

September 27, 2017
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EDITOR'S NOTE: For press inquiries, please contact the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life at rujff@sas.rutgers.edu, or call 848-932-3345. For more information, please visit the website BildnerCenter.Rutgers.edu/film.

RUTGERS JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL TO RUN OCTOBER 29– NOVEMBER 12

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – The Rutgers Jewish Film Festival heads into its eighteenth run, Oct. 29 – Nov. 12, bringing New Jersey a broad range of award-winning, international films. Of the fifteen films being screened at the festival, ten are New Jersey premieres and they represent seven countries. Discussions with filmmakers, actors, scholars, and other noteworthy guests enrich the film going experience. The festival will be held at two venues: AMC Loews New Brunswick 18, 17 US Highway 1 South, New Brunswick (AMC); and Princeton Garden Theatre, 160 Nassau Street, Princeton (PGT). The festival is sponsored by Rutgers' Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life.

Harmonia, a major contender at the Israeli Academy Awards in 2016, opens the festival with a special appearance by lead actor Alon Aboutboul. With award-winning cinematography and music, this stunning drama is a modern twist on the biblical tale of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, set against the musical backdrop of an orchestra in Jerusalem. Opening night also includes a buffet dinner and dessert reception for festival sponsors. Two additional screenings of the film will be held: On October 31 at AMC, and on November 7 at PGT.

The festival features the New Jersey premieres of several Israeli documentaries that highlight the diversity of Israeli society, politics, and history. *Ben-Gurion: Epilogue* is a fascinating film based on recently discovered interview footage with the renowned Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. The film's director, Yariv Mozer, will speak about the making of the film at two of the festival's screenings. *The Settlers* offers an intimate look at life inside the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and explores the historical factors that have led to the current situation. *Dimona Twist* shares the never before heard personal stories of seven women who immigrated to Israel in the 1950s and the challenges they faced in making lives for themselves in the tiny development town of Dimona.

Films from the United States make a strong showing at this year's festival. Among them is *Keep the Change*, which won Best Narrative Feature and Best New Narrative Director at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival. This rom-com set in New York City portrays the burgeoning love story of two adults on the autism spectrum. The film is entertaining as a universal love story, but it is also unique in that a number of the starring cast members have autism themselves. Screenwriter and director Rachel Israel and lead cast members Brandon Polansky and Samantha Elisofon will be in attendance at the November 5 matinee screening to speak with the audience after the film.

The festival is proud to present the Australian documentary *On the Banks of the Tigris: The Hidden Story of Iraqi Music*, a moving film about the meaning of home and the power of music. The film follows Majid, a Muslim who escaped from Iraq, who embarks on a musical odyssey to uncover the hidden story of Iraqi Jewish musicians. The film will be followed by remarks and a short musical performance by CUNY professor and professional musician Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas.

Among the festival highlights are three Holocaust-related films: *1945, A Bag of Marbles*, and *The Invisibles*. *1945*, a recent Hungarian release, is a stunning drama, shot in black and white, that deals with the destructive nature of anti-Semitism in a rural Hungarian town in 1945. (Based on the short story "Homecoming" by Gábor T. Szántó.) *A Bag of Marbles* showcases the fortitude and resilience of two young Jewish brothers who must flee occupied France for the Free Zone in 1941. Recommended for middle and high school students, this film will be screened several times during the festival, including a free screening for students, presented in partnership with the Herbert and Leonard Littman Families Holocaust Resource Center at the Bildner Center. *The Invisibles*, a docudrama, is a dramatic thriller about four young German Jews who manage to survive the Third Reich in Berlin living in plain sight.

Closing night features *The Testament*, a riveting drama about an Israeli historian whose fight against Holocaust deniers in Austria leads to a shocking discovery about his own family's secrets. An additional matinee screening will be held on November 2 at AMC.

For festival schedule and ticket information, or to purchase tickets online, visit the website **BildnerCenter.Rutgers.edu/film**. Festival staff can also be reached by phone at 848-932-4166, or by email at ruff@sas.rutgers.edu. Film tickets are \$13 with discounted tickets for

seniors and students available. Advance ticket purchase is strongly recommended as screenings often sell out prior to the festival.

Following is a full list of films and speakers at the festival:

Harmonia (Israel, 2016, drama, 98 minutes)
Hebrew with English subtitles • Director: Ori Sivan

A modern adaptation of the biblical story of Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar, *Harmonia* is set against the musical backdrop of an orchestra in Jerusalem. Sarah, the orchestra's harpist, and her husband, Abraham, the conductor, have no children, and their life revolves around their music. When Hagar, a beautiful young horn player from East Jerusalem, joins the orchestra, she bonds with Sarah and a unique friendship evolves. Music plays a dramatic role in this family drama.

