



SAN FRANCISCO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL 38

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sfjff.org

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THE 38TH SAN FRANCISCO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL, PRESENTED BY THE JEWISH FILM INSTITUTE, WRAPS MOST SUCCESSFUL FESTIVAL IN ORGANIZATION'S HISTORY, SHOWCASING 18 DAYS OF INSPIRING FILMS, PERFORMANCES AND PANELS
AWARD WINNERS INCLUDE *THE INTERPRETER, WHO WILL WRITE OUR HISTORY* AND *THE LAST SUIT*

SAN FRANCISCO, August 7, 2018 - The Jewish Film Institute (JFI) wrapped the 38th edition of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (SFJFF) this Sunday following a record breaking year with over 40,000 attendees and 19 sold out shows. Continuing to present film and media that celebrates the diversity of global Jewish life, SFJFF38 marked the most successful festival in the Jewish Film Institute's history, setting box office and attendance records and reaffirming the Festival's position as the premier showcase for Jewish cinema worldwide.

"At a moment in our national conversation where truth, civility and freedom of expression are under threat, the audience and industry interest in the 38th San Francisco Jewish Film Festival program has been extraordinary," said JFI Executive Director Lexi Leban. "Audiences throughout the Bay Area really responded to the diversity of stories on offer, from a sidebar on the feminist filmmaking revolution supported by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences to films that highlighted African American and Jewish experience in the U.S. The success of SFJFF38 is proof that independent filmmaking is more important now than ever."

Added JFI Program Director Jay Rosenblatt: "We are thrilled with the success of this year's Festival, especially in this year's Big Nights, which set the tone for our entire run. We were fortunate to open and close our Castro lineup with tributes to two iconic performers, beginning with a packed Opening Night presentation of **LOVE, GILDA** and closing with Sam Pollard's masterful portrait **SAMMY DAVIS, JR.: I'VE GOTTA BE ME**, and we couldn't think of a better 2018 Freedom of Expression Awardee than Liz Garbus for her impassioned defense of the free press in **THE FOURTH ESTATE**. Our strategic partnerships this year (with the Museum of the African Diaspora, the Film Noir Foundation and the San Francisco Silent Film Festival),

introduced SFJFF to new audiences and deepened our ties to fellow pillars of the Bay Area arts community. I don't think I have ever seen more smiles and heard more appreciation from our audiences than during this Festival."

The Festival, the first and largest of its kind, presented 67 films from 22 countries during the nearly three week run in San Francisco, Albany, Oakland, Palo Alto and San Rafael and welcomed over 35 filmmakers and special guests who were met with warm responses and thought provoking dialogue amongst the Jewish, independent film, and media arts communities.

The Festival featured 19 sold out shows across multiple venues including:

Who Will Write Our History (CineArts Palo Alto, Albany Twin)
Sammy Davis, Jr.: I've Gotta Be Me (Albany Twin, Smith Rafael Film Center, CineArts Palo Alto)
Budapest Noir (Albany Twin, CineArts Palo Alto, Smith Rafael Film Center)
Chasing Portraits (Albany Twin)
Wajib (Piedmont Theatre)
The Invisibles (Piedmont Theatre)
Blue Note Records: Beyond the Notes (Piedmont Theatre)
The Last Suit (Albany Twin)
The Waldheim Waltz (Albany Twin)
The Man Who Stole Banksy (Albany Twin)
The Fourth Estate (Albany Twin)
To Dust (Albany Twin, Smith Rafael Film Center)
Shalom Bollywood: The Untold History of Indian Cinema (Piedmont Theatre)

SFJFF38 AWARD WINNERS

Returning for the second year, the **SFJFF Audience Awards**, chosen by the Festival's 40,000 attendees, went to Pablo Solarz's **THE LAST SUIT** for the Best Narrative Feature Award and Roberta Grossman's **WHO WILL WRITE OUR HISTORY** for the Best Documentary Feature Award. Runners up in each category, respectively, were Claus Räfle's historical drama **THE INVISIBLES** and Ron Yassen's documentary **CROSSROADS**. "SFJFF has a famously opinionated audience, and what better way to thank our loyal attendees for their considered feedback than with an audience award from the mother of all Jewish film festivals," said Rosenblatt.

The juried **SFJFF Best Short Documentary Award** was presented to **A PERFECT DAY FOR BANANA LEAVES**, Yavin Rubinstein's look at the bananas grown in Northern Israel as they journey to their final destination in Gaza. As an Academy Award® qualifying film festival in the Documentary Short Subject category, the film will be eligible to be nominated for the Oscar® at the 2019 Academy Awards®.

"We are honored to have SFJFF join a select group of qualifying festivals for the Short Documentary Oscar®. We are very happy that our filmmakers will have this added benefit when they screen at our Festival," Jay Rosenblatt, JFI's Program Director, said.

