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RUTGERS JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL TO RUN OCTOBER 30–NOVEMBER 13

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – Tickets are now on sale for the 23rd annual Rutgers Jewish Film Festival, which will be held from Sunday, October 30, through Sunday, November 13. This year's festival will include ten films screened at the Regal Cinema in North Brunswick, New Jersey (October 30–November 6), and eight presented virtually (November 6–13). A diverse array of award-winning international feature and documentary films are showcased this year from the United States, Israel, Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Italy, and Belgium, as well as engaging discussions with filmmakers and special guests. Of the seventeen films being shown, one is a U.S. premiere, two are East Coast premieres, and nine are N.J. premieres.

In-theater tickets are \$12 and virtual tickets are \$14. There are also several discount passes available. 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 tickets, visit **BildnerCenter.Rutgers.edu/film**.

The festival kicks-off on Sunday, October 30, with two feature films. *Cinema Sabaya* portrays the experience of eight diverse Arab and Israeli women in a video production workshop who forge unlikely bonds as they begin to document their lives and share their art with one another. The film swept this year's Israeli Oscars, winning Best Film, Best Director, and Best Supporting Actress, among other awards. (*Cinema Sabaya* will also be available for online viewing, November 6-13.) Opening day will also feature the New Jersey premiere of the German rom-com *Love and Mazel Tov*. Award-winning director Wolfgang Murnberger presents a charming look at modern love in this warm-hearted and witty film.

Making its New Jersey premiere at the festival, *Dead Sea Guardians* is a moving and important Israeli documentary about the heroic effort to save the Dead Sea from drying out and

disappearing. Three historic enemies who share this wonder of the world—Israelis, Jordanians, and Palestinians—join forces to try to stop this catastrophic loss. Film director Ido Glass will speak about the film in person on November 6.

How Saba Kept Singing is an uplifting and life-affirming story about 94-year-old David “Saba” Wisnia, who survived Auschwitz by entertaining his Nazi captors with his beautiful singing voice. The documentary follows the journey of David and his grandson Avi Wisnia back to his hometown and to Auschwitz where long held secrets are revealed. From executive producers Hillary Rodham Clinton and Chelsea Clinton, this remarkable film makes its United States premiere at the festival. The screening will also feature Avi Wisnia, in person, for a Q&A and special musical performance on November 6.

The Polish film *March 1968* makes its East Coast premiere at the festival on November 3. A dramatic love story, it offers a heady convergence of romance, history, and politics in a rare cinematic treatment of antisemitism in 1960s communist Poland. Film director Krzysztof Lang will speak about the film in person at the screening.

The festival’s films—both dramas and documentaries--offer a rich exploration of Jewish identity across the globe, the immigrant experience, and efforts to bridge cultural and political divides. This year’s documentaries cover very diverse topics including: world-renowned singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen; the little-known story of the Jewish family that owned and carefully preserved Monticello for nearly a century; the practice of conversion therapy for ultra-Orthodox Gay men in contemporary Israel; the history of the Xueta, a unique group of families in Majorca who trace their heritage back to the Inquisition when they were forced to renounce Judaism; and the fight to include Orthodox women in the Knesset.

Following is a full list of films and currently scheduled speakers. Please check the website BildnerCenter.Rutgers.edu/film for updates on speakers.

In-Theater Films, October 30-November 6

Alegría (Spain, Drama)

Cinema Sabaya (Israel/Belgium, Drama)***Also shown virtually

Dead Sea Guardians (Israel, Documentary)

The Dinner (Israel, Drama)

Farewell, Mr. Haffmann (France/Belgium, Drama)

Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, A Journey, A Song (USA, Documentary)

How Saba Kept Singing (USA, Documentary)

Love and Mazel Tov (Germany, Rom-Com)

March 1968 (Poland, Drama)

Where Life Begins (Italy, Drama)

Virtual Films, November 6-13

A Radiant Girl (France, Drama)

Cinema Sabaya (Israel/Belgium, Drama) ***Also shown in theater

The Levys of Monticello (USA, Documentary)

More Than I Deserve (Israel/Germany, Drama)

Reckonings (USA, Documentary)

The Therapy (Israel, Documentary)

Women of Valor (Israel, Documentary)

Xueta Island: A Hidden History (Spain/USA, Documentary)

IN-THEATER FILMS, OCTOBER 30-NOVEMBER 6

Cinema Sabaya (Israel/Belgium, Drama, 2021, 95 minutes)

Hebrew and Arabic German, and English with English subtitles • Director: Orit Fouks Rotem

Eight Arab and Israeli women enroll in a video production workshop in Hadera, Israel in this award-winning feature film. Strangers from diverse backgrounds, they begin to document their lives on film, sharing raw footage of their homes and families. Old and young, observant and secular, the women are confronted with the stark differences in their experiences. Unlikely bonds of friendship are forged as they create a powerful sense of community. Acclaimed actress Dana Ivgy plays the Tel Aviv-based filmmaker, Rona, who leads the class. Based on her own experience as a video workshop instructor, director Orit Fouks Rotem casts her debut feature with a mix of both professional and local actors.

