



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Matthew Bussy

mbussy@phillyjfm.org

(215) 446-3012

Philadelphia's 44th Jewish Film and Media Festival Is Back with an Extended Week of Movie Premieres and More

Philadelphia, PA – (October 8, 2024) – Philadelphia Jewish Film and Media (PJFM) celebrates its 44th edition of its annual Jewish film and media festival, **Fall Fest 2024**, from **November 14-24**, at the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History and other venues, both in Center City and the suburbs. This historic organization, home of the city's first film festival and second longest-running Jewish film festival in the country, prolongs its typical one-week schedule to 10 full days. This extension of the festival, its longest running one since 2021, promises even more top-notch Jewish cinematic and digital storytelling from across the globe.

Originally known as the Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival when it was part of the now closed Gershman Y, this yearly series added *media* to its mission in 2021, incorporating Jewish digital art and visual storytelling in addition to its film screenings. The result is **Fall Fest 2024**, a broader and wider festival that showcases all forms of cinematic and new media formats, including films, animation, VR (virtual reality), music videos, podcasts, AI (artificial intelligence), social media, etc. all with a Jewish twist. 17 films from nine countries, including a master class with a special guest Israeli filmmaker, comedy night with famed comic Judy Gold, and highlights of clips from PJFM's recent *Unapologetically Jewish* content creator winner, are showcased at the organization's 44th Jewish film and media festival.

Before kicking off on **Thursday, November 14**, **Fall Fest 2024** unofficially begins two days early on **Tuesday, November 12**, with a free, pre-fest sneak preview of **A REAL PAIN** (2024) at Film Society East (formerly PFS East) in Old City. Official Selection of the 2024 Sundance Film Festival, Jesse Eisenberg's comedic drama follows a pair of mismatched cousins (Eisenberg, who also wrote and directed the film, and Kieran Culkin) as they reunite for a tour through Poland to honor their beloved grandmother. The adventure takes a turn when the odd-couple's old tensions resurface against the backdrop of their family history. This advance screening is courtesy of Searchlight Pictures.

Fall Fest 2024 officially kicks off later that week at the Weitzman Museum on **Thursday, November 14**, with the premiere of **THE BLOND BOY FROM THE CASBAH** (2023), Alexandre Arcady's semi-autobiographical French drama. This gorgeously shot tale of adolescence follows its lead character, filmmaker Antoine, as he travels to his birthplace, Algiers, with his young son to present his new film: an account of his childhood in mid-20th century Algeria during the country's civil war. As he wanders through the city, Antoine immerses viewers in the moments of happiness, laughter, and tears of his childhood – spent between school, friends, and his Jewish family.

Friday, November 15, begins the first of two *Flashback Friday Cinema* films with **OUT IN THE DARK** (2012), a queer Israeli romance distributed by Philadelphia's very own Breaking Glass Pictures. Michael Mayer's taut first feature follows a border-crossing relationship between an Israeli lawyer (Michael Aloni of *Shitsel* and *We Were the Lucky Ones*) and an increasingly desperate Palestinian student (Nicholas Jacob). **OUT IN THE DARK** screens at 2 PM at the Weitzman Museum.

After Shabbat, the festival's Centerpiece Film, **BAD SHABBOS** (2024), co-presented by the Philadelphia Film Society, screens on **Saturday, November 16, 7:30 PM** at the Weitzman Museum, followed by a post-film reception with food and drinks for all attendees. Winner of the 2024 Tribeca Film Festival Audience Award, director Daniel Robbins takes a hilarious screwball plot and centers it around one family's Shabbat gathering in Manhattan. Kyra Sedgwick, Jon Bass, Method Man, and Catherine Curtin star in this comedy about a dysfunctional family coming together for Shabbat where out of nowhere, things take a turn for the worse.

Sunday, November 17, features two film screenings. The first takes place at the Weitzman Museum at 11 AM with an interactive, family-friendly screening of **THE EMPEROR'S NEW GROOVE** (2000). Disney's animated cult classic follows cocky Emperor Kuzco (David Spade) whose life is flipped upside down after being turned into a llama by his devious adviser, Yzma (Eartha Kitt), and her hunky henchman, Kronk (Patrick Warburton). Over the years, Kronk has been interpreted by film historians as a hidden Jewish character in the Disney universe, so much so that Disney even published "Kronk's Challah Recipe" on their Instagram in the summer of 2021. In addition to the film, kids will get to make their own challah covers at the event and take home Kronk's recipe themselves.

In the evening, the festival heads to Ambler Theater for an evening screening of **SHOSHANA** (2023), official selection of the 2023 Toronto International Film Festival. Prolific writer-director Michael Winterbottom (*The Trip* series)'s passion project, 15 years in the making and based on real people and events, tells the story of a cross-

cultural relationship between a ranking member of the British Palestine Police Force and a young Jewish woman. Winterbottom's romantic drama, starring Harry Melling (*Harry Potter*), Irina Starshenbaum, and Douglas Booth (*Loving Vincent*), explores the way extremism and violence push people apart, forcing them to choose sides.