For the second year in a row, the Festival, in collaboration with the San Francisco Film Critics Circle, presented the **San Francisco Film Critics Award** to the best film in the Narrative Feature category. This year, the Festival presented the award to Martin Šulík's **THE INTERPRETER**. San Francisco Film Critics Circle members said of the film, "Our hope is this SFFCC Award will encourage a broader audience to seek out this expertly crafted, beautifully acted Slovakia-set film that eloquently ruminates on the Holocaust's shattering legacy."

The 2018 **SFJFF Film Movement Award** was presented to **SUMMER**, Pearl Gluck's narrative short about sexual awakening of two Orthodox Jewish girls at a summer camp. Presented with distributor Film Movement, the Award honors achievement in short filmmaking that express the Jewish experience in a unique, original and meaningful way, or provides a fresh perspective on diversity within the Israeli or Jewish community.

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

SFJFF38 kicked off with a packed screening at the Castro Theatre of Lisa D'Apolito's touching tribute to comedian Gilda Radner **LOVE, GILDA**. D'Apolito was joined during the Q&A by original SNL cast member Laraine Newman, and Jordan Walker-Pearlman, the nephew of Gene Wilder, Radner's husband. The selection received unprecedented interest from Bay Area moviegoers, making for an inspiring, action-packed and celebratory Opening Night event, followed by the Festival's bash at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, where 500 guests enjoyed drinks and delicacies provided by SFJFF38's food and drink purveyors.

The Festival's Centerpiece Films presented stories new and old from veteran and emerging filmmakers that provoked thoughtful discussion from SFJFF attendees. Ruth Beckermann, the venerated Austrian filmmaker, was in person to present the North American Premiere of **THE WALDHEIM WALTZ**, her stunning documentary about the 1986 election of Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, while Shawn Snyder was on hand to present the West Coast Premiere of his feature debut, **TO DUST**, along with lead actor Géza Röhrig.

Academy Award nominated filmmaker Liz Garbus received the JFI Freedom of Expression Award in conjunction with a screening of her film **THE FOURTH ESTATE**, an in-depth look at the journalists working at The New York Times during the first 100 days of Donald Trump's presidency. Following the screening, Garbus and local filmmaker Bonni Cohen discussed the film's importance and timeliness.

Director Roberta Grossman (*Seeing Allred*, JFI WinterFest 2018; *Above and Beyond: The Birth of the Israeli Air force*, SFJFF 2014; *Hava Nagila (The Movie)*, SFJFF 2012), was welcomed with a standing ovation following the World Premiere of her latest film **WHO WILL WRITE OUR HISTORY** at the Castro Theatre, and sell outs at multiple venues. The film was selected as the Festival's Palo Alto Opening Night presentation, where pass sales also broke records.

THE MAN WHO STOLE BANKSY, a meditative documentary about street art in the West Bank narrated by Iggy Pop, screened as the Festival's Next Wave Spotlight as film-goers 35 and under toasted to the West Coast premiere of the film with producer Filippo Perfido in attendance at the Castro Theatre.

Producer Hilla Medalia was present for the Castro Theatre and East Bay Opening Night screenings of **THE OSLO DIARIES**, Mor Loushy and Daniel Sivan's examination of the 1992 peace talks in Oslo, Norway between Palestinian and Israeli officials.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Jewish Film Institute collaborated with three leading Bay Area arts organizations to present three of the Festival's biggest events, reflecting JFI's strategic commitment to stewarding the rich cultural legacy of Bay Area arts and culture in partnership with its peers both in and beyond the film community.

The Castro Closing Night presentation of **SAMMY DAVIS, JR.: I'VE GOTTA BE ME**, was a collaboration with the **Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD)** that was a perfect fit for the complex identity questions raised in the film about the Black, Jewish and Puerto-Rican performer. MoAD CEO and Director Linda Harrison and the film's director Sam Pollard discussed Davis Jr.'s life and legacy onstage following the film.

Presented in collaboration with the **Film Noir Foundation**, SFJFF's packed screening of Éva Gárdos' Hungarian drama **BUDAPEST NOIR** screened at the Castro Theatre with founder and president of FNF Eddie Muller conducting a rousing Q&A with Gárdos.

FilmArchiv Austria head restorator Nikolaus Wostry introduced Hans Karl Breslauer's 1924 silent gem, **THE CITY WITHOUT JEWS**, as part of JFI's partnership with the **San Francisco Silent Film Festival**. Wostry detailed the painstaking restoration process that the film went through, and welcomed Hugo Bettauer's granddaughter to the Castro Theatre stage for an emotional introduction to the film. The film is based on Bettauer's novel of the same name, which was written as an anti-Fascist critique and led to his political assassination. A packed Castro Theatre was treated to the international premiere of the restored film accompanied by an original live score performed by local musicians Sascha Jacobsen and the Musical Art Quintet, making for a powerful event for all involved.

