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2023

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www.berkshirejewishfilmfestival.org

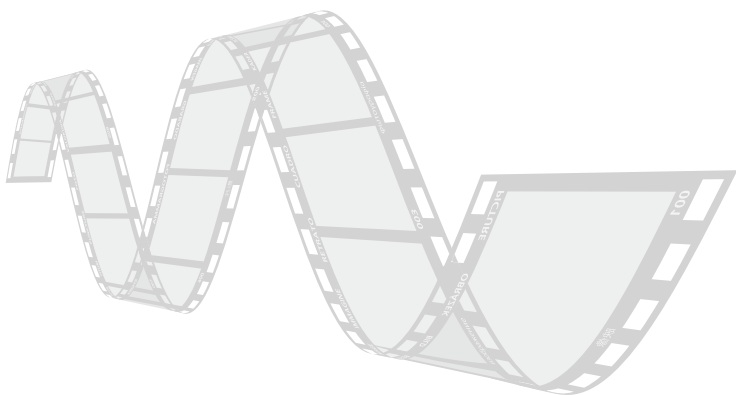


BERKSHIRE JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

On behalf of Knesset Israel and the Berkshire Jewish Film Festival, we extend a warm Welcome Back to you as BJFF embarks upon its 37th season. We are so happy to be able to present six Mondays of excellent film programming in person at the Duffin Theater at the Lenox Memorial Middle and High School.

Our screening committee has chosen the best of the many films they watched this year. We are excited to bring you a wide range of documentaries and narrative films from the US, France, Ukraine, Israel, Italy, Greece, Canada, Poland, Austria, and Belgium. There is even a silent film accompanied by live music performed by the composers themselves. We truly feel that we have outdone ourselves this year and we hope you do, too.

Judy Seaman
Beth Kruvant
Artistic Directors, BJFF



The Film Festival Committee

Our sincere appreciation to all of our committee members who work very hard throughout the year to bring you an exciting and successful festival!

Co-Artistic Directors: **Judy Seaman, Beth Kruvant**

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We are grateful to the Jewish Arts and Cultural Initiative of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation for supporting us in part over these many years. We would like to thank our loyal fans and supporters who return every year to enjoy our outstanding film offerings!

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Welcome.

Thank you for attending the Berkshire Jewish Film Festival, which in turn supports the Hebrew School and family programming at Knesset Israel. Knesset Israel is an innovator in the rapidly changing world of American Judaism. We create authentic and meaningful points of connection and spiritual experience for contemporary Jews and cultivate a community to make a positive difference in the world. Affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, our flourishing congregation is inclusive and supportive, accepting a wide range of beliefs and Jewish practice. People of all ages, religious backgrounds, genders and orientations find a supportive community here.

We hope that Film Festival attendees will participate in other Knesset Israel programming this summer.

Highlights include:

- Weekly shabbat morning services and kiddush luncheon,
- Spirited Friday night services ba'ohel, often accompanied by musical instruments and followed by a community shabbat dinner,
- JTS in the Berkshires with Professors Arnold Eisen, Gordon Tucker and Shira Billet,
- A countywide weekend of learning with Ruth Messinger
- Aaron Kula and the Klezmer Company Jazz Orchestra, August 21,
- "Ramblin' with the Rav" hikes.

See www.knessetisrael.org/rsvp for details and to sign up. We welcome broad participation in our programming throughout the year. And we appreciate the generous support of every participant in the Berkshire Jewish Film Festival.

L'shalom
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Our (Almost Completely True) Story

A life-affirming dramedy that “sparkles with wit and depth as it celebrates love and romance while reflecting on the challenges of growing older.”(Broadway World) To say that Mariette Hartley and Jerry Sroka make an unlikely couple is an understatement. She is a tall, elegant screen star who worked with Hitchcock and Peckinpah; he is a short, pudgy voice actor known for Antz and Family Guy. Both, however, bond over the indignities of being out-of-work actors of a certain age, while navigating the seniors singles scene. Initially indifferent to his advances, Hartley is eventually won over by Sroka’s quirky humour and innate goodness. Written by Hartley and Sroka, this charming film also features memorable cameos by Bernie Kopell, Morgan Fairchild and Tess Harper. Directed by Don Scardino (30 Rock).

