

PRESS RELEASE

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SAN
FRANCISCO
JEWISH
FILM
FESTIVAL 41

july 22–
august 1
sfjff.org

The Jewish Film Institute
presenters of the
San Francisco Jewish Film Festival
announces the complete line-up of the
41st SAN FRANCISCO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL
July 22 - August 1, 2021

June 28, 2021 - The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (SFJFF) is back! From July 22 to August 1, the world's first and largest Jewish film festival will present over 50 films from over 20 countries with an unprecedented number of shorts and special guests from around the globe, celebrating bold films and filmmakers that expand and evolve the Jewish story for audiences everywhere. Tickets and passes are now on sale for all programs.

Now in its 41st year, this year's program has "something for everyone." From historical dramas to genre-bending documentaries, this year's themes range from poignant coming of age films to complex narratives surrounding Jewish identity. Five films address LGBTQI+ issues, eight films on the joys and pains of teenage life, seven

explore topics and themes relating to the Israeli-Palestinian region, 25 feature women directors and producers, literature takes center stage in five films, and the creation of music graces the screen in three films. This year, the new JFI Social Change Teen Fellowship program will be presenting the Take Action program.

Festival-goers can experience SFJFF several ways this year. Those who are comfortable viewing from home can do so in the JFI Digital Screening Room, and those who are excited to gather in community will be able to enjoy in-person, live screenings at the historic Castro Theatre in San Francisco on **July 24 and 25**.

“We really were not sure what was going to happen this year, so we are thrilled to be back in the Castro for a limited theatrical run with the highest quality slate of ground-breaking and provocative films. The lineup reflects the full breadth of Jewish identity and the perseverance of independent filmmakers during a global pandemic. There is nothing like a community experiencing a film premiere together in the dark. We cannot wait to see everyone!” says JFI Executive Director Lexi Leban.

Visit sfjff.org for complete Festival information, including ticket sales and registration, updates and announcements.

All in-person films will also screen virtually, except MY NAME IS PAULI MURRAY and PERSIAN LESSONS, which will only be available live at the Castro.

Opening Night (In-person)

PERSIAN LESSONS

1942. Gilles, a young Belgian man, is arrested by the SS alongside other Jews and sent to a concentration camp in Germany. He narrowly avoids execution by swearing to the guards that he is not Jewish, but Persian. This lie temporarily saves him, but then Gilles is assigned a seemingly untenable mission: to teach Persian to Koch, the officer in charge of the camp's kitchen, who dreams of opening a restaurant in Persia (Iran) once the war is over. Gilles finds himself having to invent a language he doesn't know, word by word. As the unusual relationship between the two men begins to incite jealousy and suspicion, Gilles becomes acutely aware that one false move could expose his ruse.

Directed by Vadim Perelman (HOUSE OF SAND AND FOG)

US Premiere

In-person screening only at the Castro Theatre, Saturday, July 24, 8:15 p.m.

Opening Night (Virtual)

MISHA AND THE WOLVES

A young orphan's unusual tale of survival during the Holocaust captivated the world. In a desperate effort to be reunited with her beloved parents, 7 year old Misha Defonseca escapes her indifferent foster family and begins her trek alone armed only with a pocket knife through a bleak wintry war torn European landscape. Beset with hunger, on the verge of hypothermia, attacked by a German soldier, Misha's unimaginable horror turns to hope as she is adopted by a different family – a pack of wolves who would become her protectors and a powerful symbol of Misha's near mythical tale. After writing a best-selling memoir of her exploits, Hollywood came knocking, including the likes of Oprah and Disney. But when Misha's publisher Jane Daniels, finds herself being sued for millions, Jane turns detective and begins to unpack the story to reveal a deeper and darker truth. This film made its World Premiere at Sundance.

Directed by Sam Hobkinson (FEAR CITY)

West Coast Premiere

Also playing in-person at the Castro Theatre, Sunday, July 25, 6:45 p.m.

