Germany offers a fierce comic take on modern Jewish life and antisemitism, and the hypocritically tolerant way in which his world works.

WINNER: Best Student Film, Jaipur International Film Festival

Speaker: Pre-Recorded Q&A with Film Director Arkadij Khaet

FREE FAMILY FILM. RECOMMENDED FOR GRADES 4-6

The Tattooed Torah (USA, 2019, 21 minutes)

English • Director: Marc Bennett

Based on Marvell Ginsburg's beloved children's book of the same name, this short, animated film recounts the true story of the rescue and restoration of a small Torah from Brno, Czechoslovakia. Narrated by famed late actor Ed Asner, the film teaches about the Holocaust in a manner appropriate for a young audience by embedding it in a relatable, profound, and touching story.

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