



SAN
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FESTIVAL 39

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ANNOUNCING THE COMPLETE LINE-UP FOR THE 39TH SAN FRANCISCO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

SAN FRANCISCO, June 18, 2019 - The Jewish Film Institute (JFI) announced today the complete lineup for the 39th San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (SFJFF) which will return to the Bay Area July 18th to August 4th, 2019. Tickets are now on sale for all programs.

“As we celebrate our 39th year, it is an inspiring time to be part of the global film culture and the Jewish Film Institute is participating in that conversation. The changes of the past few years have resulted in the incredible diversity of films and filmmakers that are reflected in this year’s lineup at the first and still the largest Jewish Film Festival. We are committed to discovering and supporting films and filmmakers that expand understanding of Jewish life and we deeply believe in the power of film to illuminate Jewish experience.” said JFI Executive Director Lexi Leban

Now in its 39th year, the Festival, the first and largest of its kind, will welcome an audience of over 40,000 attendees at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco, the Landmark Albany Twin in Albany, the CinéArts Theatre in Palo Alto, the Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center in San Rafael, and the Landmark Piedmont Theater in Oakland. Visit sfjff.org for complete Festival information.

Opening Night Film - FIDDLER: A MIRACLE OF MIRACLES

The 1964 Broadway musical **Fiddler on the Roof** was (and is) a theatrical phenomenon and is now the subject of a new documentary revealing the creative origins and long-lasting cultural impact of a show that held the record, for 10 years, as the longest-running musical on Broadway. Max Lewkowicz’s lively documentary is full of interviews with the musical’s creators, performance clips from productions around the world (including the classic film version and the current popular Yiddish-language adaptation), and commentary from admirers like Stephen Sondheim and *Hamilton*’s Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Director Max Lewkowicz in person.

Following **Fiddler: A Miracle of Miracles** the party continues at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, with refreshments from Oren's Hummus, L'Chaim Foods, Wise Sons, Taste Catering, and more.

Castro Closing Night Film - THE RED SEA DIVING RESORT

Inspired by a true life rescue mission, **The Red Sea Diving Resort** is the story of a group of international agents and brave Ethiopians who in the early 80s used a deserted holiday retreat in Sudan as a front to smuggle thousands of refugees to Israel. Chris Evans plays Ari Kidron, the Mossad agent who leads the mission together with Kabede Bimro, played by Michael Kenneth Williams. Posed as naive European entrepreneurs, the team he leads take advantage of the Sudanese government's interest in expanding its Ministry of Tourism to purchase a strategically located property along the Red Sea. Their plans are thrown for a loop, however, when real tourists begin arriving, expecting service. Directed by Gideon Raff, who is the creator of the Israeli series **Prisoners of War** and an executive producer of its American adaptation **Homeland**. *Director Gideon Raff in person.*

Centerpiece Narrative - TEL AVIV ON FIRE

Salam, an inexperienced young Palestinian man, becomes a writer on a popular soap opera after a chance meeting with an Israeli soldier. His creative career is on the rise - until the soldier and the show's financial backers disagree about how the show should end, and Salam is caught in the middle. This satire by director Sameh Zoabi asks the question: Who controls the narrative of a script or, for that matter, of history?

Director Sameh Zoabi in person in San Francisco and Palo Alto.

Centerpiece Documentary - THE AMAZING JOHNATHAN DOCUMENTARY

Is it possible to make a truthful film when your subject is an unreliable performer addicted to drugs who makes his living through illusion and the art of deception? This is a key question raised in director Ben Berman's (**I'm a Mitzvah**, SFJFF 2014) meta-documentary portrait of Las Vegas magician and stand-up comic John Szeles, aka the Amazing Johnathan. What begins as a conventional story about an entertainer with a terminal heart condition embarking on his final tour ends up as both a meditation on mortality and an exploration of documentary filmmaking.

Director Ben Berman in person in San Francisco.