WINNER: Best Film, Best Director, among other awards, Israeli Film Academy, 2022

WINNER: Best First Feature, Jerusalem Film Festival, 2021

In-Theater: October 30 @ 1:00 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

Also Available Virtually: Sunday, November 6 through November 13

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

Love and Mazel Tov (Germany, 2021, 88 minutes)

German with English subtitles • Director: Wolfgang Murnberger

What starts as an innocent flirtation quickly snowballs into a comedy of errors in this witty and warm-hearted German rom-com. Anne is immersed in the Jewish community, paying off the karmic debt run up by her non-Jewish grandparents who profited during the war. She manages a small Berlin bookshop that specializes in Judaica, and volunteers at a Jewish retirement home. When she meets Daniel, a newly-single doctor, he impulsively pretends to be Jewish in order to impress her. As their romance blossoms, complications arise when Daniel attends dinner with her family. Award-winning director Wolfgang Murnberger presents a charming look at modern love and a clever take on cultural appropriation and historical guilt.

Note: This film contains scenes with brief nudity.

Sunday, October 30 @ 3:15 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

NEW JERSEY THEATRICAL PREMIERE

Where Life Begins (Italy, 2022, 101 minutes)

Italian and French with English subtitles • Director: Stéphane Freiss

A visually stunning and beautifully crafted love story set in southern Italy. Esther Zelnik has traveled with her large ultra-orthodox French family from their hometown of Aix-les-Bains to a scenic farm in Calabria, on their annual pilgrimage to select perfect citrons (etrogs) for the upcoming festival of Sukkot. Questioning her faith, this rabbi's daughter dreams of independence. She is not the only one experiencing inner anguish. Elio, the owner of the estate, gave up his art gallery in Rome after his father's sudden death. Through their time together, Esther discovers her own path, and Elio finds the inner peace he had lost.

Tuesday, November 1 @ 2:00 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

Speaker, In Person: Ayala Fader, Fordham University

Author of *Hidden Heretics: Jewish Doubt in the Digital Age* (2020)

Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, A Journey, A Song (USA, 2022, 115 minutes)

English • Director: Dan Geller

A definitive exploration of world-renowned singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen as seen through the prism of his international hit hymn, "Hallelujah." The documentary weaves together three creative strands: The songwriter and his times; the song's dramatic journey from record label reject to chart-topping hit; and moving testimonies from major recording artists for whom "Hallelujah" has become a personal touchstone. Approved for production by Leonard Cohen just before his 80th birthday, the film accesses a wealth of never-before-seen archival materials from

the Cohen Trust including Cohen's personal notebooks, journals and photographs, performance footage, and extremely rare audio recordings and interviews.

Tuesday, November 1 @ 7:00 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

Speaker, In Person: Marcia Pally, Professor of Multilingual Multicultural Studies, NYU; Author of *From this Broken Hill I Sing To You: God, Sex, and Politics in the Work of Leonard Cohen* (2021)

NEW JERSEY THEATRICAL PREMIERE

Farewell, Mr. Haffmann (France/Belgium, 2021, 116 minutes)
French with English subtitles • Director: Fred Cavayé

Forced to flee Paris on the brink of Nazi occupation, Joseph Haffmann makes a deal with his ambitious employee, Francois Mercier, to temporarily take over his home and jewelry store. When the plan goes awry, Haffmann is forced into hiding in the basement of his shop. As the men essentially trade places, tensions rise between Mercier and his wife Blanche, when he threatens to expose Haffmann. The film is an extraordinary portrayal of survival and human kindness.