Closing Night (Virtual)

PLAN A

1945. A group of Jewish Holocaust survivors planned to poison the water system in Germany, killing millions of Germans in an ultimate act of revenge. The bold and deadly operation was called - PLAN A. Based on a true story, the film provides a new perspective on the Holocaust and addresses our most primal feelings: revenge, justice, and morality. Starring August Diehl (INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS; A HIDDEN LIFE), Sylvia Hoeks (BLADE RUNNER 2049), and Michael Aloni (SHTISEL).

Directed by Doron and Yoav Paz (PHOBIDILIA; THE GOLEM)

Freedom of Expression Award

Agnieszka Holland with her new film CHARLATAN

Legendary Polish filmmaker and recipient of **SFJFF's 2021 Freedom of Expression Award**, Polish director Agnieszka Holland was born in Warsaw on November 28, 1948. She studied film directing at FAMU in Prague. Her film career began by working in Poland with Krzysztof Zanussi as assistant director and with Andrzej Wajda as her mentor. She wrote several scripts with Wajda before directing her own films, which were soon winning awards at major festivals - [Cannes (1980), Berlin (1981), Golden Globe Award (1991)] - and gaining notoriety as part of the Polish New Wave. Holland is best

known in the United States for her Oscar-Nominated ANGRY HARVEST, EUROPA, EUROPA, and the Warner Bros. films: OLIVIER, OLIVIER and THE SECRET GARDEN. More recently she turned to television and has directed episodes of HBO's THE WIRE, TREME, and the Netflix political drama, HOUSE OF CARDS. JFI is proud to present this award to this distinguished and brilliant filmmaker.

Agnieszka Holland's newest film, CHARLATAN, is a richly drawn biopic of Czech healer Jan Mikolášek who rose to fame through his uncanny ability to diagnose disease with a mere glance at the patient's urine. Treating all who entered his clinic, from the poor to the Nazis, is he an unorthodox healer ahead of his time or a mere charlatan?

The Freedom of Expression Award, presented annually at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival since 2005, honors the unfettered imagination, which is the cornerstone of a just, free and open society. Past recipients include Norman Lear, Kirk Douglas, Liz Garbus and Lee Grant.

West Coast Premiere

Laura Thielen (former Artistic Director of the Aspen Film Festival and San Francisco International Film Festival) will moderate the online Q & A with Agnieszka Holland.

Centerpiece Narrative

200 METERS

On a technicality, a desperate Palestinian father is denied entry at an Israeli checkpoint to see his injured son. It's just 200 meters across the border wall, but to Mustafa it might as well be a world away. Taking matters into his own hands he makes the dangerous decision to smuggle himself across, an expensive and dangerous undertaking. Joined on his journey by a naive young man seeking work, a Palestinian man on his way to a cousin's wedding and his German filmmaker girlfriend, they must make the perilous journey alone when abandoned by the smugglers who are supposed to guide them. This taut and restrained narrative film is directed by Ameen Nayfeh (born in Palestine, 1988), who spent his formative years moving between Jordan and Palestine.

Directed by Ameen Nayfeh

Bay Area Premiere

*Preceded by the short film **WHITE EYE**.*

In-person screening at the Castro Theatre, Saturday, July 24, 11:00 a.m.

Centerpiece Documentary

THE CONDUCTOR

Internationally renowned conductor Marin Alsop smashed the glass ceiling when she became the first woman to serve as music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, and the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra. **THE CONDUCTOR** takes the audience backstage to the artistry and energy that rewards her audiences and inspires her students. With unprecedented access, the filmmakers accompany Marin Alsop to concerts around the world, filming across three continents: from Mozart's Magic Flute in São Paulo, to Mahler's 1st Symphony in Lucerne, to Bernstein's Mass in Baltimore, and her opening concert in Vienna.