Freedom of Expression Award - JUDITH HELFAND

Judith Helfand is an artist/activist who is able to craft complex ideas about science, corporate greed, and environmental injustice into highly personal films that entertain as well as inform. Her films include **A Healthy Baby Girl** (SFJFF 1997), in which Helfand reveals her exposure in-utero to the drug diethylstilbestrol (DES), and **Blue Vinyl** (SFJFF 2001) which investigates the potentially toxic effects of vinyl. Helfand co-founded Working Films, a non-profit that mentors filmmakers, NGOs and foundations on the use of documentaries for social change. She is also the co-founder of Chicken and Egg Films, a source of funding to women filmmakers. Helfand will present her new film is **COOKED: Survival by Zip Code**, in which she takes audiences from the deadly 1995 Chicago heat disaster deep into one of our nation's biggest growth industries -

Disaster Preparedness. Along the way she forges links between extreme weather, extreme disparity, and the politics of 'disaster.'

Director Judith Helfand in conversation with award-winning filmmaker Nico Opper in San Francisco

Next Wave Spotlight - SAFE SPACES

In **Safe Spaces**, an adjunct professor come to terms with the upheavals in his personal and professional life. After being held responsible for a controversial incident in his classroom, he spends some time reconnecting with his dysfunctional father, mother, and sister. Starring Justin Long, Fran Descher, and Richard Schiff.

Director Daniel Schechter in person in San Francisco and Palo Alto

Following the San Francisco screening of **Safe Spaces**, there will be a reception in the Castro Mezzanine for Next Wave passholders, featuring snacks, Bay Area made House Kombucha bottles, and Tito's Handmade Vodka cocktails.

A Next Wave Membership is available this year to anyone 35 and under, which includes a Festival pass that offers access to the entire Festival for only \$45. Further information available at sfjff.org/next-wave.

Local Spotlight - WHAT SHE SAID: THE ART OF PAULINE KAEI

This new documentary by Rob Garver tells the story of the life and career of Pauline Kael (1919-2001), perhaps the most powerful, and personal, movie critic of the 20th century. Writing for *The New Yorker* and publishing a dozen best-selling books, Kael's passion made her both admired and despised amongst her readers.

Following the San Francisco screening of **What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael**, there will be a HerStory Panel and Discussion on feminism and film criticism at Spark Arts, 4229 18th St.

East Bay Opening Night - PICTURE OF HIS LIFE

The Festival continues its tradition of programming in the East Bay, opening with **Picture of His Life**. Amos Nachoum is one of the world's great underwater photographers. He's developed a unique approach that puts him face to face with his subjects, without any protection. At the age of 65, he is about to face his ultimate challenge: to swim with a polar bear.

Directors Dani Menkin and Yonatan Nir, producer Nancy Spielberg and subject Amos Nachoum in person in San Francisco and Albany. Director Dani Menkin in person in San Rafael.

A reception with local treats from Saul's Deli, Pomella Oakland Catering, and Hagafen wine will follow the Albany screening on Thursday, July 25.

Palo Alto Opening Night - MY POLISH HONEYMOON

The Festival returns to Palo Alto with this special Opening Night presentation. Anna and Adam, a young Parisian couple with Jewish origins, are about to travel to Poland for the first time. They will attend a ceremony in memory of the Jewish community in the village of Adam's grandfather, which was destroyed 75 years ago. Anna is both anxious and excited about the trip, hoping to reconnect with her roots and finally discover more about her own family's history.

Director Élise Otzenberger in person in Palo Alto and San Francisco.

SFJFF In Good Company - CURTIZ (presented in partnership with Noir City)

Michael Curtiz directed nearly 200 films in his lifetime. In this noir-ish dramatization of the making of his most famous film, **Casablanca**, for which he won the Oscar for Best Director, Curtiz is shown as a man in turmoil. As America prepares to enter WW2, the Hungarian film director grapples with political intervention and a dysfunctional relationship with his estranged daughter amid the troubled production of **Casablanca** in 1942.

Film Noir Foundation founder Eddie Muller in conversation with Curtiz biographer Alan K. Rode following the screening in San Francisco.

Film and Feast - ABE

Abe is a 12-year-old kid from Brooklyn. A passionate cook, he decides to unite his half-Palestinian, half-Israeli family by cooking a special dinner, but it all goes wrong. The movie stars Noah Schnapp (*Stranger Things*), and features Mark Margolis (*Breaking Bad*), and Brazilian musician Seu Jorge (**City of God**).

Following the Albany screening, there will be a ticketed lunch reception featuring traditional and contemporary Middle Eastern flavors at Zaytoon Mediterranean Restaurant & Bar, 1133 Solano Ave, Albany.

