

The 21st anniversary edition of the NY Sephardic Jewish Film Festival features compelling stories and evocative documentaries about Iraqi, Syrian, Mexican, Egyptian, Israeli, French, Tunisian, Ethiopian, and Greek communities



The American Sephardi Federation's NY Sephardic Jewish Film Festival showcases contemporary voices steeped in the history, traditions, and rich mosaic culture of Greater Sephardic communities. The ten-day Festival features premiere film screenings, intriguing stories, evocative documentaries, Q&As with filmmakers, as well as special honorees and guests. The Pomegranate Awards Ceremony on Opening Night celebrates Sephardi excellence in the arts. Past recipients include Senior Counselor to the King of Morocco André Azoulay, French-Algerian recording legend Enrico Macias, Kuwaiti star and human rights activist Ema Shah, and Morocco-Israeli poet Erez Bitton.

Each night of the Festival is a different themed program honoring the rich and diverse communities ASF represents.

"For the NYSJFF 21st Edition, we are proud to present poignant and powerful programs, including a number of New York premieres," said Sara Nodjoumi, Artistic Director of the New York Sephardic Jewish Film Festival.

“From Stars, Konrad Wolf’s classic, cinematic gem on the Greek Holocaust experience, to Cecile Peck’s Brave Miss World about a Moroccan-Israeli beauty contestant’s struggle against sexual violence, these are universal stories that speak to the issues of our time (discrimination, persecution, immigration, resistance) and all time,” Nodjoumi said.

NYSJFF Artistic Director Sara Nodjoumi produced The Iran Job, and is a programming alumna of the Tribeca Film Festival, where her latest film, When God Sleeps, premiered earlier this year.

David Serero, the producer of the NYSJFF's star-studded 20th edition, returns to produce this year's Festival. A Moroccan-French opera singer and actor with many credits to his name, Serero previously created and starred in ASF's successful theatrical season (Merchant of Venice, Othello, and Nabucco), and will star in April and June 2018 as Cyrano of Bergerac and Don Giovanni at the ASF.

All films and events are taking place at the Center for Jewish History located at 15 West 16th Street. The complete list of selected NYSJFF films with dates, times, as well as pass and ticket information can be found at www.nysephardifilmfestival.org

Moroccan Opening Night, Monday, March 5th. Program to be soon announced.

Tuesday, March 6th at 7pm: The Syrian Sephardic Community

**THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY: OUR JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY
THE JEWS OF SYRIA, 1930-1967**

Directed by Lisa Ades

Executive Produced by Joseph J. Sitt

Documentary Feature, 90 min, USA, 2014, English

From Executive Producer, Joseph J. Sitt, the sixth installment of his multi-part series on the Syrian Sephardic community, is the fascinating story of life in Syria for the Jews who remained there after the massive exodus to the US and other countries in the early 1900s. Weaving together stories of pogroms and fires in Aleppo and Damascus in 1947 and 1948, of repression and heroic escapes as Jews in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt fled persecution, the mysterious Aleppo Codex (part of which was smuggled to safety in Israel), the courageous Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz who helped Syrian boys escape to New York, and the Jewish spy, Elie Cohen, who helped his brothers in Israel win the Six Day War before his capture and execution, this is an incredible film about one of the Jewish People’s oldest and most illustrious communities.

Wednesday, March 7th at 7:00pm: Anti-Semitism in France

WHY DO THEY HATE US?

Directed by Alexandre Amiel

Documentary Feature, 81 min, France, 2016, French with English subtitles

NY Premiere

Followed by a Panel discussion

In 2015, French and Belgian-born ISIS terrorists massacred civilians in Paris, including at the office of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and the famed Bataclan Theatre. Motivated by these attacks—the deadliest in France since World War II—and his son's questions about the murderers, Alexandre Amiel, a French-Moroccan Sephardi filmmaker and veteran reporter, produced a trilogy of documentaries exploring hatred from the perspectives of its primary victims in French society by profiling three representatives: himself, Amelle Chahbi (a comedienne of Moroccan descent), and Lucien Jean-Baptiste (an actor and director who was born in the Caribbean). This NY premiere of the episode relating to anti-Semitism is a must-see in this age of rising religious and racial hatreds, nationalist chauvinism, and violence.

