

"These films represent universal themes and are a chance for us to share our experiences with the Baton Rouge community."

HARVEY HOFFMAN, festival chairman

Jewish films offer unique perspective



Photo provided by BEN SCHENCK

The Panorama Jazz Band will perform Klezmer music at the Manship Theatre Sunday, Jan. 20, as part of the Baton Rouge Jewish Film Festival.

Film festival organizers hope that the featured films will encourage dialogue, build bridges and promote tolerance

BY LISA TRAMONTANA
News Features staff Writer

Mike's Place was a popular blues bar and nightclub on the beach in Tel Aviv — the perfect place for a group of filmmakers to make their point that there is more to Israel than terrorism.

Ironically, and tragically, a suicide bomber blew himself up outside the bar while the cameras were filming.

The resulting documentary, *Blues by the Beach*, is just one of several highly acclaimed films that are showing this weekend as part of the Baton Rouge Jewish Film Festival.

The others include *The Tribe*, *A Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden* and *Varian's War*. Festival-goers will also enjoy a live music performance and an interactive discussion with one of the film directors. All events take place at the Manship Theatre downtown.

"This festival is not just for Jewish people," said chairman Harvey Hoffman. "These films represent universal themes and are a chance for us to share our experiences with the Baton Rouge community."

This is Hoffman's second turn as chairman of the event. Last year's films played to near-sell-out crowds, he said, and gave

audiences a chance to see films that are otherwise unavailable in mainstream theaters.

"You know, Louisiana is trying to develop a strong film industry, and this is our contribution," Hoffman said. "It's a good cultural experience for our community, but it also lets filmmakers know that Baton Rouge is diverse ... cosmopolitan ...

that we continue to grow as a city and a place where events like this are appreciated."

A double feature on Saturday begins at 7 p.m. with *The Tribe*, a quirky, unorthodox short film that combines the histories of the Jewish people

and the Barbie doll. It's a wry look at that blonde-haired, blue-eyed American icon, her Jewish woman creator, and the Jewish experience in general.

The Tribe is followed by *Blue: by the Beach*, an examination of the Israeli club scene that takes a shocking turn from entertainment to docudrama. Even screenwriter/filmmaker David Mamet has weighed in on this movie, calling it a "very, very important film. It ranks, along with *One Day in September*, as an actual, undeniable presentation of the unmitigated horror of terrorism," he said.

Baton Rouge Jewish Film Festival

WHEN: January 19-20

WHERE: Manship Theatre, Shaw Center for the Arts, 100 Lafayette St.

ADMISSION: \$8.50 per film

INFORMATION/TICKETS:

(225) 344-0334 or

<http://www.manshiptheatre.org>



The Tribe is a quirky, unorthodox and unauthorized biography of the Jewish people ... and the Barbie Doll. It won Indiewire's Sunda

Audience members can meet *Blues* filmmaker Jack Baxter, (who was present at the 2006 bombing) in the Manship Theatre after the film. After the blast, Baxter had to have surgery to remove shrapnel from his leg and to re-



Baxter

pair his eardrums, which were injured when the bomb went off.

The festival's Sunday lineup begins at 2 p.m. with *A Jumpin' Night in the Garden of Eden*, which examines the joyful art of Klezmer music, and will be followed by an exciting live performance by New Orleans' own Panorama Jazz Band.

Clarinetist and band leader

Ben Schenck has a humorous way of describing Klezmer music — "snake charmer melody on top of a polka rhythm."

It's actually American music, but it came from the Old World (Eastern Europe) with the Jewish immigrants at the turn of the last century, he adds.

"It's basically Jewish wedding music," Schenck says, "and it's party music, not religious."

On Sunday evening, the festival closes with the star-studded *Varian's War* at 7 p.m., based on the true story of Varian Fry, who is said to have saved 2,000 Jews from the Nazis. The film stars William Hurt, Julia Ormond, Alan Arkin and Lynn Redgrave.

After the film, Kenneth Hoffman of the National World War II Museum in New Orleans will help viewers separate fact from



Photo provided by ANN EDELMAN

e Critic's Choice Award in 2006.

fiction. Hoffman is the director of education at the museum.

"This festival does what art is supposed to do: feed imaginations and spark creative dialogue," said Ann Edelman, who handled public relations for the event. "If a movie is on the schedule, there is a compelling reason for it. Viewers will walk away with a truly memorable experience."

Tickets are \$8.50 (per film) and are available through the Manship Theatre Box Office. Call (225) 344-0334. You can also go online to <http://www.manshiptheatre.org>

The Jewish Film Festival is part of the Jewish Cinema South program, which is devoted to preserving Jewish culture in the South. For more details, go to <http://www.BRJFF.com>.