



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**THE AMERICAN SEPHARDI FEDERATION PRESENTS THE  
20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION OF THE NEW YORK SEPHARDIC JEWISH  
FILM FESTIVAL**

**EXPERIENCE HISTORY AND TRAVEL THROUGH TIME FROM BAGHDAD TO  
GREECE, ETHIOPIA TO SWITZERLAND, AND ISRAEL TO IRAN,  
MARCH 30 – APRIL 6, 2017**

(NEW YORK, NY) February 27, 2017 – In its 20th Anniversary Edition, the American Sephardi Federation (ASF) today announced the programs for its weeklong celebration of diverse stories and rich histories portrayed in film at the New York Sephardic Jewish Film Festival (NYSJFF).

The Festival features a different themed program each day. Select nights are dedicated to the Moroccan, Iraqi, Greek, and Yemenite Jewish communities.

For the first time at the Festival, the untold stories of how Sephardic Jews from Algeria, Tunisia, and Greece suffered during the Holocaust are shared during a full day of films, “Sephardim in the Shoah” (Sunday, April 2). “From Ethiopia to Israel” (Tuesday, April 4) explores the challenges of emigration.

“An Evening of Empowering Sephardi Women” (Monday, April 3) showcases three films that explore women’s experiences and highlight differences in gender relations and expectations between Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities. ASF’s Young Leadership Board is hosting “Love, Sephardi Style” (Tuesday, April 4) an evening of short films that explore modern romance and relationships from several Sephardi perspectives, including Israeli and Persian. An interactive discussion will follow with an award-winning Jewish Iranian-American filmmaker.

“For this important NYSJFF 20th Anniversary Edition, we are proud to present poignant and powerful programs that speak to the issues of our time and all time,” said Sara Nodjoui, Artistic Director of the New York Sephardic Jewish Film Festival. “There are stories of immigration, persecution, and resistance. Perspectives on everything from the making of the modern Middle East to the modern experiences of finding romance in traditional Sephardi communities. The number of quality films this year is a sign of vitality and the increasing interest in the varied experiences of Sephardim,” Nodjoui said.

NYSJFF Artistic Director Sara Nodjoui produced *The Iran Job* and is a programming alumna of the Tribeca Film Festival. “Sara has scoured the globe for movies of Sephardi interest and the results are the strongest film line-up in the NYSJFF’s storied history,” said Jason Guberman-P., ASF’s Executive Director.

Joining her as the NYSJFF’s Producer is French opera singer, David Serero. Serero previously created and starred in ASF’s successful theatrical season (*Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *Nabucco*). Most recently he performed at ASF for the President of Portugal. “We are elated that David is applying his many talents to make this NYSJFF the most memorable yet,” said Guberman.

The Festival will screen all films and events at ASF’s home, the Center for Jewish History (15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street), near Union Square in Chelsea. The complete list of selected NYSJFF films with dates, times and ticket information can be found at [www.nysephardifilmfestival.org](http://www.nysephardifilmfestival.org) and below:

**March 30 – Thursday: Opening Night**

7:00 p.m. Reception  
Pomegranate Award Ceremony

**April 1 - Saturday: - Iraqi Night**

8:30 p.m. **Letters from Baghdad** directed by Sabine Krayenbühl & Zeva Oelbaum

Feature Documentary, USA, France, UK, 2016, 95 min  
Letters from Baghdad is the story of a true original—Gertrude Bell—sometimes called the female “Lawrence of Arabia.” A British spy, explorer, and political powerhouse, Bell played a pivotal role in the creation of Iraq. Voiced and executive produced by the Academy Award-winner Tilda Swinton and featuring newly discovered primary source documentation and rare footage, the film unveils this dramatic story of the modern Middle East.

*Filmmakers in attendance for Q&As.*

## April 2 – Sunday: Sephardim in the Shoah

2:00 p.m. **The Night of Fools** directed by Rami Kimchi

Docu-Drama, Israel, 2014, 56 min

This film reveals the little-known story of Algeria's mostly Jewish underground movement during WWII. With only 400 volunteers versus the Vichy garrison of 25,000 troops, the underground succeeded in taking control of Algiers for one night, before handing the city over to the Americans, who arrive via an amphibious landing the next morning.

4:00 p.m. **Victor Young Perez** directed by Jacques Ouaniche

Feature Narrative, France, 2013, 110 min

Victor "Young" Perez is the heartbreaking true story of a Tunisian Jew, the World Flyweight Champion in 1931 and 1932, who was deported to Auschwitz.