Directed by Bernadette Wegenstein

West Coast Premiere

*Preceded by the short film, **THE VIOLIN UPSTAIRS**, by local director Asali Echols.*

Take Action Spotlight

NOT GOING QUIETLY

A rising star in progressive politics and new father, 32-year old Ady Barkan's life is upended when he is diagnosed with ALS. After a chance encounter with a powerful senator on an airplane catapults him to national fame, Ady and a motley crew of activists ignite a once-in-a-generation movement for universal healthcare, in a journey that transforms his belief in what is possible for the country and for his family. **NOT GOING QUIETLY** won the 2021 SXSW Audience Award for Documentary Feature and Special Jury Recognition for Humanity in Social Action.

Directed by Nicholas Bruchman (LA AMERICANA)

SFJFF's annual Take Action programming features impactful documentaries exemplifying the Jewish values embodied in tikkun olam, which inspire us to repair the world with our actions. Screening presented by JFI's Social Change Teen Fellows, who will lead the Q&A with the filmmaker.

Song and Dance

A KADDISH FOR BERNIE MADOFF

An artistic excommunication set on Wall Street in 2008. *A Kaddish For Bernie Madoff* is a mystical meta-musical about the greatest financial fraud in history, as seen through the eyes of musician/poet Alicia Jo Rabins. A hybrid of memoir and narrative fantasy, this is the story of Madoff and the system that allowed him to function for decades.

Fueled by Rabin's growing obsession, real-life interviews transform into music videos, ancient spiritual texts become fevered fantasies of synchronized swimming, and a vivid, vulnerable work of art is born from the unique perspective of an artist watching the

global financial collapse up close. This critically acclaimed musical story is brought from stage to screen, and from past to present — maintaining the original narrative while also drawing a thread between the massively destabilizing global financial crash of 2008, and our current era of profound ethical and moral uncertainty.

Directed by Alicia Jo Rabins

California Premiere

In-person screening at the Castro Theatre with filmmaker Q&A, Saturday, July 24, 5:00 p.m.

Next Wave Spotlight

WET DOG

When 15-year-old Soheil moves to Wedding, one of Berlin’s multicultural, mostly Muslim, neighborhoods, he hides his Iranian-Jewish origins to fit in. When his gang of friends decides to rob the local “Jew-lery” as they call it, run by his parents, he realizes that the stakes are much higher, and he begins fighting for his own truth, hoping that love, friendship and acceptance will reward him. Based on a provocative autobiography, WET DOG raises questions of cultural diversity, religious identity, and how they intersect with friendship, especially during the phase of rawness and exploration that are one’s teenage years.

Directed by Damir Lukacevic

Preceded by the short film, KIPPAH.

Local Spotlight

PROGNOSIS: NOTES ON LIVING

When maverick Oscar-winning Bay Area documentary filmmaker Debra Chasnoff is diagnosed with stage-4 breast cancer, she faces injustice as always, with her camera. A raw, surprisingly funny portrait emerges of how her calling—to repair the world—shifts as she navigates between terminal illness and the shifting identities of her chosen LGBTQI+ family. Underpinned by their decision to not hear the prognosis, Debra and her wife Nancy reveal their most vulnerable moments, even as they face the physical and emotional rollercoaster of treatment and the overwhelming bureaucracy of being a cancer patient. Through it all, they lovingly work toward their common goal—Debra’s survival. With Debra at the helm, their on-camera honesty and candor offer a level of emotional access that is difficult to achieve when mediated by a film crew. They bravely put themselves on display, hoping that their experience might help others.

Directed by Debra Chasnoff & Kate Stilley Steiner, Executive Produced by Carrie Lozano, Produced by Joan Lefkowitz, Nancy Otto, Lidia Szajko

In-person screening and Q&A with the Bay Area-based filmmaking team at the Castro Theatre, Sunday, July 25, 12:00 p.m.

