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MOVIES

10 Best Bets From Hartford Jewish Film Festival

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The 18th Mandell JCC Hartford Jewish Film Fest runs from March 20-30. The event is filled with movie screenings, talkbacks and receptions, but these are 10 events that shouldn't be missed. (Details and tickets: www.hjff.org.)



'Paris-Manhattan'

"Paris-Manhattan" is a charming French romantic comedy inspired by Woody Allen's "Play It Again, Sam." That 1972 comedy was about a neurotic man who leans on the ghost of Humphrey Bogart for relationship advice. The French homage is about a beautiful, but insecure pharmacist who takes relationship advice from the spirit of Woody Allen. It's got silly moments and romantic ones, and nuggets of Woody wisdom throughout. (Saturday at 8 p.m. at Mandell JCC in West Hartford, preceded by a reception; and March 30 at noon at Digiplex Bloomfield.)

The Details

March 20-30, various locations
www.hjff.org



'Cupcakes'

Perfectly titled, "Cupcakes" is a sweet little confection about a bunch of friends in Tel Aviv who want to sing on a reality show. It shows that reality TV in other countries is just as featherbrained as it is here. (Wednesday at 6 p.m. and Sunday, March 30, at 2 p.m. at Digiplex Bloomfield.)



'Next Year Jerusalem'

Another Connecticut connection can be seen in "Next Year Jerusalem," a documentary about a bunch of Fairfield nursing home residents traveling to Israel. (Wednesday at 2 p.m. at Emanuel Synagogue, West Hartford.)



'When Day Breaks'

The fest's best acting performance is in "When Day Breaks." Mustafa Nadarevic is quietly heartbreaking as Misha, who is told after retirement that his biological parents were Serbian Jews killed during the war. The drama also is noteworthy as one of the very few films in this genre to acknowledge that Gypsies suffered under the Nazis, too. Gypsies even get to be the heroes. (Wednesday at 8:15 p.m. at Digiplex Bloomfield.)



'The Zigzag Kid'

"The Zigzag Kid" is ridiculous but appealing, a pre-teen wish fulfillment fantasy. What tween wouldn't want to go on a crazy, parent-defying adventure with an enigmatic master thief and a legendary chanteuse (Isabella Rossellini)? (Monday at 7 p.m. at Beth El Temple, West Hartford.)



'50 Children'

"50 Children" is a documentary about a Philadelphia couple who took 50 Viennese Jewish children to America in 1939. One of those kids, retired Fairfield orthodontist Robert Braun, is in the film and will attend the screening. (Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Mandell JCC.)



'Life In Stills'

"The Gambling Man" is a short film, but it will charm music lovers. It's about retired Hartford doctor Alby Hurwit, who composed a symphony even though he couldn't read or write music. It is being shown with "Life in Stills," a documentary about a Jerusalem photo shop. It's a hoot. The old shop owner never hesitates to tell anyone what she thinks, and it's not always nice. (Sunday at 1 p.m. at Spotlight Theatres in Hartford.)



Downtown Express

Musicians Nellie McKay and Philippe Quint are cute together in "Downtown Express." She plays a loosey-goosey musician who captures the heart of a disciplined violinist. There's also a nice sexy subplot about an older couple. (Saturday, March 29, at 8:45 p.m. at Digiplex Bloomfield.)



'Putzel'

The always underappreciated Melanie Lynskey is adorable as the love interest in "Putzel," a frisky romantic comedy about a Jewish deli owner in love with a shiksa dancer. (Thursday, March 27, at 8:15 p.m. at Digiplex Bloomfield.)



'Hunting Elephants'

The festival closes with "Hunting Elephants," an Israeli bank-heist comedy that has a rip-roaring funny supporting performance by Patrick Stewart. He plays a blowhard actor dragged into the heist and then loving every histrionic minute of it. It also has the best line of any movie in the fest, about a blind driver. (Sunday, March 30, at 7:30 p.m. at Mandell JCC, followed by a reception.)