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JEWISH FILM INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF INAUGURAL JFI COMPLETION GRANTS PROGRAM

***ANNOUNCEMENT COMES AHEAD OF THE JEWISH FILM INSTITUTE'S
SUMMER PROGRAM, CINEGOGUE SUMMER DAYS, TAKING PLACE THIS
WEEKEND (JULY 16-19)***

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (July 13, 2020) – Celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, the Jewish Film Institute (JFI), a premier curatorial voice for Jewish film and media and a leading arts and culture organization in the Bay Area, announced today the six projects that have been selected for JFI's inaugural Completion Grants Program for 2020. The JFI Completion Grants Program is the nation's only grant program for Jewish-content films in America and supports both emerging and established filmmakers developing original, contemporary stories that promote thoughtful consideration of Jewish history, life, culture, and identity. The announcement was made today by JFI's Executive Director, Lexi Leban.

When the National Foundation for Jewish Culture closed in 2015, film and media grant opportunities for Jewish-content films and stories became non-existent. This gap, along with a growing need for work that builds empathy and understanding within and beyond Jewish culture, informs the new fund and its administration. JFI's new Film Completion Funding Program, which was formally announced at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival in January, aims to expand opportunities for filmmakers making Jewish content and help inspire and secure the future of Jewish storytelling.

"We know that film has unparalleled power to open hearts and bridge differences," states Jewish Film Institute Executive Director Lexi Leban. "Now more than ever, when artists are struggling and the world is in need of transformative storytelling, we are excited to be able to

provide this much needed resource to the diverse and talented body of filmmakers working with Jewish themes.”

Projects eligible for the 2020 Fund included feature narratives, documentaries, shorts, episodic programs, and web series that were in post-production at the time of applying.

The inaugural grant awards will be presented as part of “Cinegogue Summer Days”, a four day cinematic event showcasing the best of Jewish film and culture in a reimagined festival experience. Running during what would have been the opening weekend of the 40th Anniversary San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, the showcase features several stellar events including a special selection of Drive-in presentations, virtual film screenings and online shorts programs, as well as interactive conversations, premiere performances, and award presentations.

The grant awards will be formally presented online on Sunday, July 19 at the virtual Closing Night Award Ceremony and Cocktail hour event, along with the winners of the Short Documentary Award and Film Movement Award. The recipient of SFJFF's Best Short Documentary Award is eligible for consideration in the Documentary Short Subject category of the Academy Awards®. The SFJFF Film Movement Award, co-presented with the distributor Film Movement, receives the option of a non-exclusive, DVD and streaming distribution deal with Film Movement.

JFI's San Francisco Jewish Film Festival is the longest running Jewish film festival and provides a suite of awards with cash prizes, including: the Freedom of Expression Award (recent recipients include Norman Lear, Lee Grant, Kirk Douglas and documentary filmmakers Joe Berlinger and Liz Garbus); Audience Award for Best Narrative and Best Documentary; the Film Movement Award for Best Narrative Short; a juried award for Best Documentary Short, and the San Francisco Film Critics Circle Award for best international fiction feature.

Jurors for this year's Completion Grant Program include programmer, independent producer and strategist Claire Aguilar, and award-winning filmmakers Alan Berliner (NOBODY'S BUSINESS, WIDE AWAKE), Independent Spirit Award nominee Shawn Snyder (TO DUST), documentary filmmaker and AMPAS member Ferne Pearlstein (THE LAST LAUGH) and Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship recipient and Emmy nominee editor/filmmaker Pola Rapaport.

JFI's 2020 Completion Grants Program recipients include:

A CRIME ON THE BAYOU (USA)

Director: Nancy Buirski / Feature Documentary

"A Crime on the Bayou" is the story of Gary Duncan, a Black teenager from Plaquemines Parish, a swampy strip of land south of New Orleans. In 1966, Duncan tries to break up an argument between white and Black teenagers outside a newly integrated school. He gently lays

his hand on a white boy's arm. The boy recoils like a snake. That night, police burst into Duncan's trailer and arrest him for assault on a minor. A young Jewish attorney, Richard Sobol, leaves his prestigious D.C. firm to volunteer in New Orleans. With his help, Duncan bravely stands up to the District Attorney, challenging his unfair arrest. Their fight goes all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, and their lifelong friendship is forged.