TV Spotlight

LABYRINTH OF PEACE

A compelling portrait of an industrial family dynasty, inspired by true yet little-known events in post-WWII “neutral” Switzerland. This is a six-episode television series, presented in two halves. The year is 1945. War is over. While Klara tries to mend the wounds of war by caring for displaced Holocaust survivors, her fiancé Johann works for her industrialist father and hopes to save his father-in-law’s well-established but faltering textile company. Just home from military service, Johann’s brother Egon takes his first steps in the Attorney General’s office. His mission: to hunt down escaped Nazis. All three of them soon realize the façade of peace is bought with the blood and victims of the war. Johann’s professional ambitions bring him closer to those who committed unspeakable war crimes. Klara risks her marriage while growing ever closer to Herschel, one of the survivors, who are all met with distrust by the locals. And Egon finds himself caught in a system that willingly turn a blind eye towards war criminals for the sake of profit while his sanity hangs in the balance.

Directed by Mike Schaerer and Produced by the creators of the European box-office hit HEIDI.

Other Highlights

THE ADVENTURES OF SAUL BELLOW

For most of his adult life, Saul Bellow was the most acclaimed novelist in America and winner of, among other awards, the Nobel Prize in Literature, three National Book Awards, and the Pulitzer Prize. This is the first-ever documentary film about this legendary author, who was one of the most acclaimed chroniclers of post-war American Jewish life. Galay intelligently weaves a chronological study of Bellow’s oeuvre with an intimate portrait of the writer’s inner life and relationships. Marking the centennial of his birth and the tenth anniversary of his death, this film features original interviews with Bellow’s family, close friends, and writers inspired by him, including Martin Amis and A. B. Yehoshua. Bellow’s revolutionary impact on American literature is examined, as are his many identities as a writer, polemicist, ‘serial husband,’ father, Chicagoan, Jew, and American.

Directed by Asaf Galay (THE MUSES OF BASHEVIS SINGER)

THE BINDING OF ITZIK (short)

In his online search for bookbinding materials, a middle aged Hasidic bookbinder stumbles across a Craigslist ad offering 'binding lessons for submissive women.' He responds to it, becoming entangled in an emotionally intense BDSM relationship with a stranger on the internet. Funded by the inaugural JFI Completion Grants Program.
Directed by Anika Benkov

BORN IN AUSCHWITZ

This is the untold story of the only Jewish baby who was born in the death camp before the liberation and survived. An extraordinary journey of the second and third generation breaking the cycle of trauma to free themselves from Auschwitz forever. In May 1944, when Vera arrives in Auschwitz, she is two months pregnant and immediately selected by Dr. Mengele for medical experiments. With the help of a bunkmate, Vera eventually gives birth to baby Angela in secret. When Angela eventually begins a family of her own, she is determined to raise her daughter, Kati, as a survivor. As mother and daughter attempt to reconcile the past, they travel to places they never wanted to return to, meet people they never imagined connecting with, as we bear witness to the Holocaust's long shadow on three generations.

Directed by Eszter Cseke and Andras Takacs

*Preceded by the short film, **ALINA**.*

THE LIGHT AHEAD

A forgotten classic by B-movie maverick Edgar G. Ulmer (THE BLACK CAT, DETOUR), this 1939 film is one of the finest examples of pre-WWII American Yiddish cinema. Shot in Ulmer's trademark expressionistic visual style and featuring a large ensemble cast from New York's Artef and Yiddish Art Theatres, the film is a document of a lost era and transcends its humble "poverty row" origins. The film follows Fishke and Hodel, a young disabled couple, as they strive to escape the oppressive disease and poverty of their shtetl. At once a touching comedic drama and poignant social critique, Ulmer's film is markedly distinct from the standard Hollywood offerings of the era, and is a prescient allegory for the looming peril facing European Jews on the eve of the Second World War. Restored in new 4K digital restoration from original 35mm materials by the National Center for Jewish Film. Descendents of Ulmer live in the Bay Area.