Other film highlights included three inspiring screenings of the emotionally powerful documentary **CROSSROADS**, with director Ron Yassen and subjects Bobby Selkin and Xavier Hare in attendance, screenings of the activist documentary **NAILA AND THE UPRISING** with award-winner director Julia Bacha and producer Suhad Babaa in person, and a fascinating discussion at the Castro Theatre with the attorney Kenneth Feinberg, subject of the documentary **PLAYING GOD**.

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

Oakland based filmmaker V. Scott Balcerek presented his film **SATAN & ADAM** as the Local Spotlight, a project he has been working on for over 23 years, and was present for all four screenings of the film. Subject Adam Gussow attended special screenings in San Francisco and Albany and held impromptu harmonica performances following both screenings. The film looks at the unlikely musical partnership of Gussow, a Jewish man and the African American street performer Sterling McGee, a.k.a. Mr. Satan.

Elizabeth Rynecki, a Bay Area based first-time filmmaker, presented the California Premiere of her personal documentary **CHASING PORTRAITS**. The feature documentary was accompanied by two short films from local director Rachel Boyoung Kim (**JERUSALEM IF I FORGET YOU**) and editor Michelle Blue (**HABESHA**), who were sponsored by the Jewish Film Institute in 2017 to attend the Jerusalem Film Workshop where these shorts were produced. The selection of these shorts demonstrates JFI's growing commitment to supporting filmmakers in both the production and exhibition stages of filmmaking.

BEYOND THE SCREEN: PANELS, PARTIES AND SPECIAL EVENTS

As part of a special initiative supported by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the California Arts Council in the wake of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, SFJFF presented the sidebar **Hands On/Hands Off: Anatomy of a Feminist Film Movement**, with a panel moderated by JFI Executive Director Lexi Leban with **ROLL RED ROLL** director Nancy Schwartzman, **NETIZENS** director Cynthia Lowen, **NETIZENS** subject and founder of Feminist Frequency Anita Sarkeesian, and Ron Barney from Futures Without Violence's Coaching Boys Into Men program, which shined a spotlight on women behind and in front of the lens shaping today's social discourse and revolutionizing the way we talk about sexual harassment and consent. SFJFF38 was also thrilled that 54% of this year's films were directed by women.

SFJFF once again presented Take Action Day, a full day of illuminating documentaries which take their cues from the Jewish value of *tikkun olam*, dedicated to repairing the world with our actions and supported by the Alexander M. and June L. Maisin Foundation of the Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund. Powerful and inspiring discussions led by award-winning filmmaker and former JFI Filmmaker in Residence Nicole Opper, followed each screening and left audiences inspired and engaged. This year's lineup included award-winning documentaries such as HBO's **THE SENTENCE**, and National Geographic's **SCIENCE FAIR**, winner of the 2018 Sundance Film Festival Festival Favorite Award and attended by the film's directors Cristina Costantini and Darren Foster and subject Robbie Barrat for an invigorating post-film discussion. Community activist support was provided by the Factory Farming Awareness Coalition, the Center for Environmental Health, the Young Women's Freedom Center, Bend the Arc and many more.

LOOKING AHEAD

The 38th San Francisco Jewish Film Festival presented a bold, diverse and dynamic year of Jewish-themed cinema that expanded the Festival's audience with its interpretations of films

that qualify for the program. The Jewish Film Institute will continue to build on the 2018 Festival's record-breaking success with new online initiatives, a robust year-round programming calendar, enhanced artist support opportunities and creative partnerships to showcase Jewish film for years to come.

Stay tuned for the Jewish Film Institute's year-round programming, including WinterFest 2019, and the 39th San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, July 18 – August 4, 2019.

[All Festival Photos are available to download here. Please credit the Jewish Film Institute and San Francisco Jewish Film Festival and photographer Pat Mazzera unless otherwise noted.](#)

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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.

San Francisco Jewish Film Festival 38 Sponsors

The Jewish Film Institute and San Francisco Jewish Film Festival wish to thank the **2018 Premier Festival Sponsors** Sterling Bank & Trust and The Seligman Family Foundation.

SFJFF38 wishes to thank its Premier Media Sponsors: the San Francisco Chronicle and SFGATE; its Grand Media Sponsors: J. the Jewish News of Northern California, KQED and The Forward;

and its Major Media Sponsors: ABC7/KGO-TV, Berkeleyside.com and the SF Bay Times.

The Festival wishes to thank its Business and Community Sponsors: Berkeley Film Foundation, Britex Fabrics, the Contemporary Jewish Museum, Craig Harrison's Expressions of Excellence™, GoWatchIt, Ingeniux Web Experience Management, Schoenberg Family Law Group, Sinai Memorial Chapel Chevra Kadisha and Wareham Development and Where the Buffalo Roam.

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