6:30 p.m. **Cloudy Sunday** directed by Manoussos Manoussakis

Feature Narrative, Greece, 2016, 118 min

Set in Thessaloniki (Salonica) during the Nazi occupation in 1943, this film tells the story of the forbidden love between Estrea, a young Jewish woman, and Giorgos, the brother-in-law of the famed composer Vassilis Tsitsanis.

## April 3 - Monday: An Evening of Empowering Sephardi Women

5:00 p.m. **Dimona Twist** directed by Michael Aviad

Feature Documentary, Israel, 2016, 70 min

Like most of Israel's southern periphery, Dimona was a town created for primarily Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants and refugees. Seven courageous Sephardi women share their stories about being shipped to this desert town originally built in the 1950s. Determined to create meaningful lives they found creative ways to overcome poverty and discrimination.

7:00 p.m. **The Women's Balcony** directed by Emil Ben-Shimon

Feature Narrative, Israel, 2016, 96 min

When a women's balcony collapses during a Bar Mitzvah—a close-knit Sephardic congregation in Jerusalem fractures along gender lines. This popular crowd-pleaser about women speaking truth to patriarchal power is accompanied by stirring music and sumptuous food.

This will be preceded by the World Premiere of **A Gravedigger's Daughter**, directed by Shira Gabay (15 min narrative short, Israel).

## April 4 – Tuesday: From Ethiopia to Israel

5:00 p.m. **Red Leaves** directed by Bazi Gete

Feature Narrative, Israel, 2014, 80 min

Meseganio Tadela, 74, is a hard, obstinate man who emigrated from Ethiopia to Israel 28 years ago with his family. After losing his wife, Meseganio sets out on a journey that leads him through his children's homes realizing that he belongs to a rapidly disappearing class that believes in retaining Ethiopian-Jewish culture.

### Young Professionals Night: Love, Sephardi Style

7:00 p.m. **Dear God** directed by Erez Tadmor and Guy Nattiv

Short Narrative, Israel, 2014, 16 min

Aaron is a simple man who guards the Wailing Wall. Day after day, a mysterious woman puts a note in between the ancient stones, and Aaron, recovering and reading the papers, fulfills her deepest wish.

7:15 p.m. **Jewish Blind Date** directed by Anaëlle Morf

Short Narrative, Switzerland, 2016, 16 min

Unhappy in love, Mary Lou decides to reconnect with her religious roots by marrying an observant Jew. In order to get married, she has to pass the “Shidduch Test,” which will determine whether her life will be a success or failure.

8:00 p.m. **Love, Iranian-American Style** directed by Tanaz Eshaghian

Feature Documentary, USA, 2006, 63 min

Sexual purity, money, and a mother's worries come together in this humorous guided tour of America's status-obsessed Iranian Jewish community. As Tanaz's Iranian family attempts to marry her off now that she's reached the age of 25, she vacillates between sappy American ideas of romance, and a more business-like Persian approach, and in the end may be unable to execute either.

*Filmmaker in attendance for Q&As.*

## April 5 - Wednesday: A Greek Odyssey

6:00 p.m. **Trezoros: The Lost Jews of Kastoria** directed by Lawrence Russo & Larry Confino

Feature Documentary, Greece, USA, 2016, 93 min

Using never before seen archival footage, this moving documentary set in the idyllic city of Kastoria, illuminates the lives of the Greek Sephardic community until Nazis took control of the town - dooming the substantial and storied community that had existed since the times of the Roman Empire.

*Filmmakers in attendance for Q&As.*

8:00 p.m. **The Queen of Rebetiko: My Sweet Canary** directed by Roy Sher  
Feature Documentary, Greece, 2011, 90 min

The story of three young musicians from Greece, Turkey, and Israel who embark on a musical journey to tell the story of Greece's best-known and best-loved Rebetiko singer, Roza Eskenazi, a woman who sang the way she lived: with passion, fire, and love.

### **April 6 – Thursday: Closing Night**

Maimonides Friendship Award Ceremony

7:00 p.m. **Sallah Shabati** directed by Ephraim Kishon  
Feature Narrative, Israel, 1964, 110 min

This sharp, often hilarious satire that became the most successful film in Israeli history, is about new immigrants Sallah and his family, who are left in a shack near their promised apartment and are abandoned for months. This 1964 classic won a Golden Globe Award and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, putting Israel on the international film stage for the first time.

### **Ticket prices are as follows:**

Opening Night plus Festival Pass = \$100

Festival Pass excluding Opening Night = \$50

Young Professionals Night = \$25

Individual Film = \$10

### **About the American Sephardi Federation:**

The American Sephardi Federation, based at the 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, and the National Sephardic Library, and represents the Sephardi voice in diplomatic and Jewish communal affairs as a member of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Please visit us at [www.facebook.com/americansephardifederation](http://www.facebook.com/americansephardifederation)

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