Directed by Edgar G. Ulmer

West Coast Premiere

In-person screening at the Castro Theatre, Sunday, July 25, 3:30 p.m.

MY FATHER AND ME

Acclaimed documentary filmmaker Nick Broomfield takes a distinctly personal look at his relationship with his humanist-pacifist father, Maurice Broomfield, a factory worker turned photographer of vivid images of postwar England. Maurice's sublime and meticulously crafted photos would inspire Nick's own filmmaking career, but also speak to a difference in outlook between father and son, whose less romantic, more left-wing political identity stemmed from his Jewish mother Sonya's side. Both memoir and tribute, *MY FATHER AND ME* is an intimate story of one family that also takes an expansive, philosophical look at the twentieth century itself.

Directed by Nick Broomfield (*KURT AND COURTNEY*; *BIGGIE AND TUPAC*; *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER*)

MY NAME IS PAULI MURRAY

Fifteen years before Rosa Parks refused to surrender her bus seat, a full decade before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned separate-but-equal legislation, Pauli Murray was already knee-deep fighting for social justice. A pioneering attorney, activist, priest and dedicated memoirist, Murray shaped landmark litigation—and consciousness—around race and gender equity. As an African American youth raised in the segregated South—who was also wrestling with broader notions of gender identity—Pauli understood, intrinsically, what it was to exist beyond previously accepted categories and cultural norms. Both Pauli's personal path and tireless advocacy foreshadowed some of the most politically consequential issues of our time. Told largely in Pauli's own words, *MY NAME IS PAULI MURRAY* is a candid recounting of that unique and extraordinary journey.

Directed by Julie Cohen and Betsy West

In-person screening only at the Castro Theatre Saturday, July 24, 2:00 p.m.

THOSE WHO HEARD & THOSE WHO SAW

An experimental essay film about a network of internment camps that were built in eastern Canada in 1940, with British funding, to imprison 2,000 Jewish refugees who had fled Europe during the lead up to the Second World War. The small city of Sherbrooke, Québec housed one of the largest internment camps, and today is the home to newly-arrived Syrian refugees like Muhammed Al Jabir and his family. They live quiet lives in the shadow of personal trauma. With eloquence and poise, he describes being severely wounded by Syrian troops, the death of his brother, and his family's escape. He reflects on the loss of his home and the challenges of starting anew in a

strange place. As the film tarries between past and present, the question is not “are these experiences the same”, but rather: “how does one illuminate the other?”

Directed by Nate Lavey

World Premiere

Funded by the inaugural JFI Completion Grants Program

TIGER WITHIN

Starring Emmy-Award winning actor, Ed Asner in a once-in-a-lifetime performance, this is the story of the unlikely friendship between Samuel, an elderly, lonely Holocaust survivor, and Casey, an angry 14-year-old runaway. Tired of her neglectful mother choosing her boyfriend's comfort over her welfare, Casey roams the streets of Los Angeles with only the clothes on her back. It's her distinctive leather jacket bearing the mark of a swastika, that captures the attention of thoughtful senior Samuel. Having been taught by her mother that the Holocaust was a fiction, she is surprised to learn that Samuel experienced this history firsthand and that his children were murdered in the camps. Following through on a promise made to his deceased wife to erase the lingering hate in his heart, Samuel makes it his mission to befriend the misguided teen. For if he can forgive her, he can master his anger, and if she can forgive herself, she can be free.

Directed by Rafal Zielinski

West Coast Premiere

*Preceded by the short film **BECHORA**.*

WHO'S AFRAID OF ALICE MILLER?