Thursday, March 8th at 7pm: Undying Romance in Mexico - Sephardi-style

NORA'S WILL

Directed by Mariana Chenillo

Narrative Feature, 90 min, Mexico, 2010, Spanish with English subtitles

Followed by a Mexican After-Party

When his ex-wife Nora dies right before Passover, José is forced to stay with her body until she can be properly put to rest. He soon realizes he is part of Nora's plan to bring her family back together for one last Passover feast, leading José to rediscover their undying love for each other. A comedy like no other, and directed by Mariana Chenillo, the first female director to win Mexico's Best Picture Award.

Saturday, March 10th at 8:30pm: Classic Movie Night: Greek Sephardim in the Holocaust

STARS

Directed by Konrad Wolf

Narrative Feature, 88 min, East Germany / Bulgaria, 1959, German, Bulgarian, Yiddish, and Ladino with English subtitles

A classic film from one of Germany's greatest filmmakers, Stars won The Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1959. The film exquisitely tells the story of a Nazi officer who falls in love with a Greek-Sephardi Jewish girl while escorting Jewish prisoners through Bulgaria to a concentration camp.

Sunday, March 11th at 1:30pm: The Promised Land: Ma'abarot Memories

THE ANCESTRAL SIN

Directed by David Deri

Documentary Feature, 109 min, Israel, 2017, Hebrew and Darija (Moroccan Arabic) with English subtitles

NY Premiere

In the first two decades after the re-establishment of Israel, the director's family, originally from Morocco, were part of the wave of refugees from Greater Sephardi communities who came to the fledgling Jewish State.

As other immigrants coming to this Promised but poor land, Deri's family were taken to a "development town," Yeruham in the Negev Desert, as part of a population disbursement policy that pushed Sephardim to the country's periphery. This chilling documentary shares personal stories that reveal the price immigrant-families have paid and the price still being paid by Israeli society for the discriminatory policies of its Ashkenazi-dominated early years.

ROCK IN THE RED ZONE (3:30pm)

Directed by Laura Bialis

Documentary Feature, 92 min, Israel, 2014, English & Hebrew with English subtitles

Fear and danger are never far for residents of the development town, Sderot, where missiles rain down on civilians routinely from Hamas and other Islamist forces in the nearby Gaza Strip. Despite the almost daily trauma, a community of young artists—Greater Sephardi Jews of mainly Moroccan, Kurdish, and Persian descent—have found an artistic outlet for their anger and hope, creating world-infused music every single day.

Sunday, March 11th at 5:30pm: The Egyptian Experience

STARTING OVER AGAIN

Directed by Ruggero Gabbai

Documentary Feature, 64 min, USA, 2015, English

NY Premiere

Filmed in Paris, Milan, New York, London, Washington, Sydney, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem, this personal documentary is the story of Egyptian Jews during 1948-1956. Narrated by twenty witnesses, this NY premiere deftly weaves historical events and archival footage, a powerful film about resilience and reinvention.

THE BAND'S VISIT (7:00pm)

Directed by Eran Kolirin

Narrative Feature, 87 min, Israel, 2007, Arabic & Hebrew with English subtitles

When a band of eight Egyptian musicians arrive by mistake in a small town in Israel's Negev Desert, they stop at a restaurant owned by Dina (the late and great ASF Pomegranate Award Honoree, Ronit Elkabetz), who offers them lodging. Now an award-winning Broadway musical, this classic is both a clever, subtle slice-of-life comedy, and poignant cross-cultural exploration.

Monday, March 12th at 7:00pm: Young Professionals Night - A Moroccan Israeli's #MeToo

BRAVE MISS WORLD

Directed by Cecilia Peck

Documentary Feature, 92 min, USA, 2013, English, Hebrew & Italian with English subtitles

Q&A with Filmmaker

Preceded by a Happy Hour

Weeks before winning the 1998 Miss World pageant, Moroccan-Israeli teen Linor Abargil was held captive and raped by her travel agent while heading home from an Italian modeling assignment. Ten years later, she resolved to confront her past and reach out to other rape survivors. An inspiring story about courage and the universal struggle to stop rampant sexual violence against women.

Tuesday, March 13th at 7pm: SEPHARDI SHORTS PROGRAM

THE PIRATE CAPTAIN TOLEDANO

Directed by Arnon Shorr

Short Narrative, 10 min, USA, 2017, English

NY Premiere

On a 16th century ship, a Jewish stowaway who fled the Inquisition wants to become a pirate to avenge Spanish persecution. The captain must decide whether to make him a pirate... or make him walk the plank. An imaginary take on the real history of the Sephardi pirates of the Caribbean.