USA 2022, English, Narrative, 92 minutes
Director: Don Scardino





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Four Winters

"All I owned was my camera, a leopard coat, and a grenade in case of capture...the pillow was the rifle, the walls were the trees and the sky was the roof," says partisan Faye Schulman. Over 25,000 Jewish partisans fought back against the Nazis and their collaborators from deep within the forests of WWII's Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Belarus. Against extraordinary odds, they escaped Nazi slaughter, transforming from young innocents raised in closely knit families to courageous resistance fighters. Shattering the myth of Jewish passivity, the last surviving partisans tell their stories of resistance in *FOUR WINTERS*, revealing a stunning narrative of heroism and resilience.

USA 2022, English, Documentary, 99 minutes

Director: Julia Mintz





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JULY 17, 4 PM



The Muses of Isacc Bashevis Singer

In the mid 1960's, Isaac Bashevis Singer established an army of female translators - more than forty women - who helped spread his work. He chose his translators carefully, was inspired by their presence, often falling in love with them. Nine of the women who were intimately familiar with the man and work are featured in the documentary. Theirs are the only voices heard in the film, as they allow us a glimpse into Singer's complex personality and personal life.

Israel 2014, English, Hebrew (English subtitles) Documentary, 72 minutes
Directors: Asaf Galay and Shaul Betser



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JULY 17, 8 PM



Reckonings

Reckonings is the first documentary film to chronicle the harrowing process of negotiating German reparations for the Jewish people. It takes viewers from the halls of power in Bonn, West Germany, where fierce debate raged over how to pay wartime debts, to the streets of Jerusalem, where horror about any talks with Germany led to violent protests and a mob storming the Knesset. It profiles Jewish and German leaders who risked their lives to meet in a hidden castle near the Hague to negotiate the impossible.

The film captures the anger on one side, the shame on the other, and the anguish for all as talks broke down and failure seemed imminent. And it honors the behind-the-scenes figures who forged ahead to continue negotiations, knowing the compensation would never be enough but hoping it could at least be an acknowledgement, a recognition and a step toward healing.

Filmed in six countries and featuring new interviews with Holocaust survivors, world-renowned scholars and dignitaries and the last surviving member of the negotiating delegations, *Reckonings* powerfully illustrates how political will and a moral imperative can join forces to bridge an impossible divide. By confronting the past, the German and Jewish leaders charted a better future for a desperate and traumatized people. Their actions led to the first time in history that individual victims of persecution received material compensation from the perpetrators.

USA 2022, English, German, Hebrew (English subtitles)
Documentary, 74 minutes
Director: Roberta Grossman

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JULY 24, 4 PM



Shttl

A filmmaker returns from Kyiv to his rural village to marry the love of his life. He is expected to marry the Rabbi's daughter, which disrupts the balance of the whole town. In one unflinching shot, this film presents a day in the life of a Jewish village before it disappears. *SHTTL* is the story of the inhabitants of a Yiddish Ukrainian village at the border of Poland, 24 hours before the Nazi invasion, known as Operation Barbarossa. Today, there are no such villages in existence; the production fully reconstructed a traditional 'Shtetl' outside of Kyiv. Following the filming, the set was to be turned into a museum but has since been destroyed in the ongoing political crisis between Russia and Ukraine.

Narrative 100 minutes, Israel 2022 Hebrew (English subtitles)
Director: Moshe Rosenthal





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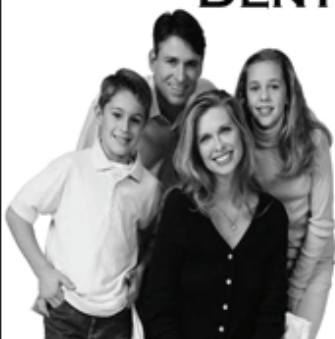
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JULY 24, 8 PM



Karaoke

An Israeli comedy about an upper-middle-class suburban Sephardic couple. Meir (Sasson Gabay, *The Band's Visit*) and Tova (Rita Shukrun, *Game Over*) are drawn to their new neighbor, a charismatic bachelor (Lior Ashkenazi, *Foxtrot*) who invites them to his unhinged karaoke nights. Energized by the newfound friendship, Meir and Tova undergo personal transformations in this entertaining exploration of masculinity, marriage, social status, narcissism, and conformity. Taking inspiration from his own parents' relationship, acclaimed Israeli director Moshe Rosenthal creates a humorous, empathetic portrait of midlife self-discovery, laced with poignant wisdom.

