



2025

Phyllis Hoffman

HARTFORD JEWISH
FILM FESTIVAL



Bliss (Hemda) – Sat, Jan 11 – Opening Night



Drama – 125 minutes

[Trailer](#)

Nominee: Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Music at the Awards of the Israeli Film Academy

Synopsis: Sassi and Efi are hard workers, struggling with the debt left by Sasai's son before he left for Brussels. Though there is quite an age gap between them, their love and humor keep them from life's weariness and despair. When two youngsters - Omri, Sassi's hormonal and kind-hearted grandson, and David, Efi's former student - appear in their lives, their carefully kept routine breaks, and the couple's love is tested. Eighteen years after Aviva, My Love, Sasson Gabai and Asi Levi collaborate once again with director Shemi Zarhin to showcase their unique talents. Sassi and Efi's love story is both funny and touching. It illuminates in its unique way issues of relationships, family, and loyalty and sends a painful but also warm and optimistic look at the social realities of today.

Centered: Joe Lieberman – Sun, Jan 12



**Documentary –
73 minutes**

[Trailer](#)

Synopsis: Joe Lieberman. The man who nearly became the first Jewish Vice President of the United States. The politician who put principles above party. And the Founding Chairman of No Labels, whose quest for a bipartisan ticket nearly upended the 2024 presidential election. In pursuit of his beliefs, Joe Lieberman sacrificed his popularity for what he believed was in the best interest of the American people. Centered chronicles Lieberman's remarkable journey and more than 40 years of public service, providing invaluable insights into this iconoclastic politician. The release of the documentary in 2024 is particularly timely, presenting a unique opportunity to engage both young individuals and adults across the U.S. and around the world. The film will encourage meaningful conversations, elevate discourse, and enhance awareness of civic responsibility during a pivotal election year. And with the untimely passing of Senator Lieberman in March of 2024, his message of moderation and bipartisanship is needed even more.

Ain't No Back To A Merry-Go-Round – Sun, Jan 19 and Mon, Jan 20



**Documentary –
89 minutes**
[Trailer](#)

Synopsis: When five Howard University students sat on a segregated Maryland carousel in 1960, the arrests made headlines. When the largely Jewish community near Glen Echo Amusement Park joined the Black students in picketing, the first organized interracial civil rights protest in US history was born. The pickets attracted Nazis, Congressman, and a press avalanche. Picketing together for these unlikely allies led to partying together, and union organizers mentored student activists. Ten 1961 Freedom Riders, including Stokely Carmichael, were incubated on the Glen Echo picket line, and the carousel arrests were challenged in a Supreme Court case. With never-before seen footage, and immersive storytelling by Emmy-award winning director Ilana Trachtman, four living protesters rescue this untold story in a gripping documentary, revealing the price, and the power, of heeding the impulse to activism. Acclaimed actors Jeffrey Wright, Mandy Patinkin, voice the Black and mainstream presses, respectively, with additional voiceover by Bob Balaban, Lee Grant, Peter Gallagher, Dominique Thorne, Alysia Reiner and Tracie Thoms.

Avenue of the Giants – Sun, Jan 26



Drama – 142 minutes

[Trailer](#)

Winner: Finn Taylor- Kadima Jury Award: Miami Jewish Film Festival & Audience Award: Spokane International Film Festival

Synopsis: Starring Stephen Lang (Avatar) and Elsie Fisher (Eighth Grade), Avenue of the Giants tells the true story of Herbert Heller who kept his miraculous escape from the Auschwitz Birkenau death march a secret for 60 years, even from his family. That is, until he meets Abbey, a young teenager whose own brush with pain and death inspires him to open up as well, leading the two of them to exchange their stories as a meaningful and healing friendship is born.

Unspoken – Tues, Jan 28



Drama – 91 minutes

[Trailer](#)

Winner: Best Narrative Film at the 2024 Los Angeles Jewish Film Festival

Synopsis: When a closeted, religious teenager finds a love letter from before the Holocaust written to his grandfather by another man, he discovers that he might not be alone. With the help of his high-school crush, he sets out to find the mysterious author of the letter and uncover both his grandfather's identity as well as his own.

Bad Shabbos – Sat, Feb 8



Comedy – 84 minutes

[Trailer](#)

Winner: Audience Award at the Tribeca Film Festival

Synopsis: When two couples, Abby and Benjamin, and David and recently-converted-to-Judaism Meg, return home for Shabbat dinner, an unexpected shadow looms over their night — an accidental death (or is it murder?) threatens to unravel the whole evening. Over the course of one night during this anything-but-typical New York City shabbos, their family get-together takes a turn for the worse...Bad Shabbos takes the one-night-in-New-York story and spins from it a cast of characters, each more hilarious and specific than the next. Kyra Sedgwick kills (not literally) as the neurotic matriarch, and unexpected performances by Method Man, Catherine Curtin, and other familiar faces forge a brilliant ensemble that hits on pure comedic gold.

Children of Peace – Sun, Feb 9



**Documentary –
53 minutes**

[Trailer](#)

Winner: Grand Prize at the SimFest International Film & TV Festival and the Grand Prize and Best Documentary at the Warsaw Jewish Film Festival.