On **Monday, November 18, Fall Fest 2024** heads back to the suburbs to Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel (located in Elkins Park) for its Holocaust commemoration screening of **VISHNIAC** (2023), in a special night presented in partnership with the synagogue, Congregations of Shaare Shamayim, and Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center (HAMEC). This powerful docudrama, directed by Laura Bialis, centers on the life of photographer Roman Vishniac, who is best known for his iconic images of Jewish life in Eastern Europe from 1935 through 1938. Few predicted that less than a decade later, these communities would be wiped out, and Vishniac's photographs would provide the last visual records of an entire world.

Fall Fest 2024 continues **Tuesday, November 19**, with two more film screenings, one afternoon film at Gratz College (located in Melrose Park) and one evening film at the Weitzman Museum. **THE SECRET SABBATH** (2023) premieres at Gratz and explores the journeys undertaken by diverse Jewish people in Mexico and America to uncover long-hidden family secrets passed down through generations. As they delve deeper, they discover a compelling fusion of their Hispanic and Jewish cultural heritage, a less explored and often marginalized facet of their identities. Rejecting strict identity categories, they embrace who they are instead, drawing inspiration from the life and experiences of Luis de Carvajal the Younger, a historical figure who met a tragic end in 16th-century Inquisitorial Mexico.

ALL ABOUT THE LEVKOVICHES (2024) premieres later in the evening back at the museum. Directed by Ádám Breier, this Hungarian comedy/drama follows Tamás, a generous but stubborn boxing coach who gets along well with everyone but his own son. They have not spoken since the boy, Iván, moved to Israel and became religious in an orthodox community. When Tamás' beloved wife, Zsuzsa, dies unexpectedly, Tamás agrees with his son that he can come and sit shiva in his house as long as he brings his grandson, Ariel, with him. As past conflicts resurface, they embark on an unexpected journey of self-reflection and reconciliation

The festival's popular shorts program, **JEWISH SHORTS**, is the sole event the next day on **Wednesday, November 20**, at the museum. Five shorts, two of which are narratives and the other three documentaries, explore a wide range of topics, including war and trauma, *l'dor v'dor* (a Hebrew phrase meaning "from generation to generation"), interfaith relations amidst World War II, and antisemitism in the surfing community.

I SEE YOU (2023) is a poignant portrait of Danny Layani who, after 25 years of total blindness, regains his sight and sees his wife and four children for the very first time. However, the newfound light in Danny's life begins to dim, taking a sharp turn. **HOW TO MAKE CHALLAH** (2024) follows director Sarah Rosen as she tapes her aunt baking challah the same way her aunt filmed her grandmother in 1975 in a sweet film about what we pass on to the next generation and what we leave behind. **SEVAP/MITZVAH** (2023), a riveting thriller from Bosnia and Herzegovina, follows a Muslim woman in Nazi-occupied Bosnia who risks her life to save her Jewish friends and is saved by them in turn 50 years later. **WAVES APART** (2023) transports viewers to the surf in a dark documentary about a Jewish surfer confronting the dark, antisemitic history of the sport he once found solace in. **JEWISH SHORTS** concludes with **HERITAGE DAY** (2023), a riotous comedy starring Rachel Bloom (*Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*) about a Jewish girl who becomes increasingly obsessed with her family's history after dressing up as her estranged grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, on "Heritage Day" at school.

On **Thursday, November 21, Fall Fest 2024** takes a night off from films and co-presents **COMEDY NIGHT WITH JUDY GOLD** with the Weitzman Museum. This marks Gold's second return to PJFM after her 2016 appearance at the organization's 36th festival in which she performed a set at the Gershman Y before the premiere of *The Last Laugh* (2016), a documentary she co-starred in. Known for her bold, unapologetic humor, Judy's sharp wit tackles everything from family and relationships to her experiences as a Jewish gay woman. She has appeared in numerous shows and the host of the hit podcast *It's Judy's Show with Judy Gold*.

Preceding Gold is an opening set from rising star Liz Glazer. A former tenured law professor turned comedian, Liz brings a unique and insightful perspective to her stand-up, blending her life experiences as a lawyer, rabbi's wife, and lesbian. Her clever storytelling has earned her top spots in comedy competitions, and she's known for her deeply personal and reflective material.

Friday, November 22, is another packed day at **Fall Fest 2024** with two events, one in Wynnewood and the other in West Philadelphia. The festival's second *Flashback Friday Cinema* film, **LIBERTY HEIGHTS** (1999), screens in the morning at the Kaiserman JCC. Academy Award winner Barry Levinson (*Rain Man*) returns to his hometown of Baltimore in this underrated gem of Jewish cinema, a nostalgic, semi-autobiographical tale of the Kurtzman family, played by Adrien Brody, Ben Foster, Joe Mantegna, and Bebe Neuwirth, in 1954. Guests are encouraged to bring their own lunch to the JCC for this relaxing, breezy trip down 1950s America.