WINNER: Best Actress, Sarlat Film Festival, 2021

Thursday, November 3 @ 2:00 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

EAST COAST PREMIERE

March 1968 (Poland, 2022, 117 minutes)
Polish with English subtitles • Director: Krzysztof Lang

College students Hania and Janek meet and fall in love amidst the social turmoil and government censorship of 1968 Warsaw. Antisemitism is on the rise, and the discrimination against Jewish citizens is gaining momentum. Students take to the streets protesting against the unlawful expulsion of their colleagues from university and banned performances at the National Theatre. Among the protesting youth are Hania and Janek, whose families are on opposite sides of the march barricade. This dramatic love story offers a heady convergence of romance, history, and politics in a rarely told story of antisemitism in 1960s communist Poland.

Thursday, November 3 @ 7:00 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

Speaker, In Person: Krzysztof Lang, Director

Alegría (Spain, 2021, 105 minutes)
Spanish and Chelja with English subtitles • Director: Violeta Salama

This uplifting drama about friendship, family, and reconciliation centers on Alegría who has been distanced from her family and her Jewish heritage for years. When her niece plans a

traditional wedding in the family's native city of Melilla, Alegría must come to terms with her past. The picturesque Mediterranean coastal city--where Jews, Christians, and Muslims converge—offers a stunning backdrop to this bright and funny film. The lives of the diverse women of Alegría are a richly woven tapestry of love, courage, and compassion, and are based on the director's own experiences growing up in Melilla.

Saturday, November 5 @ 7:15 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

The Dinner (Israel, 2020, 79 minutes)

Hebrew and Russian with English Subtitles • Director: Matti Harari

Recent Russian immigrants Emma and Gregory are adapting to life together in Israel in this suspenseful drama about love, desire, and betrayal. Working in low level jobs to make ends meet, they cross paths separately with Alon, an amateur artist and tech entrepreneur, whose own marriage is in trouble. Emma secretly models at night for his drawing class, and becomes his muse. Gregory finally finds a better paying job, coincidentally, at Alon's company. The tension reaches a fever pitch when the couple attend a small dinner party at Alon's home.

Note: This film contains scenes with female nudity.

Saturday, November 5 @ 9:30 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

Dead Sea Guardians (Israel, 2022, 78 minutes)

Hebrew, English, and Arabic with English subtitles • Director: Ido Glass

The Dead Sea—shared by Israelis, Jordanians and Palestinians—is a unique salt-lake, known for its exceptional geographical, biological, and historical value. It is also the lowest place on earth and one of the wonders of the world. Tragically, the Dead Sea is drying due to overconsumption and poor water management. Three historic enemies join forces on a heroic journey to stop this catastrophe and save the Dead Sea from disappearing.

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

Sunday, November 6 @ 1:00 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick

Speaker, In Person: Ido Glass, Director

UNITED STATES PREMIERE

How Saba Kept Singing (USA, 2022, 78 minutes)

English • Director: Sara Taksler

94-year-old David “Saba” Wisnia survived Auschwitz by entertaining his Nazi captors with his beautiful singing voice. When his grandson Avi begins to ask questions, they realize that there is more to the story. The pair set out on a journey to explore the mystery of David’s past, traveling to his hometown in Poland and to Auschwitz. On the journey, David reveals his long-held secret – a lost love from Auschwitz and the importance of their relationship. More than seventy years later, the two are reunited in a breathtaking testament to the power of music, art, and love. This uplifting and life-affirming story about family and faith shows how love can take root in even the grimmest of places. From executive producers Hillary Rodham Clinton and Chelsea Clinton.

Sunday, November 6 @ 3:30 PM - Regal Cinema, North Brunswick
Speaker and Performance, In Person: Avi Wisnia, grandson of David Wisnia

VIRTUAL FILMS, NOVEMBER 6 - 13

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

A Radiant Girl (France, 2021, 98 minutes)
French with English subtitles • Director: Sandrine Kiberlain

Set in Paris in the summer of 1942, Irene is an exuberant 19-year-old aspiring actress. Her world is filled with friends, theater, and new love. While her father contemplates defying new restrictions for Jewish residents, Irene’s carefree world starts to change. Sandrine Kiberlain, makes her directorial feature film debut with a story of self discovery on the brink of change in Nazi-occupied France.

NOMINEE: Best Debut Feature Film, Cannes Film Festival, 2021

Cinema Sabaya (Israel/Belgium, Drama, 2021, 95 minutes)
Hebrew and Arabic German, and English with English subtitles • Director: Orit Fouks Rotem

*****See film description and awards above.*****

Speakers, Virtual: Orit Fouks Rotem, Director, interviewed by Michal Aviad, Affiliated Visiting Israeli Filmmaker, Rutgers Bildner Center

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

The Levys of Monticello (USA, 2022, 70 minutes)
English • Director: Steven Pressman

Follow the little-known story of the Levy family, which owned and carefully preserved Monticello for nearly a century—far longer than Thomas Jefferson or his descendants. When

Jefferson died in 1826, he left behind a mountain of personal debt, which forced his heirs to sell his beloved Monticello home and all of its possessions. Left in ruin, the estate was purchased and restored by Uriah Levy, a career U.S. naval officer who fiercely admired Jefferson for his views on religious liberty. The Levy family's remarkable story also intersects with America's long history of antisemitism.

