



10th NY Sephardic Jewish Film Festival

FEBRUARY 2 - 8 • 2006

PRESS RELEASE

FESTIVAL PRODUCTION

ALLA VERLOTSKY
SEAGULL FILMS
FESTIVAL CURATOR

ESMÉ EMMANUEL BERG
DIRECTOR

TOVA GELLER
STELLA LEVI
SASHA TENENBAUM
SCREENING COMMITTEE

ANNA SAMUEL
PUBLICIST

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMERICAN SEPHARDI FEDERATION WITH SEPHARDIC HOUSE

CO-SPONSORED BY YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
AND IN ASSOCIATION WITH JCC MANHATTAN

PRESENTS

10TH NY SEPHARDIC JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

FEBRUARY 2 - 8, 2006

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF CINEMATIC EXPLORATIONS OF SEPHARDIC JEWRY

Opening Night Screening and Reception featuring the Highly Anticipated
and AWARD WINNING

"LIVE AND BECOME"

- VA, VIS ET DEVIENS -

OPENING NIGHT
THURSDAY FEBRUARY 2, 2006 AT 7:00 PM

FESTIVAL DURATION
FEBRUARY 2 - 8, 2006

AMERICAN SEPHARDI FEDERATION WITH SEPHARDIC HOUSE
at the Center for Jewish History
15 West 16th Street (between Fifth and Sixth Avenues)

NEW YORK - December 13, 2005 - The **American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House** is proud to announce the **10th NY Sephardic Jewish Film Festival** at the Center for Jewish History, with an additional screening at the JCC Manhattan. It will open on February 2nd and feature a weeklong cinematic exploration of Sephardic Jewry with topical panel discussions and special events.

This is the only film festival of its kind dedicated to showcasing a wide range of films with distinctly Sephardic Jewish themes. The opening night screening and reception will feature the highly anticipated and award winning film **"Live and Become"** starring renowned actress **Yael Abecassis**.

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15 WEST 16 STREET - NEW YORK - NY - 10011 - PHONE 212.294.8350 - FAX 212.294.8348 - INFO@AMERICANSEPHARDIFEDERATION.ORG - WWW.AMERICANSEPHARDIFEDERATION.ORG

LEON LEVY
HONORARY LIFETIME PRESIDENT

DAVID E. R. DANGOOR
PRESIDENT

MIKE NASSIMI
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD



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Since its debut at Lincoln Center a decade ago the **NY Sephardic Jewish Film Festival** has continued to expand its audiences, attracting over 20,000 viewers and becoming the largest forum of its kind. The festival, curated by Alla Verlotsky of Seagull Films, is committed to exhibiting carefully assembled and invariably thought-provoking international quality feature films and documentaries that examine the past and explore contemporary Sephardic identity.

The 2006 slate of films includes critically acclaimed and award-winning New York and World premieres as well as classic feature films and documentaries presented by filmmakers from differing global perspectives. **"While continuing to reflect the history and traditions of Sephardim, this year's films also examine modern day societies, and the development of a new identity for Sephardic Jewry,"** Verlotsky explains. This year's timely themes include a special focus on the courage and valor of Sephardic women and their efforts to reshape their role in today's society.

"Through cinematic exploration, our aim is to further elevate the understanding of the very rich history and culture of Sephardic Jewry, as well as the issues they face today," says ASF Director Esmé E. Berg.

The term Sephardic Jew traditionally includes those whose ancestors came from primarily Portugal and Spain and fled the Inquisition in the 15th and 16th centuries, a prolonged, and not the first nor the last horrific Holocaust suffered by the Jewish people. Those who kept their identity and managed to escape mainly made their way to the then Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and the Netherlands, as well as to the Americas. In fact they were the first Jews to come to this country during the 17th century, where they established an important presence. Today the definition of Sephardic Jews also generally includes all Jews from Muslim Countries who, as a direct result of the creation of the State of Israel, had to abandon their home countries where they had lived in relative peace for centuries and even for millennia in several cases. The destinies and significant contributions of the Sephardic Jews, as well as the challenges they face in their efforts to assimilate in Israel, and other predominantly Ashkenazi Jewish communities, is a history that needs to be made better known and studied.

The virtual disappearance of Jewish communities in the Middle East, North Africa and in India is an important theme running through several films. ***The Forgotten Refugees*** provides the viewer with first-hand testimony through interviews and archival footage of the loss of communities in Iraq, Egypt, Yemen and Libya. The forceful documentary, ***A Matter of Time: Common Fate*** explores the possibility that given more time the Nazis would soon have perpetrated the same crimes in North Africa that they did in Europe. ***Salaam Shalom: The Jews of India*** vividly describes the dwindling Jewish community of India that prospered in an environment of tolerance for centuries. Indian Jews began to leave this home after the declaration of Indian independence in 1947.