Song and Dance - THE MAMBONIKS

During the 1950s, a group of mostly Jewish dancers from New York City fell in love with the mambo, a new dance from Havana, Cuba. Their love for Latin rhythms earned them a nickname: the "mamboniks." **The Mamboniks** tells a little-known story of how two cultures, Jewish and Latin, met on the dance floor at a time when America was racially segregated, and anti-Semitism was commonplace.

Director Lex Gillespie in person in San Francisco

Preceding the San Francisco screening of **The Mamboniks** will be a live performance of mambo-inspired music by *Club Havana 1950*, led by Sascha Jacobsen.

Take Action Day: Social Justice Filmmakers Repair the World

SFJFF39's annual **Take Action Day** is a full-day lineup of documentaries that exemplify the Jewish values embodied in *tikkun olam* which inspire us to repair the world with our actions. Each film on Monday, July 22nd at the Castro Theatre will be followed by discussions with attending filmmakers and community leaders, led by former JFI Filmmaker-in-Residence Nico

Opper. This year's **Take Action Day** films are **American Muslim** by Adam Zucker, which explores Muslim/Jewish alliances in the face of rising violence; **Refugee Lullaby** by Ronit Kertsner, which reveals what results when one person is compelled to act because of his family history; **COOKED: Survival by Zip Code** by SFJFF Freedom of Expression Award recipient Judith Helfand, which confronts the effects of climate change in an unequal world; and **American Factory** by Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert, which observes what happens when a Chinese billionaire opens an auto glass company in a shuttered auto factory in Ohio.

Desperately Seeking Israel

Falasha Jews of Ethiopian descent call themselves the House of Israel (Beta Israel) and claim descent from the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. In 1977 Israeli officials decided that the Law of Return (aliyah) applied to them. This Festival sidebar series centers on three films about the struggle of Ethiopians to make aliyah: **The Red Sea Diving Resort** by Gideon Raff, about a resort in the Sudanese desert operated by Mossad agents as a decoy for evacuating refugee Ethiopian Jews; **Fig Tree** by Alamork Davidian, a drama set during the Ethiopian Civil War; and **The Passengers** by Ryan Porush, about two Ethiopian friends seeking support for the aliyah Israel promised them.

HerStory: If She Can See It, She Can Be It

In addition to the screening/panel discussion of **What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael**, the other HerStory selections in this year's Festival are **Before You Know It** by Hannah Pearl Utt, **Dolce Fine Giornata** by Jacek Borcuch, **Fig Tree** by Alamork Davidian, **Leona** by Isaac Cherem, and **Made in Auschwitz: The Untold Story of Block 10** by Sylvia Nagel and Sonya Winterberg.

For Festival logos, photos and press materials, visit jfi.org/press or sfjff.org/press. To request interviews or screeners, contact Larsen Associates at publicity@larsenassoc.com or call 415.957.1205.

For general or ticket information, visit sfjff.org or email jewishfilm@sfjff.org. To contact the SFJFF Box Office, please email boxoffice@sfjff.org, or call 415.621.0568.

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About the Jewish Film Institute

The Jewish Film Institute (JFI) is the premier curatorial voice for Jewish film and media and a leading arts and culture organization in the Bay Area. Presenter of the San Francisco Jewish Film

Festival, 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. Year round, the Jewish Film Institute promotes awareness and appreciation of the diversity of the Jewish people through multiple mediums – including original online programming that reaches a global audience of over 2 million views. All of these services, along with artists' support and educational initiatives, give audiences around the world even greater access to Jewish culture and the visionaries who shape it.

About the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival

The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (SFJFF), presented by the Jewish Film Institute, is the largest and longest-running festival of its kind and a leader in the curation and presentation of new film and media exploring the complexities of Jewish life around the world. Presenting more than 65 films and 135 individual screenings, performances and events in five Bay Area cities (San Francisco, Palo Alto, San Rafael, Oakland, Albany), SFJFF attracts more than 40,000 filmgoers and industry professionals to its 18-day program.

The Jewish Film Institute extends a heartfelt thanks to all of its generous donors. For a complete listing of members and donors, visit jfi.org/supporters.

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