(Courtesy, Jacob Burns Film Center)

Israel 2022, Hebrew (English subtitles)

Narrative, 100 minutes

Director: Moshe Rosenthal



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JULY 31, 4 PM



Grossman

"I learned something about my writing since my son, Uri, was killed - there's one way we're able to comprehend the slightest inkling of what exists beyond the impenetrable wall of death, the feeling of non-existence. And yet feel the vastness of what it means to be alive right alongside it - and that's through writing. That's what I search for in my writing, to exist in that place for just a brief moment, the moments I'm able to touch both life and death", said David Grossman, whose novels have touched the hearts of many. An Israel Prize recipient and the first Israeli author to receive the prestigious Booker Prize, in an up close and intimate portrayal.

The film tells the story of David Grossman's personal life, one of the finest Hebrew writers, through his spellbinding words and exceptional phrasings, alongside rare and personal archival materials, that take the viewers on a journey inwards into his soul and work, and also manages to tell the story of this unique country.

This is a film about writing and family and political upheavals and bereavement. Looking straight into the camera, Grossman manages to conquer the screen in a rare moment of personal insight and exposes the delicate and complex connections between his novels and his personal life.

Israel 2021, Hebrew (English subtitles)
Documentary, 54 minutes
Director: Adi Arbel



*(l-r) Frederick M. Keator, 1919; Frederick Keator, 1944;
Raymond Keator, 1944; George Keator, 1960*

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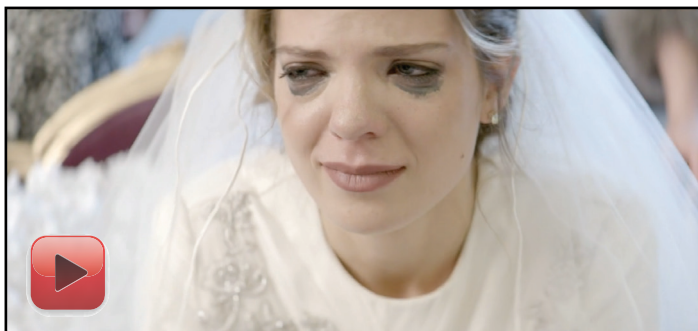
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JULY 31, 4 PM



Castles In The Sky

Filmmaker and professor Pearl Gluck's provocative latest dramatic short film centers on Malke, a Holocaust survivor and sex-ed teacher who has been leading a secret life for decades: performing slam poetry on the Lower East Side. *Castles in the Sky* features commanding performances from actor Lynn Cohen, who died in 2020, and poet Venus Thrash, who died in 2021.

The film explores Gluck's relationship to her Hasidic past, the women who helped her form her own feminist interpretations of the faith, and her own history as a slam poet and slam hostess in the Lower East Side in the early '90s at the KGB Bar and the Nuyorican Poetry Café.

Gluck's great aunt Malke, herself a survivor of the Holocaust, unable to have children because of the experimentations in Auschwitz, would always warn her not to "build castles in the sky" with her artistic aspirations.

*Please join us after the 4 PM films for a talkback with Director Pearl Gluck. Professor Gluck will also be speaking after the 8 pm screening of *Where Life Begins*.*

USA 2022, Yiddish (English subtitles)

Narrative, 33 minutes

Director: Pearl Gluck



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JULY 31, 8 PM



Where Life Begins

In this lyrical drama of human connection set in the Italian countryside, a stifled rabbi's daughter and conflicted farmer long to escape their constraints. Each summer, Esther (Lou de Laâge) travels with her French ultra-Orthodox family to a scenic Calabria estate to harvest etrogs for Sukkot. Trapped by the suffocating rituals of her faith, the despairing, defiant young woman captures the attention of the farm's owner Elio (Riccardo Scamarcio), a lapsed Catholic and divorcé. A fleeting encounter and flicker of desire might just give these tormented souls the mettle to forge a new life they so desperately crave. Visually sumptuous and deeply moving, this subtle portrayal of self-realization is the directorial debut of French actor-turned-director Stéphane Freiss.