As a child, Martin is beaten by his father and rejected by his mother. It sounds like a case study lifted from the book “The Drama of the Gifted Child” by world-renowned Swiss psychoanalyst Alice Miller, except his situation is a unique one: his mother is the author herself. Following her death, Martin embarks on a journey across Europe and the United States to finally understand the contradiction between the famous childhood trauma researcher and his destructive mother. With the help of sympathetic historians, archivists, and psychoanalysts, Martin digs deeper into his mother's traumatic past and discovers that his own emotional pain stems from the legacy of something that he himself never experienced: the greatest drama of the 20th century, the Shoah, the systematic annihilation of the Jewish people. A fascinating look at the way trauma is experienced, internalized, and the havoc it creates in the lives of subsequent generations.

Directed by Daniel Howald

FESTIVAL THEMES

COMING OF AGE

BECHORA (Short)

BROKEN BIRD (Short)

FEELING SEXUAL (Short)

THE INSPECTION (Short)

KIPPA (Short)

THE LESSON

TIGER WITHIN

WET DOG

ISRAELI & PALESTINIAN INTEREST

200 METERS

AFRICA

BLUE BOX

A COMMON GOAL

KINGS OF CAPITOL HILL

MISH MISH

PARADISE (Short)

LGBTQI+ STORIES

BINDING OF ITZIK (Short)

CHARLATAN

THE CONDUCTOR

COSMOPOLITAN (Short)

PROGNOSIS: NOTES ON LIVING

LITERATURE

THE ADVENTURES OF SAUL BELLOW

THE BINDING OF ITZIK (Short)

MEANING OF HITLER

MISHA AND THE WOLVES

WHO'S AFRAID OF ALICE MILLER?

MUSIC

THE CONDUCTOR

A KADDISH FOR BERNIE MADOFF

THE VIOLIN UPSTAIRS (Short)

WOMEN WRITERS, DIRECTORS, PRODUCERS

AMERICAN BIRTHRIGHT

BECHORA (Short)

THE BINDING OF ITZIK (Short)

BLUE BOX

BORN IN AUSCHWITZ

BRING YOUR OWN BRIGADE

BROKEN BIRD (Short)

CHARLATAN

THE CONDUCTOR

COSMOPOLITAN (Short)

FEELING SEXUAL (Short)

I THINK IT'S ENOUGH, ISN'T IT?

THE INSPECTION (Short)

A KADDISH FOR BERNIE MADOFF

KINGS OF CAPITOL HILL

THE LESSON

LONG DISTANCE (Short)

MAREK EDELMAN...AND THERE WAS LOVE IN THE GHETTO

THE MEANING OF HITLER

MISH MISH

MY NAME IS PAULI MURRAY

PROGNOSIS: NOTES ON LIVING

SCAR OF THE EARTH (Short)

SNOWY (Short)

THE VIOLIN UPSTAIRS (short)

For Festival logos and press materials, visit sfjff.org/press.

To request interviews or screeners, contact Larsen Associates at publicity@larsenassc.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.

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 based in the Bay Area. 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. JFI each year produces their signature summer Festival, the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, in four Bay Area counties, the largest Jewish cultural event in Northern California and the first and largest festival of its kind worldwide. The annual festival provides a suite of awards, some 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 (the winner is eligible for the Oscars); and the SF Film Critics Award for best international fiction feature. Throughout the year JFI screens films in the community including at WinterFest, a mini-festival in February, in senior communities, JCC's and at San Quentin Prison.

Additionally, JFI provides a number of Filmmaker Services to provide support for emerging and established filmmakers working with Jewish themes and create 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 has provided office space and support for independent producers, the JFI Completion Grant program, which in its inaugural year provided a total of 75 K to six projects, and the JFI Social Justice Teen Fellowship with participants crafting and promoting a series of screenings and conversations around JFI's social justice films for other teens in the Bay Area.

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 1,800 films to investigate, this archive is the largest online resource for Jewish film and media in the World; through JFI On Demand, more than 350 films of its greatest hits can be accessed anytime, anywhere; and the Monthly Online Shorts, in which every month JFI releases films for free to a global audience of 2.3 million since 2009.

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