SARA LEVY COHEN

Directed by Zohar Melnik

Documentary Short, 13 min, Israel, Ladino & Hebrew with English subtitles

NY Premiere

A 96-year old woman has lived in the same apartment for 70 years in Jerusalem. Before immigrating to Israel from Turkey, she sang traditional songs in Ladino, her mother-tongue. While Ladino fades away, it also reveals a story of cultural identity in constant motion.

116 CAMERAS

Directed by Davina Pardo

Documentary Short, 16 min, USA, English

As the Holocaust survivor community ages, the USC Shoah Foundation has embarked on an ambitious new project to transform survivors into 3D digital projections that will interact with generations to come. Short-listed for a 2018 Academy Award, 116 CAMERAS follows Auschwitz survivor Eva Schloss, as she goes through this unique process and reflects on how her role as a Holocaust speaker has changed over time. The film's Emmy Award-winning director, Davina Pardo, received ASF's Ronit Elkabetz "Rising Star" Pomegranate Award at the 20th NY Sephardic Jewish Film Festival.

KEEP IT COOL

Directed by Na'ama Keha

Narrative Short, 17 min, Israel, Hebrew with English subtitles

Q&A with Filmmaker

Tomer, a teenage girl, has an unexpected visit by her older brother Uri, who has been injured during his service in the IDF and is now confined to a wheelchair. Uri is aware of his impotence while Tomer is just discovering her own sexuality and womanhood. An uncomfortable first film from this year's Ronit Elkabetz "Rising Star" Pomegranate Award Recipient.

Wednesday, March 14th at 7pm: On the Road to Zion

TWO ZIONS: THE LIVING LEGACY OF THE QUEEN OF SHEBA & KING SOLOMON

Directed by Cheryl Halpern

Documentary Feature, 58 min, USA / Ethiopia / Israel, English, Amharic & Hebrew with English subtitles

Q&A with filmmaker & subject

"Two Zions" tells the story of people from two seemingly disparate countries who share a bond originating in biblical times. Focusing on the "Zions" of Jerusalem, Israel and Axum, Ethiopia, and the fascinating history that links these holy places, the film focuses on the relationship between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

CLOSING NIGHT: Thursday, March 15th at 7pm: Tunisia & Iraqi Closing Night

JOURNEY FROM TUNISIA

Directed by Jonathan Maimon

Short Documentary, 30 min, USA, English, Arabic, & Hebrew with English subtitles

NY Premiere

What began as a few simple interviews of his Sephardic grandparents turned into an epic and spell-binding documentary about emigration, immigration, upheaval, disappointment, and adaptation. The film features rare archival footage of the Nazi invasion of Tunisia during World War II, as well as the joyous celebration of its liberation by Allied Forces in May 1943. Journey from Tunisia is a film about the upheaval of centuries-old roots for Jews and their Arab neighbors in North Africa, and the creation of new-old roots in Israel.

REMEMBER BAGHDAD

Directed by Fiona Murphy

Feature Documentary, 69 min, UK / USA, English

NY Premiere

Q&A with Filmmaker

In this expertly made documentary, using a unique blend of powerful home movies and photos, alongside public source news footage, we meet several storied Baghdadi Jewish families: the Dallals who import tires, the Khalastchis who sell cars, the Shamashes who are property developers and politicians, and the Dangoors who import Coca-Cola - all working in partnerships with their Muslim Iraqi friends and neighbors. The story of Baghdad's last Jews—from gaiety to revolutions, community celebrations to persecution and public hangings—opens out onto the wider story of the effectual end of Iraq's Jewish community after 2,500 years.

About **The American Sephardi Federation**

The American Sephardi Federation, a Partner of the landmark Center for Jewish History, proudly preserves and promotes the history, traditions, and rich mosaic culture of Greater Sephardic communities as an integral part of the Jewish experience. ASF hosts high-profile events and exhibitions, produces widely-read online (Sephardi World Weekly and Sephardi Ideas Monthly) and print (The Sephardi Report) publications, supports research, scholarship (see: ASF's 2018 Broome & Allen Fellowship and Scholarship Recipients), and the National Sephardic Library & Archives, and represents the Sephardi voice in diplomatic and Jewish communal affairs as a member of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and World Jewish Congress.

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