Sunday, October 29, 7:00 p.m., at AMC (Opening Night)

Speaker: Alon Aboutboul, lead actor

Tuesday, October 31, 3:30 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: Prof. Gary A. Rendsburg, Rutgers University

Tuesday, November 7, 11:30 a.m., at PGT

New Jersey Premiere

1945 (Hungary, 2017, drama, 91 minutes)

Hungarian with English subtitles • Director: Ferenc Török

On a sweltering August day in 1945, a rural Hungarian village prepares for the wedding of the town clerk's son. Meanwhile, two Orthodox Jews arrive at the train station carrying mysterious boxes. The villagers fear the Jews may be returning to reclaim their homes and possessions lost during the war. Based on the acclaimed short story "Homecoming" by Gábor T. Szántó, this stunning film exposes the corrosive power of anti-Semitism and collaboration during the Holocaust.

Tuesday, October 31, 7:30 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: Director invited

Tuesday, November 7, 2:00 p.m., at PGT

Saturday, November 11, 9:30 p.m., at AMC

New Jersey Premiere

A Bag of Marbles (France, 2017, drama, 110 minutes)

French with English subtitles • Director: Christian Duguay

In occupied France in 1941, Maurice and Joseph, two young Jewish brothers, must flee Paris for the Free Zone to the south. The brothers demonstrate an incredible amount of wit and courage

evading the Germans as they attempt to reunite with their family in the unoccupied part of the country. The film is based on the best-selling memoir of the same name by Joseph Joffo.

Sunday, November 5, 4:30 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: Prof. Michael Levine, Rutgers University

Thursday, November 9, 12:30 p.m., at AMC

New Jersey Premiere

Ben-Gurion: Epilogue (Israel, 2016, documentary, 70 minutes)

English and Hebrew with English subtitles • Director: Yariv Mozer

In the depths of an archive in Jerusalem, six hours of interview footage with Israel's mythic founding father, David Ben-Gurion, were recently discovered and brought to light for the first time in this fascinating documentary. It is 1968 and Ben-Gurion has retired to his kibbutz in the desert. His soul-searching is the focus of this film, and his clear voice provides a surprising vision for Israel's future.

Sunday, November 5, 5:00 p.m., at AMC

Wednesday, November 8, 7:30 p.m., at PGT

Speaker: Yariv Mozer, director

Thursday, November 9, 7:30 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: Yariv Mozer, director

Northeast Premiere

The Cakemaker (Germany and Israel, 2017, drama, 104 minutes)

English, Hebrew, and German with English subtitles •

Director: Ofir Raul Graizer

The Cakemaker is a sensitive portrayal of love and relationships. Thomas, a young German baker, is having an affair with Oren, an Israeli married man who makes frequent business trips to Berlin. When Oren disappears, Thomas travels to Jerusalem looking for answers. Without revealing his secret, he begins working for Oren's widow at her small café, and becomes involved in her life in unexpected ways.

Thursday, November 2, 7:30 p.m., at AMC

Director invited.

Thursday, November 9, 3:30 p.m., at AMC

New Jersey Premiere

Dimona Twist (Israel, 2016, documentary, 71 minutes)

Hebrew with English subtitles • Director: Michal Aviad

This moving documentary focuses on the lives of seven women from North Africa and Poland who came to Israel by ship in the 1950s and 1960s. They were sent to live in Dimona, a development town in the desert with a population in 1955 of 300. For the first time, they share their personal stories about the difficulties of adjusting to their new homeland, and their determination to create rich and meaningful lives. Intimate conversations are interwoven with stunning archival footage and the music of the time.

Thursday, November 2, 1:15 p.m., at AMC

Sunday, November 5, 12:30 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: TBA

New Jersey Premiere

The Invisibles (Germany, 2017, docudrama, 110 minutes)

German with English subtitles • Director: Claus Räfle

This dramatic thriller tells the story of four young German Jews in 1943 who manage to survive the Third Reich in Berlin living in plain sight. Taking on false identities and risky activities, they endure through resourcefulness, luck, and the decency of fellow Germans. Skillfully weaving interviews with dramatic reenactments, *The Invisibles* tells the story of these bold survivors who have become contemporary witnesses.