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

More Than I Deserve (Israel/Germany, 2021, 87 minutes)

Hebrew and Russian with English subtitles • Director: Pini Tavger

This sensitive coming-of-age drama portrays the challenges of new immigrants with rare emotional depth. A single mom and her twelve-year-old son are new arrivals to Israel from Ukraine. Trying to fit in, Pinhas asks permission to join his classmates in bar mitzvah studies, but Tamara, who is highly ambivalent about religion, refuses. To her dismay, Shimon (Yaakov Zada Daniel, *Fauda*), a religious neighbor, steps in to tutor him. Despite her initial disapproval, Tamara's growing attraction to Shimon changes all three lives in dramatic and unforeseen ways.

WINNER: Best Script, Jerusalem Film Festival, 2021

NOMINEES: 4 Awards, Israeli Film Academy, 2021

Speaker, Virtual: Pini Tavger, Director

Reckonings (USA, 2022, 74 minutes)

English • Director: Roberta Grossman

They met in secret to negotiate the unthinkable—compensation for the survivors of the largest mass genocide in history. Survivors were in urgent need of help, but how could reparations be determined for the unprecedented destruction and suffering of a people? *Reckonings* explores this untold true story set in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Directed by award-winning filmmaker Roberta Grossman, *Reckonings* recounts the tense negotiations between Jewish and German leaders. Under the constant threat of violence, they forged ahead, knowing it would never be enough, but hoping it could at least be an acknowledgment and a step towards healing.

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

The Therapy (Israel, 2021, 80 minutes)

Hebrew and English with English Subtitles • Director: Zvi Landsman

Set in Jerusalem, this gripping documentary exposes the harmful practices of so-called conversion therapy. The film compassionately follows the lives of two gay men—Lev (54) and Ben (23)—who underwent conversion therapy and then agreed to testify before the Knesset about whether or not this practice should be banned. Lev, a divorced ultra-Orthodox Jew, clings to conversion therapy because it provides the only space where he can be openly gay within a community. Whereas Ben, seven years into conversion therapy, starts questioning his life

choices. Featuring footage from one-on-one and group sessions, this documentary is an unprecedented exposé of this controversial practice in ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in contemporary Israel.

WINNER: Special Jury Award, Docaviv, 2021

Speaker, Virtual: Zvi Landsman, Director

EAST COAST PREMIERE

Women of Valor (Israel, 2021, 77 minutes)

Hebrew with English subtitles • Director: Anna Somershaf

In the Haredi community, a woman's obligation is to marry and bear children and serve as primary breadwinner while her husband studies religious texts. Haredi political parties in Israel forbid women to seek public office. Fed up with the status quo, Esty Shushan is fighting to change that. She cofounds a nonprofit calling for representation of Orthodox women in the Knesset, taking their case to the UN women's rights committee and the Israeli Supreme Court. But change comes with a cost. Esty's activism brings threats, suspicion, and online harassment. Ostracized as a "fake Haredi," she must reconcile deep-rooted frustration over ultra-Orthodox life with her efforts to bring the silenced voices of women to the center of Israeli discourse.

WINNER: Best Documentary, Israeli Film Academy, 2022

NEW JERSEY PREMIERE

Xueta Island: A Hidden History (Spain/USA, 2021, 63 minutes)

English, Catalan, and Spanish with English subtitles • Director: Dani Rotstein

This fascinating documentary explores the history of the Xueta, a unique group of families living on the Island of Majorca, part of the Balearic Islands. Most of the families trace their heritage back to the Inquisition era when they were forced to renounce their Judaism and officially convert, effectively eliminating Jewish life in Majorca. Yet many continue to practice their Judaism in secret. Current day Majorca presents a compelling case study for silenced Judaism, as practicing Catholic families cite Jewish "traditions" that date back centuries. It is estimated that 20,000 Xuetas live on the island today. New Jersey native Dani Rotstein investigates the islanders history and hidden secrets in this compelling film.

Invited Speaker, Virtual: Dani Rotstein, Director

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