Italy 2022, Italian (English subtitles)

Narrative, 100 minutes

Director: Stéphane Freiss





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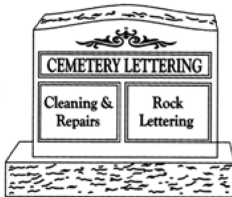
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AUGUST 7, 4 PM



Queen of the Deuce

Born in Salonika, Greece, Chelly Wilson came from a religious Sephardic family where Ladino was spoken, and religious laws and customs strictly followed. As a young successful businesswoman in Greece, Chelly was ahead of her time. At the start of WWII, leaving her family and children behind, she emigrated to America. While her children were kept safe, the rest of her family members perished in Auschwitz. Chelly entered the film business in NYC and purchased The Cameo, the first of six movie theaters in Times Square where "Greece on the March," a film she made to help her homeland in the war effort was shown. Her business turned a dark yet lucrative corner when she entered the world of pornographic film theaters located alongside the X-rated shops on 8th Avenue - also called the Deuce.

Greece, Canada 2022, English, Greek (English subtitles)

Documentary, 78 minutes

Director: Valerie Kontakos



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AUGUST 7, 8 PM



March '68

Two young students - Hania (Vanessa Aleksander, Wartime Girls) and Janek - meet and fall in love in the midst of social turmoil and Jewish discrimination in 1960's Warsaw. While the young lovers are uninterested in politics, they find themselves unable to avoid it when Hania's father and mother lose their jobs due to the anti-Semitic purge and are forced to emigrate. Hania does not want to leave Janek, and the couple soon participate in a protest rally at the university where they discover freedom comes at a high price.

Poland 2022, Polish (English subtitles)

Narrative, 117 minutes

Director: Krzysztof Lang





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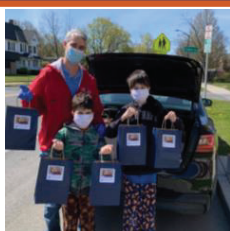
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AUGUST 14, 4 PM



City Without Jews

The City Without Jews, (Die Stadt ohne Juden) H. K. Breslauer's 1924 silent masterpiece, is based on the best-selling dystopian novel by Hugo Bettauer. It was produced two years after the book's publication and, tragically, shortly before the satirical events depicted in the fictional story transformed into all-too-horrific reality. All complete prints were thought to be destroyed, but thanks to the discovery of a nitrate print in a Parisian flea market in 2015, this "lost" film can once again be appreciated in its unfortunately ever-relevant entirety. Set in the Austrian city of Utopia (a thinly-disguised stand-in for Vienna), the story follows the political and personal consequences of an anti-Semitic law passed by the National Assembly forcing all Jews to leave the country. At first, the decision is met with celebration, but when the citizens of Utopia eventually come to terms with the loss of the Jewish population - and the resulting economic and cultural decline - the National Assembly must decide whether to invite the Jews back. Though darkly comedic in tone and stylistically influenced by German Expressionism, the film nonetheless contains ominous and eerily realistic sequences, such as shots of freight trains transporting Jews out of the city. The film's stinging critique of Nazism is part of the reason it was no longer screened in public after 1933.

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Austria 1924, Silent Film with original musical accompaniment
Narrative, 80 minutes
Director: Hans Karl Breslauer



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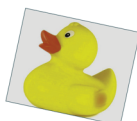
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AUGUST 14, 8 PM



Farewell Mister Haffmann

In this gripping wartime thriller probing issues of conscience and character, a French-Jewish jeweler is caught in a Faustian pact that will change the fate of all involved. When the Nazis occupy Paris, Joseph Haffmann (Daniel Auteuil) arranges for his family's escape and hastily signs over his humble shop to trusted right-hand man François (Gilles Lellouche). As fortunes reverse, Haffmann is now at his employee-turned-collaborator's mercy, trapped hiding in the basement to avoid deportation. As relationships fray, and François turns the screws on Haffmann, greed, deception and courage culminate in a sobering coda. Impeccable performances and unpredictable twists mark this superbly crafted morality tale based on an award-winning play by Jean-Philippe Daguerre.

Belgium, France 2022 French (English subtitles)

Narrative, 115 minutes

Director: Fred Cavaye



Berkshire Jewish Film Festival's 37 Years of Film

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- A Crime on the Bayou
- A Father's Kaddish
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- Fugitive Pieces

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- Gilad Shalit
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- Golda
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- Yankles
- The Year My Parents Went on Vacation
- Yidl in the Middle
- Zemene

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March '68

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Farewell, Mr. Haffmann

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