Sunday, October 29, 3:30 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: TBA

Saturday, November 4, 7:15 p.m., at AMC

New Jersey Premiere

Keep the Change (USA, 2017, drama, 94 minutes)

English • Written and directed by Rachel Israel

A feel-good romantic comedy set in New York City, *Keep the Change* is the story of two people who meet in a support group at the Jewish Community Center. When David, an upper-class charmer, meets the outgoing and quirky Sarah, who fully embraces her individuality, an unexpected romance blooms.

Tuesday, October 31, 12:30 p.m., at AMC

Sunday, November 5, 2:00 p.m., at AMC

Speakers: Rachel Israel, screenwriter and director, and lead cast members Brandon Polansky and Samantha Elisofon

Menashe (USA, 2017, drama, 82 minutes)

Yiddish with English subtitles • Director: Joshua Z. Weinstein

In Borough Park, Brooklyn, a Hasidic widower battles for custody of his son. Shot in secret entirely within the Hasidic community portrayed in the film, and performed entirely in Yiddish, *Menashe* is a tender, life-affirming look at the universal bonds between fathers and sons. Based largely on the real life of its Hasidic star Menashe Lustig, the film is strikingly authentic and deeply moving.

Wednesday, November 8, 1:00 p.m., at PGT
Saturday, November 11, 7:15 p.m., at AMC

Monkey Business: The Adventures of Curious George's Creators

(USA, 2017, documentary, 80 minutes)

English • Written and directed by Ema Ryan Yamazaki

This charming documentary explores the extraordinary lives of Hans and Margret Rey, the authors of the beloved Curious George children's books. A wonderful mix of home footage, interviews, and original animation tells the story of the Reys' early adventures in Germany, Brazil, and France, and their remarkable escape just days before the Nazi invasion: the couple fled Paris on bicycles with the original manuscript about Fifi the monkey—later renamed Curious George. The film is narrated by Sam Waterston.

Sunday, November 12, 4:00 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: Jacob Kafka, film animator

Norman: The Moderate Rise and Tragic Fall of a New York Fixer

(USA and Israel, 2016, drama, 117 minutes)

English • Written and directed by Joseph Cedar

Norman Oppenheimer (Richard Gere) is a small-time operator who befriends a young Israeli politician visiting New York. Three years later, when the politician becomes the Israeli prime minister, Norman's life dramatically changes for the better—and worse. This smart dramatic thriller is the first English-language film from Academy Award–nominated director Joseph Cedar.

Sunday, November 12, 3:15 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: Director invited.

New Jersey Premiere

On the Banks of the Tigris: The Hidden Story of Iraqi Music

(Australia, 2015, documentary, 79 minutes)

English and Arabic with English subtitles • Director: Marsha Emerman

After Majid Shokor escaped from Iraq and settled in Australia, he discovered that the songs he loved as a child in Baghdad have a hidden history. Majid, who is Muslim, makes a bold journey to Israel, Europe, and Iraq to meet exiled Iraqi musicians, hear their music and stories, and unite them in a concert in London for peace and reconciliation.

Sunday, November 5, 11:45 a.m., at AMC

Speaker: Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas, CUNY, will speak and give a short musical performance.

New Jersey Premiere

The Settlers (Israel, 2016, documentary, 107 minutes)

Hebrew and Arabic with English subtitles • Director: Shimon Dotan

The Settlers traces the history and growth of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Interweaving archival footage with current interviews of settlers, Palestinians, academics, and politicians, Shimon Dotan's film provides an intimate look at life inside the settlements and examines the incremental protests, governmental indifference, and political calculation that have led to the current situation.

Sunday, November 12, 1:00 p.m., at AMC

Speaker: Dr. Assaf Harel, Binghamton University, SUNY

New Jersey Premiere

The Testament (Israel and Austria, 2017, drama, 88 minutes)

English, German, and Hebrew with English subtitles •

Director: Amichai Greenberg

Yoel Halberstam, a historian leading a legal battle against Holocaust deniers in Austria, discovers that his mother's testimony casts doubt on his family's past. This riveting drama portrays a man who is willing to risk his career, his religious beliefs, and his identity to discover the truth.

Thursday, November 2, 4:00 p.m., at AMC

Sunday, November 12, 7:30 p.m., at AMC (Closing Night)

Speaker: TBA

The Wedding Plan (Israel, 2016, drama, 110 minutes)

Hebrew with English subtitles • Director: Rama Burshtein

At 32, Michal, an Orthodox Jewish woman, is looking forward to the comfort and security of marriage. She is blindsided by her fiancé's decision to call off the wedding with only a month's

notice. Believing that Mr. Right will appear, she books a venue, sends out invitations, and buys a wedding dress—groom TBA.

Saturday, November 4, 9:30 p.m., at AMC