



Film Festival Opens Windows for Everyone into Jewish Life and Culture

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by Andrew Botsford

When Tina Silverman was 8 years old, a friend's young mother showed her a string of numbers tattooed on her arm in a concentration camp during World War II. The lasting impression from that experience and her fascination with history ever since would eventually lead to the creation of the Southampton Jewish Film Festival in 2015.



Tina Silverman. Courtesy of
Southampton Cultural Center.

Now in its third year, the summer festival is a production of the [Southampton Cultural Center](#) on Pond Lane in Southampton in partnership with Chabad of Southampton Jewish Center. Silverman, who brought the idea to the Cultural Center when she became a member of the SCC board in 2014, is the artistic director and curates each summer's Festival program. Screenings in Southampton are at the Southampton Arts Center on Jobs Lane, and the festival offers supplementary programming such as filmmaker and guest speaker talks, panel discussions and, this year, a staged reading at the Cultural Center on August 21, 2017.

Running from July 6 to August 29, 2017, the Festival has expanded eastward this year, with five additional films and three supporting post-screening programs offered at Guild Hall in East Hampton.

In a joint statement when the Southampton Jewish Film Festival made its debut in 2015, Southampton Cultural Center Chairman Tom Knight and Rabbi Rafe Konikov of Southampton Chabad noted that "a Jewish film festival is more than just a showcase for the Jewish experience; it reflects the journey of all humanity in the face of tough odds and threats, at times of great celebration and unfettered joy. We are thrilled to be partnering to bring this unique film series to the Southampton community and beyond, exposing our neighbors to these historic and groundbreaking artistic achievements."

For her part, Silverman, a resident of East Hampton, wrote in an email this week that the Festival "is a very personal undertaking for me. Although unstated, it is dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust, not just to the six million or more who perished, but to the survivors as well."

"The films reconstruct Jewish life and culture," the Festival artistic director wrote. "They are a treasure trove of historic value in that, along with population, Jewish culture was extinguished in

Europe and the Middle East. In selecting a program, I try to include a little something for everyone, European and Middle Eastern Jewish history, the experiences of which differ greatly, as well as music, art, and even the food. Each offers a window into a different aspect of Jewish life.”

She started out showing films at the Southampton Chabad on a small screen and then drew on support from the Cultural Center board and Rabbi Konikov as well as what she called “amazing film archives” to start the Southampton Jewish Film Festival in 2015.

“I love it,” Southampton Cultural Center Executive Director Kirsten Lonnie said in an interview this week. She said that she sees every film offered at the festival, adding, “I find it very compelling, especially when there are speakers and programs that complement the screenings.”

In the first year of the Festival, she said, films were screened at the Cultural Center using rented equipment. In 2016, SCC started a collaboration with Southampton Arts Center, which has its own projection equipment, to have the films screened there.

Lonnie said that she saw “significant growth” between 2015 and 2016, noting that the collaboration with the Southampton Arts Center helped to “get the word out.” With this year’s expansion to [Guild Hall](#) in East Hampton, she said the growth trend has continued, helping to build audience for SCC programming. Many of the tickets sold to Southampton and East Hampton residents for screenings and programs in both towns, she said, are going to people who have never previously purchased tickets to programs offered by the Cultural Center.

After Silverman suggested expanding the Festival to include screenings and programs in East Hampton, Lonnie obtained the approval of the SCC board and then reached out to Guild Hall Artistic Director Josh Gladstone to arrange it. Since then, she has been working with Jennifer Brondo and Joe Brondo at Guild Hall on the details and tech components of the new collaboration.

While all the films “deal uniquely with the Jewish experience,” Lonnie said, “they are also so diverse in their subject matter and themes,” with the additional speakers and programs helping audiences gain deeper insights and understanding.

She cited as one example of this kind of enrichment was the screening of “Wagner’s Jews” on July 24, 2017 at Guild Hall, which was followed by a special guest panel discussion with filmmaker Hilan Warshaw and Wagnerian expert Allan Leicht.



Still from “Wagner’s Jews.” Courtesy of Southampton Cultural Center.

Another example she cited is the upcoming August 8, 2017 screening of “Starting Over Again” at the Southampton Arts Center. The film looks at the changing fortunes of Jews living in Egypt following World War II, and the guest speaker will be Lucette Lagnado, who wrote a book on the topic, “The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit.” Subtitled “A Jewish Family’s Exodus from Old Cairo to

the New World,” Lagnado’s book is a memoir about her father and her family’s flight from Egypt after Abdel Nasser seized power.



Still from “Starting Over.” Courtesy of Southampton Cultural Center.

On Monday, August 21, 2017, Robert Kalfin is directing a staged reading at the Southampton Cultural Center of a new play, “The Resettlement of Isaac” by Robert Karmon. A novel is coming out in the fall based on the love story set against events of World War II at the center of the play. Admission to the 7:30 p.m. reading is free.

“The Resettlement of Isaac” tells the true story of a 17-year-old boy who survives a massacre of Polish Jews and goes on to find love with an older Russian woman fighting with the partisans. The two are torn apart by events of the war, and Isaac searches for her after the armistice, knowing that she was carrying his child before the two were separated.

The reading is being presented as part of the Jewish Film Festival by the Southampton Cultural Center in association with the Playwrights’ Theater of East Hampton. Kalfin wrote this week in an email that all the roles have not been cast yet, and all are welcome to try out at an open call from 6 to 9 p.m. on Sunday and Monday, August 6 and 7, 2017 at the Cultural Center at 25 Pond Lane. Sides and scripts will be available.

Silverman’s reasons for starting the Southampton Jewish Film Festival underlie her continuing careful curation of screenings and programming: to increase awareness and understanding of the Jewish experience, among Jews and non-Jews alike.

“Although it is hard to get young people to leave their electronics, I hope to get them to attend,” she wrote. “Based on my experience as an 8- year-old, if even just one individual is affected and later in life goes on to share, that is already a win.”

“It goes without saying,” she continued, “that the Jewish people exist within a larger community and that we are inextricably connected to each other. Clearly there can be no better reason than this for all members of the community to enjoy these films, particularly those like myself who are history buffs.”

BASIC FACTS: The Southampton Jewish Film Festival runs from July 6 to August 29, 2017. Screenings and post-screening programs are held at the [Southampton Arts Center](#), 25 Jobs Lane, Southampton, NY 11968 and in East Hampton at [Guild Hall](#), 58 Main Street, East Hampton, NY 11937. Admission is \$15, with children under 12 half price. Seating is limited and online reservations are suggested, at www.scc-arts.org. For a complete schedule and programming details, click [here](#).

As part of the Jewish Film Festival, a free staged reading of "The Resettlement of Isaac," by Robert Karmon and directed by Rogert Kalfin, takes place on August 21, 2017 at 7:30 p.m. at the Southampton Cultural Center, 25 Pond Lane, Southampton, NY 11968. www.scc-arts.org

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