From 1-3 PM at Penn Hillel, located in University City, the festival presents **MASTER CLASS WITH DIRECTOR TOM NESHER**. After a short hiatus, PJFM and Penn Department of Cinema & Media Studies are back for another Master Class in this workshop, co-presented in partnership with the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies. The daughter of Avi Nesher, considered by many to be Israel's most acclaimed filmmaker, Tom Nesher has made waves in Israel this year with the release of her critically acclaimed, first feature film, *Come Closer* (2024), Israel's Oscar selection for Best International Feature Film. The winner of four Ophir Awards (Israeli Academy Awards), including Best Picture and Best Director, *Come Closer's* personal story of familial loss and stunning cinematography has catapulted the young filmmaker into one of the most promising directors this year. In this interactive workshop, Tom discusses Israeli cinema and the ins and outs of filmmaking in the 21st century.

Closing Night of **Fall Fest 2024** aims to be an exhilarating one with the Philadelphia premiere of **LEGEND OF DESTRUCTION** (2021), an eye-popping, visual masterpiece from Israeli director Gidi Dar. Screening on **Saturday, November 23**, at the Weitzman Museum, this animated epic, featuring the voicework of Oscar Isaac, Evangeline Lilly, Billy Zane, and Elliot Gould, slowly entered the virtual film festival scene back in 2021 during COVID-19. Three years later, as audiences have now increasingly returned to the theaters in droves again, the film finally makes it debut on the big screen where it deserves to be seen. **LEGEND OF DESTRUCTION** takes place in the Land of Israel under Roman rule. Social inequalities, corruption, and injustices are rampant. When the rebellion against the Roman oppressor breaks out, it swiftly escalates into a full-blown vicious civil war. These events took place some 2,000 years ago, yet the timeliness of this seminal story to the Jewish people is shocking. The film's visual style was created with 1,500 original paintings by David Polonsky and Michael Faust, the artists behind the Oscar-nominated *Waltz with Bashir* (2008).

Sunday, November 24, is an extra bonus day of **Fall Fest 2024** and features two films at the Weitzman Museum. **TELLING NONIE** (2023), a pivotal documentary by Pat Schwartz and Uriel Sinai, follows the relationship between Geizi Tsafrir, an elderly Israeli agent, and Nonie Darwish, the daughter of an Egyptian lieutenant colonel he assassinated in 1950s Gaza. Winner of the Haifa International Film Festival's Best Israeli Documentary Award, **TELLING NONIE** is undoubtedly timely in its release during the Israel-Hamas War. It is a film that explores intricate emotions, history's complexities, and the bumpy path toward mutual understanding and forgiveness. Nonie, who is herself a prominent voice against radical Islam and supporter of Israel, forges a friendship with Geizi that serves as a crucial reminder of the importance of conversation.

The festival officially concludes with **THE CATSKILLS** (2024), the perfectly nostalgic film for the Weitzman Museum. Lex Gillespie (*The Mamboniks*), a PJFM alumnus, returns with a delightful documentary on the rise and fall of the Borscht Belt. With a trove of lost-and-found archival footage and a cast of characters endowed with the gift of gab, this charming film journeys into the storied mountain getaway north of New York City that served as refuge for Jewish immigrants fleeing poverty, as well as a lavish playground for affluent Jewish families.

Throughout the festival, PJFM also screens portions of clips from its recent *Unapologetically Jewish* winner's social media channel, *Jewsical 101*, created by Erez Shek and available to watch on Instagram and TikTok. Shek was the lucky \$5,000 winner at PJFM's digital media festival, Digital Chutzpah 2024, last September. Since this past summer, Shek has continued to post a variety of engaging and crowd-pleasing posts centered around diverse Jewish artists who have shaped music culture. Festival attendees are introduced to short segments from his clips before each movie screening.

Next year marks the festival's 45th year, a landmark achievement for an organization that has continued to deliver enthralling and original Jewish content to Philadelphia audiences. **Fall Fest 2024** promises to be a bigger and bolder week of Jewish joy, stories, laughs, tears, music, and more from the most promising filmmakers and artists around the world.

Fall Fest 2024 takes place **November 14-24** (including a pre-fest sneak preview on **November 12**) at the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History and other venues throughout the city and suburbs.

Full festival details available at <https://phillyjfm.org/fall-fest/>

Follow PJFM on social media:

- Facebook: @PhiladelphiaJewishFilmAndMedia
- Instagram: @PhillyJFM
- TikTok: @PhillyJFM
- YouTube: @PhiladelphiaJewishFilmAndMedia