We travel back in time to the period of the Inquisition in Spain and Venice in ***Secret Passage***, a period piece that vividly portrays the life and death challenges faced by two young sisters with conflicting goals and desires - to escape to the Ottoman Empire or to remain and marry a Venetian nobleman. Italy is visited once again in the festival's special revival presentation of the world-renowned classic by Vittorio

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da Sica, **The Garden of the Finzi-Contini**, brought back to our screen for the appreciation of young audiences who have yet to experience this story of the tragic events that befell the Jewish community in Italy during World War II.

This year's program presents a particular focus on the courage and valor of Sephardic women and their efforts to reshape their role in today's society. Our New York premiere of **Until Tomorrow Comes** portrays the life of three generations of woman facing life's challenges in a small town in Southern Israel. **Love Iranian-American Style** is a humorous documentary that follows filmmaker Tanaz Eshaghian, a modern American woman of Jewish-Iranian background grappling with the traditional marriage customs and expectations of her community. One of the central figures in **Live and Become** is the strong mother of a Moroccan-Israeli family dealing with the challenges of raising an adopted Ethiopian boy.

"We are excited to be able to feature these wonderful films and we are delighted at how well they support our mission to promote and preserve the rich spiritual, historical, cultural and social traditions of all Sephardic communities as an integral part of Jewish heritage," explains Esmé E. Berg.

The **American Sephardi Federation** (ASF), founded in 1973 to support American Sephardic communities, with **Sephardic House**, promotes awareness and interest in Sephardic culture as an integral part of Jewish and American history. ASF maintains the only Sephardic Library & Archives and permanent Sephardic exhibition gallery in the U.S., provides rich educational and cultural public programs and publishes scholarly books, memoirs and **The Sephardic Report**. Its ongoing activities also include the annual **NY Sephardic Jewish Film Festival** and the **Broome and Allen Scholarship Fund** for Sephardic studies and scholars. ASF also supports the **Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC)** efforts to further knowledge about the human rights violations suffered by close to 900,000 Jewish refugees from Muslim countries. At www.americansephardifederation.org one can access our catalogue database of over 4,000 book titles and 33 periodicals and an online bookstore featuring historical books, videos and DVD's of Sephardic interest. The American Sephardi Federation was one of the founding partners of the **Center for Jewish History**.

Since its founding in 1973, **Yeshiva University Museum's** changing exhibits have celebrated the culturally diverse intellectual and artistic achievements of 3,000 years of the Jewish experience. The museum provides a window into Jewish culture around the world and throughout history through its acclaimed multi-disciplinary exhibitions and award-winning publications.

Seagull Films is one of the leading North American programming / distribution company exclusively specialized in Jewish, Russian, formerly Soviet cinema.

TICKET INFORMATION

\$10 General Public; \$8 American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House and Yeshiva University Museum members, seniors and students; \$40 Festival Subscription pass (valid for five films excluding Opening Night. Reservations for specific screenings must be made at time of purchase). \$45 Opening night screening and reception. Tickets can be purchased in advance online at www.ticketweb.com, through the Center for Jewish History Box Office, 15 West 16th Street. Mon. 11-8pm; Sun., Tues., Wed. and Thurs. 11-5pm and Fri. 11-2pm; and one hour prior to screenings, or by calling 917.606.8200.

**FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF SCREENING TIMES/LOCATIONS, PRESS MATERIAL, AND IMAGES,
PLEASE CONTACT ANNA SAMUEL AT 718.623.3113 OR anna@annasamuel.com**

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FESTIVAL FILM HIGHLIGHTS

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LIVE AND BECOME / VA, VIS ET DEVIENS – DIR. RADU MIHAILEANU; FRANCE/ISRAEL, 2004; 143MINS.

Audience Award winner of the Berlin Film Festival 2005 will open the festival on February 2nd. From director Radu Mihaileanu comes a poignant story of an Ethiopian boy airlifted from a Sudanese refugee camp during 1984's Operation Moses. Adopted by a Moroccan family in Israel, the film follows Schlomo's conflicted journey into adulthood as he struggles with survival, a secret identity, and love. Actor Sirak M. Sabahat will be present for a Q & A.

UNTIL TOMORROW COMES – NEW YORK PREMIERE – DAVID DERI; ISRAEL, 2004; 65MINS.

Directed by David Deri, the film vividly depicts the realities of inter-generational conflicts in a dramatic and tender portrayal of a week-in-the-life of a beauty salon owner in the South of Israel facing the decline of her aging mother, the unraveling marital crisis of her daughter, and an unexpected courtship threatening her glorious solitude. Q & A with Director David Deri and actress Raymonde Abecassis.