Synopsis: A group of dreamers decided to challenge everything they knew about their nationalities and histories and founded *Neve Shalom*, Oasis of Peace, in 1970's Israel as a social experiment and intentional community where Muslims, Christians, and Jews decided to live together to endorse coexistence. The film follows the many children who were brought up in this unique environment. In this bold attempt to raise a new generation, their internal struggles and the outside conflict challenged their revolutionary ecosystem. The children of peace are now grown men and women dealing with the harsh reality of political turmoil and war.

Technion 10² – Sun, Feb 9



Documentary [Trailer](#)

Synopsis: In 1924, the first Technion class opened in Haifa. Today, 100 years later, it is hard to believe that this modest class, taking place in the far reaches of the British Empire, was the start of the Technion – one of the leading technological research institutions in the world. The story of this institution's hundred years on Mount Carmel provides a fascinating prism through which to describe the history of the State of Israel. It is hard to imagine a modern-day Israel, with its strong economy and scientific and technological achievements, without the Technion playing its part. From the pre-state period, through dramatic moments in times of war, to the birth of the startup nation and breakthroughs in global-scale research – the Technion was always there.

Wanted: Roni Kalderon – Sun, Feb 16



**Documentary –
100 minutes**

[Trailer](#)

Nominee: Best Film at the DocAviv Film Festival

Synopsis: At 17, Roni Kalderon was the greatest promise of Israeli soccer football. The offer to play for Ajax was the beginning of a journey, that started with football, but soon turned into drug trafficking, entanglement with international law, and a mythical disappearance. The boy for whom football was in his soul, grew up in Tel Aviv in the late 1960s without his parents who left for the USA. At 17, Roni Kalderon became the star of Hapoel Tel Aviv, and was regarded as the great promise of Israeli football. Then, he was invited to go to the Netherlands and play for the coveted Ajax football club. This was only the opening whistle for the real game of his life: he would soon find himself deep in international drug trafficking, constantly escaping from the law, until he disappeared off the face of the earth. The fantastic narratives woven around his enigmatic persona, and the mystery surrounding his disappearance, lead the viewer between reality and the myth around the promising footballer who became a drug lord.

The Monkey House – Sat, Feb 16



**Comedy/Drama –
121 minutes**

[Trailer](#)

11 Nominations at the Awards of the Israeli Film Academy

Synopsis: Amir Haddad, a very ambitious young filmmaker, stumbles upon a complex scam, concocted by Amitai Kariv – an Israeli left-wing novelist, and Margo Mai – a young woman who's writing Kariv's biography. Haddad considers this encounter fodder for a docu-thriller, one that features much passion and deceit. Kariv, not a nemesis to be taken lightly, takes exception to Haddad's investigation. Margo Mai seems to be playing both sides. Hostilities ensue. When narratives collide, truth is an immediate victim.

All About the Levkoviches – Thurs, Feb 27



Drama - 85 minutes

[Trailer](#)

Winner: Best Film at the 2024 Sofia International Film Festival

Synopsis: The generous but stubborn boxing coach, Tamás 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, Tamas agrees with his son that he can come and sit the 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. Father and son are not just obliged to face their old grievances during the one-week religious mourning but to help Ariel deal with his own grief and his obsession that grandma's spirit is still in the house.

Welcome to Yiddishland – Wed, March 5 - matinee



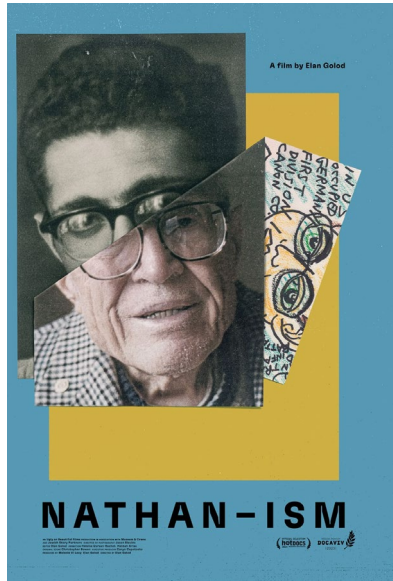
**Documentary –
95 minutes**

[Trailer](#)

Official Selection: 2024 Sydney Film Festival

Synopsis: Behind-the-scenes look at efforts to keep the Yiddish language alive, from a production of Yentl in Melbourne to punk-Klezmer musicians and Barrie Kosky's Berlin staging. The film takes viewers on an immersive journey into the heart of Yiddish culture, exploring its rich history, vibrant traditions, and the people who keep it alive today.

Nathan-ism – Sun, March 9 – Closing Film



Winner: Yad Vashem Award at the 2023 DocAviv Film Festival

Synopsis: At the end of World War II, Nathan Hilu, the son of Syrian Jewish immigrants to New York, received a life-changing assignment from the U.S. Army: to guard the top Nazi war criminals at the Nuremberg trials. This experience fueled a lifetime of artistic inspiration for Nathan, a virtually unknown “outsider artist”, who spent the next 70 years obsessively creating a visual narrative from his memories. But what happens when those memories take on a life of their own?

**Documentary –
79 minutes**

[Trailer](#)