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# The Portland Press Herald

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March 24

## Indie Film: Jewish Film Festival takes Mainers around the world

Saturday through March 31.

By DENNIS PERKINS

There are times when it seems the movie industry considers Maine a far-off frozen wasteland, like an Arctic research station where people would be glad just to have anything to watch, no matter how bland or outdated, simply to distract us from our imminent deaths by polar bear.

Maine film fans are a sophisticated bunch, however, clamoring for more interesting and adventurous fare than what the big chains deign to send our way. We want the best and the newest, the weirdest and most challenging.

And thanks to like-minded area theaters, festivals and groups, the real film aficionados in town have options.

Especially this week.

The 14th annual Maine Jewish Film Festival is back, and from Saturday through March 31, this yearly roster is, as the mission statement states, "a forum for the presentation of films to enrich, educate and entertain a diverse community about the Jewish experience."

Or, as Kari Wagner-Peck, MJFF's executive and artistic director, further explained: "The festival curates a program of films that explore the Jewish experience in Maine and globally through features, documentaries and shorts.

"Over the last 14 years, we have presented global and diverse perspectives on the Jewish experience, about communities and individuals from all walks of life, from Africa, the Middle East, Eastern and Western Europe, North and South America, gay, straight, disabled, persecuted and triumphant," she added. "Ultimately, this vast diversity is a reflection of the human experience."

Growing from six films screened on VHS at Congregation Bet Ha'am in South Portland, the MJFF now can boast almost two dozen films screening at Nickelodeon Cinemas and several other venues, and has sold more than 28,000 tickets in its history.

In addition to the impressive films on display, this year's MJFF boasts several special events, kicking off with opening-night appetizers and drinks at Greenhut Galleries on Saturday.

On Monday, the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies will host a screening of the new documentary "The Way Up," an insightful and moving portrait of an orphaned Romanian girl.

Adopted by an Israeli family, the girl comes out as a lesbian, runs away from home and spends three years on the streets of Tel Aviv. Following the film, Salt Executive Director Donna Galluzzo will facilitate a panel including filmmakers Yoav Kosh, Alexandra Daley-Clark and Dovid Muyderman.

And Tuesday, Salt hosts an LGBT Film Forum followed by a screening of the French comedy "He's My Girl" (about a gay Jewish clarinetist trying to cope with his sexuality,



"Precious Life" is an Israeli documentary about a Palestinian infant whose only hope for survival is a bone marrow transplant in an Israeli hospital. A panel discussion will follow Sunday's screening.

Courtesy MJFF



"Nora s Will," a Mexican film, is a dark comedy involving a divorced woman's suicide, her ex-husband and a mysterious photograph.

Courtesy MJFF

Select images available for purchase in the Maine Today Photo Store

career and Orthodox family) at Nickelodeon Cinemas.

Clearly, the MJFF has a broad vision for the films it chooses.

"We screen independent films that would not otherwise be shown in the state," Wagner-Peck said. And MJFF caters to "a large, diverse audience that loves independent film."

And I say Maine film fans of all faiths should be grateful.

*Dennis Perkins is a freelance writer who lives in Portland.*

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