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# BJFF's back in full glory

## Annual event showcases exceptional films

By Jules Becker

Sara Rubin, the executive director of the Boston Jewish Film Festival, has called the annual November event "the heart of what we do."

A quick glance at the variety of themes and genres represented by this year's offering of 57 films from 16 countries demonstrates once again that Jewish films are as vibrant as ever. As always, American Jewry, Israel (this year especially Haifa), Jewish music and the Holocaust figure importantly in many selections, shorts and full-length features. The respect that the festival commands stretches from the guest appearances of many directors, producers and actors and even film subjects to opening music performances by students from the Berklee College of Music.

An examination of three very different films – "Lonely Man of Faith: The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik" (U.S.A.), "Out of Sight" (Israel) and "A Love to Hide" (France) – suggests both the importance and the quality of the festival.

"Lonely Man of Faith," directed and co-written with impressive balance and clarity by Ethan Isenberg, is a rich testament to the amazing achievements of the unique Torah and Talmud scholar known as the Rav (1903-1993). A tale of four countries, this informative and affectionate documentary takes his family from Communist Russia to Poland; details Rabbi Soloveitchik's engagement with philosophy at the University of Berlin and chronicles his four-decade tenure at Yeshiva University and six-decade residence in Boston. Here, the founding and development of the Maimonides School did much to shape the local Orthodox Jewish community.

As an alumnus of the Brookline Hebrew day school and a one-time regular at the Rav's Saturday night Torah lectures and Sunday morning Talmud study there, this critic was moved by the film's careful attention to Rabbi Soloveitchik's pioneering efforts to provide Orthodox female students with the same rigor of Jewish education as their male counterparts here and at Stern College. The fitting title not only suggests this "rabbi's rabbi" enormous influence as a leader and teacher, but also refers to a major original 1965 work that



SUBMITTED PHOTO

"A Love To Hide" is part of the Boston Jewish Film Festival.

opened the door to the ongoing publication of hundreds of his manuscripts.

"Lonely Man of Faith" richly embraces the Rav's boundless contribution to American Jewry and the world. The film's world premiere will take place Nov. 9 at the MFA, with Ethan Isenberg in person.

Daniel Syrkin's "Out of Sight" ("LMareet Ayin") centers on the investigation by blind Princeton doctoral candidate Ya'ara into the suicide of her dear cousin and best friend Talia. As childhood secrets become all too clear, the undaunted heroine's lack of sight pales in comparison with the psychological and emotional blindness of Talia's family. Noa Greenberg and Noah Stolman have artfully collaborated on a screenplay that captures the poetic beauty of Ya'ara and Talia's friendship as it evokes the former's growing confidence about finding love and realizing a full life despite her disability.

"Out of Sight" is more visible proof of the high caliber of much contemporary Israeli film. The New England premiere takes place Nov. 4 at the Coolidge Corner Theatre; also at Showcase Cinema in Randolph on Nov. 8, and the Arlington Capitol Theatre on Nov. 14.

In Christian Faure's powerfully disturbing "A Love to Hide" ("Un Amour a Taire"), friendship is tested in a very different way during the Nazi occupation of France. A young Jewish woman named Sara, the lone survivor from her family, flees to Paris, where longtime friend Jean passes her off as a non-Jewish employee at his family's laundry. Sara is in love with Jean,

the heir apparent to his father's business. Yet Jean is deeply committed to his gay lover Philippe, a relationship that leads Jean's homophobic brother Jacques to a decision with irrevocable consequences for their entire family, Philippe and even Sara.

Some Holocaust confrontation scenes may seem a bit melodramatic, but director Faure keeps the pacing sharp and the down-turning fortunes fully absorbing. The title works on several levels as Sara, Jacques and lovers Jean and Philippe conceal their love in various ways in the face of anti-Semitism and the most severe kind of gay-bashing.

The entire cast is first-rate with Jeremie Remier, heart-wrenchingly vulnerable as Jean, and Louise Monot, beautifully subdued as fearful Sara, the standouts. Svella Ganeva's strong camera work smartly underscores the cruelties of the Vichy Regime.

"A Love to Hide" memorably lays bare the all-too-clear parallels between the persecution of gays and Jews by the Nazis and France itself. The Massachusetts premiere takes place at Coolidge Corner Theatre on Nov. 5, with Louise Monot in person. The film will also show at the West Newton Cinema on Nov. 8.

*Boston Jewish Film Festival, 18th annual edition. Coolidge Corner Theatre, Brookline; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; West Newton Cinema and other suburban movie theaters. Nov. 1-12.*



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