IRMI (USA)

Directors: Veronica Selver and Susan Fanshel / Feature Documentary

IRMI is a documentary about Irmi Selver, who lost her husband and two children while trying to escape from Hitler's Europe. Using her memoir - beautifully read by the actress, Hanna Schygulla - and made by Irmi's daughter, the film is a portrait of a woman whose strength, resilience and perhaps most stunningly, whose joie de vivre could not be vanquished, even in the face of unimaginable loss.

THE BINDING OF ITZIK (USA)

Director: Anika Benkov / Narrative Short

A middle aged, Hasidic bookbinder in search of binding materials, stumbles across a craigslist ad offering 'binding lessons for submissive women', which he responds to, becoming entangled in an emotionally intense BDSM relationship with a stranger on the internet.

THE WILD ONE (USA / FRANCE)

Director: Tessa Louise-Salomé / Feature Documentary

The Wild One illuminates an unsung artist, Jack Garfein—Holocaust survivor, Actors Studio West co-founder, and Hollywood filmmaker—examining how his experience in the camps propelled his vision of acting as a vehicle of resilience and his engagement with controversial themes in postwar American cinema.

THOSE WHO HEARD AND THOSE WHO SAW (USA / CANADA)

Director: Nate Lavey / Feature Documentary

In 1940, Jewish refugees who had fled to the United Kingdom were sent to work in prison camps in Canada. Through a large archive of never-released audio interviews, Those Who Heard and Those Who Saw considers how their experiences connect to those of contemporary Syrian refugees in Canada.

'TIL KINGDOM COME (USA / ISRAEL)

Director: Maya Zinshtein / Feature Documentary

Over 600 million Evangelicals are in love with Israel. For them, the Jewish State is crucial to hastening the End Times and Christ's imminent return. Led by a dynasty of pastors, a congregation in a Kentucky mining town works for the return of Messiah by contributing to the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, an organization with powerful ties to the Netanyahu and Trump administrations. This investigative documentary traces the re-shaping of American foreign policy in the Middle East to faith-based financing and advocacy, exposing the enormous influence religious forces wield in the halls of government.

About the Jewish Film Institute

The Jewish Film Institute (JFI) catalyzes and inspires communities in San Francisco and around the world to expand their understanding of Jewish life and culture through film, media, and dialogue. As the premier curatorial voice for Jewish film and media and a leading arts and culture organization in the Bay Area, JFI each year produces the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival the first and largest festival of its kind worldwide.

Additionally, JFI provides a number of Filmmaker Services to help provide support for emerging and established filmmakers working with Jewish themes and creates a continuum of support for filmmakers at various stages in their careers. This support is provided through JFI's Filmmaker Residency Program which since 2012 as provided office space and support for independent producers (current filmmakers in residence include documentary filmmakers: Nora Mariana, Theo Rigby, Eva Ilona Brzeski, Yoav Potash, and Charene Zalis), and JFI sends two emerging documentary student filmmakers to the Jerusalem Film Workshop, a 6-week program in which students from all over the world make short documentaries that screen at the Jerusalem International Film Festival and the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival.

Finally, JFI provides a number of online programs, including the JFI Film Archive, the largest database of Jewish cinema online today, with almost 40 years of curatorial history and more than 1800 films to investigate. This archive is the most comprehensive online resource for Jewish film and media in the world; JFI On Demand, provides online access to over 350 films from the archive that can be accessed anytime, anywhere; and a free Monthly Online Shorts program. These films have garnered 2.3 million views since 2009.

For more information on JFI & 'Cinegogue Summer Days': <https://jfi.org/summer-days>

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