THE FORGOTTEN REFUGEES – NEW YORK PREMIERE – MICHAEL GRYNSPAN; US, 2005; 49 MINS.

A documentary that traces the decline and disappearance of once vibrant Middle Eastern Jewish communities that had existed for over 2,500 years. Compelling interviews from modern day Jews from Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya, who quietly carry the memory, give insight into a destroyed civilization.

SECRET PASSAGE – ADEMIR KENOVIC; UK-LUXEMBOURG, 2004; 94MINS.

Directed by Ademir Kenovic and starring John Turturro, the film is a period piece filled with intrigue and romance. Set in 16th century Venice, Isabel and Clara are growing up in a time of terror. It is 1492, and Spain has decreed that all Jews must either convert to Catholicism, go into exile or face trial and execution. Although forcibly baptized, the sisters are chased through Christendom until they arrive in Venice. It is in this great maritime empire, where opulence rhymes with tolerance, that Isabel organizes secret passages to the Ottoman Empire for refugees fleeing the Inquisition while Clara falls in love with a Venetian nobleman.

LOVE IRANIAN-AMERICAN STYLE – TANAZ ESHAGHIAN; US, 2005; 62MINS. – *The film premiered at the festival in 2001 as a short entitled "The Persian Girl"*

Sexual purity, money, and a mother's worries come together in Tanaz Eshaghian's humorous documentary, offering a rare glimpse into the inner circles of the tightly knit Persian community in the United States. The film follows Tanaz, the narrator, a hip New Yorker whose Iranian family attempts to marry her off now that she's reached the ancient age of 25. As they arrange dates with suitors, lament her liberal American upbringing, and agitate about the passing of youth, Tanaz explores whether she can find love in her own way. Q & A with the director.

ELIAS CANETTI – THOMAS HONICKEL; GERMANY, 2005; 59MINS.

A "Spanish poet of German language," Elias Canetti grew up a polyglot, living at different periods of his life in Bulgaria, England and Vienna. He was born into an elite Sephardic family who when expelled from Spain in 1492, settled in the Ottoman Empire. His masterpieces "Auto-da-Fé" and "Crowds and Power," are considered among the most original works of the 20th Century. The film will be followed by a talk with Gloria Ascher, Tufts University on Canetti's Sephardic heritage.

A MATTER OF TIME: COMMON FATE – NY PREMIERE; SERGE ANKRI; ISRAEL 2005; 52MINS.

The little-known story of the Jewish Communities of North Africa (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) during WW II, revealing how, had fate not intervened, it was only "a matter of time" until they would share the fate of their co-religionists in Europe. While often considered a Jewish community "apart," the film reveals through archival and contemporary footage and stills, and extensive interviews with surviving witnesses and historians, that these Jews too were very much in the thoughts of Nazi planners.

SALAAM SHALOM: THE JEWS OF INDIA – VANESSA C. LAUFER; CANADA, 1999; 50MINS.

A colorful film about the Jews of India that brings to life a remarkable history dating back two millennia. A microscopic minority living within a vast, varied nation, Jews who have been in India for thousands of years and more recent immigrants from Iraq and Spain, co-existed in an environment of tolerance and pluralism. With the declaration of Indian independence in 1947 and the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, many of the Jews of India decided to "leave their home to find their home: their religious loyalty stronger than their national loyalty to India."

THE GARDEN OF THE FINZI-CONTINI – VITTORIO DE SICA; ITALY-WEST GERMANY, 1970; 94MINS.

Adapted from Giorgio Bassani's 1962 semi-autobiographical novel, the film chronicles the gradual disintegration of the Jewish community living in Italy at the beginning of World War II. As Fascist persecution of the Jews escalates from the onset of Benito Mussolini's anti-Semitic edicts in 1938 to the mass arrests and deportations in 1943, the wealthy Finzi-Contini family open their lush gardens to the persecuted friends of their daughter, Micol, and their son, Alberto. It is through the eyes of one of these friends, a middle-class, Jewish-Italian student named Giorgio, that the story of unrequited love, unfolds.

THE LAST GREEKS ON BROOME STREET – ED ASKINAZI; US, 2004; 27MINS.

a personal exploration of filmmaker Ed Askinazi's heritage doubles as a fascinating glimpse into the little known community of Greek Jews, known as Romaniotes, with 2,000 years of history, their own culture, language, food, liturgical rites and customs. Ethnic communities and the cultures that help define our identities are vanishing throughout America. The Last Greeks on Broome Street explores one such culture, New York City's Greek Jews – a unique community that thrived on Manhattan's Lower East Side only a century ago but now borders on extinction.

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