

Yiddish film a hit at Berlin festival

A J GOLDMANN

A DOCUMENTARY about Samuel Bickels, a polyglot costume drama about Karl Marx and a star-studded André Aciman adaptation are among the highlights at this year's Berlin International Film Festival, which opened last week with the warmly received *Django*, a biopic about the legendary gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt.

When the annual festival finishes on February 19, more than 400 films will have been screened at Europe's largest film festival.

With no Israeli films and a single Jewish director in the main competition slate, the tribal flavour of this festival is somewhat more difficult to discern than in previous years – in 2014 Wes Anderson's Stefan Zweig homage *The Grand Budapest Hotel* opened the festival on a high note and last year the German-language *Diary of Anne Frank* was hailed as one of that festival's best films.

Even without such contributions, this year's Berlinale features a number of Jewish milestones, including the festival's first Yiddish-language entry, the Borough Park melodrama *Menashe*, a surprisingly authentic and sensitive peek inside the Chassidic world by first-time feature director Joshua Weinstein.

Another first for the Berlinale is the screening of an Israeli film as part of the festival's selection of restored classic films. Alongside *Annie Hall*, *Terminator 2: Judgment*

Day and Night of the Living Dead, the Berlinale will screen a restored version of *Avanti Popolo*, Rafael Bukai's 1986 anti-war comedy.

The contemporary face of Israeli cinema is represented this year with a single feature-length production, Daniel Mann's debut *Low Tide*, to screen in Panorama, the Berlinale's second main slab.

The American-born Mann conjures up the absurdity of everyday life in a country where violence is omnipresent and states of emergency are routine, through the story of an army reservist who fails to report for training.

Neither of the two Israeli-themed documentaries this year are by Israeli filmmakers. In Raed Andoni's *Ghost Hunting* – a co-production from Palestine, France, Switzerland and Qatar – former Palestinian prisoners re-enact their experiences in Israeli detention centres as a sort of trauma therapy.

There are high hopes for Andoni's film, in which Palestinians reenact their own experiences at Israel's main interrogation centre, Al-Moskobiya, the facility where the director himself was jailed at 18.

Bickels (Socialism) is one of four films by the German filmmaker Heinz Emigholz that are screening at the festival. The mostly dialogue-free documentary is a meditative Israeli travelogue, and named for Samuel Bickels, the architect behind many kibbutzim and museums.

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A scene from the Yiddish-language American film *Menashe*, which screened at the Berlin International Film Festival.



Preparing to fire rockets in Gaza.

Misreporting the Gaza War

AJN STAFF

A DOCUMENTARY exposing the media's culpability in distorting how the 2014 conflict between Hamas and Israel was portrayed on TV and in the press will be launched at a special screening in Melbourne on February 20.

Eyeless in Gaza, which first screened at the Jewish International Film Festival (JIFF) last November, will be shown at the Classic Cinemas, Elsternwick at 6.30pm, followed by a Q&A with producer Robert Magid.

The combination of interviews with journalists, Palestinian citizens and Hamas officials portrays the truth about how Hamas has intimidated and exploited the media.

In the documentary, directed by Martin Himel, former Associated Press (AP) reporter Matti Friedman revealed that at one point during the war staff witnessed a rocket launch outside their office but were pressured into covering it up.

"Armed Hamas men burst into the AP bureau and threatened staff over a photograph that an AP staffer had taken," said Friedman.

"Not only does Hamas know that it can successfully intimidate reporters into what Hamas wants; it knows they will not report their own intimidation."

Another reporter, RTV's Harry Fear, was expelled from Gaza when he tweeted that rockets were fired from "a well-known site in West Gaza City near my hotel".

Fear said journalists know the



The media's role is under scrutiny in *Eyeless in Gaza*.

truth, but don't have the freedom to always report it.

"I don't think there is any correspondent who covered that conflict who didn't see war crimes committed by Palestinian militant groups," he said.

When *Eyeless in Gaza* screened at JIFF, Magid explained that the documentary sets out to determine the truth and show how the media is being used.

"The media is being played by Hamas like a violin," he said. "Hamas is using the Palestinian people as human shields because the more innocent Palestinians that die, the worse Israel looks."

Eyeless in Gaza reveals how the terror group manipulated coverage at the time, intimidating journalists and forcing them to create a false impression of the impact of Israeli shelling by focusing solely on civilian casualties.

The fact is confirmed in previously unseen footage featuring Hamas spokesperson Sami Abo

Zohri, who is normally guarded when speaking to western media. However, speaking to the documentary's Palestinian crew, he admits that when Israel drops leaflets urging civilians to leave their homes ahead of an imminent airstrike, "Hamas asked people to stay in their homes."

Himel, a former Jerusalem producer for the American ABC News and correspondent for three major North American TV networks, has made many investigative documentaries. Magid is the owner of Polarix Films and publisher of *The AJN*.

Eyeless in Gaza will be available on iTunes, Amazon and YouTube on demand next month.

Eyeless in Gaza screens at the Classic Cinemas, 9 Gordon St, Elsternwick on February 20 at 6.30pm. Bookings: www.eyelessingazamovie.com.

Watch the trailer
Available on the iPad & desktop apps

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EYELESS IN GAZA

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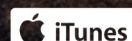
SYDNEY PREMIERE SCREENING
+ SPECIAL Q+A with Producer Robert Magid
Thursday 2nd March
6pm Reception Drinks 6:30pm screening
The Randwick Ritz Cinema,
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MELBOURNE PREMIERE SCREENING
+ SPECIAL Q+A with Producer Robert Magid
Monday 20th February
6pm Reception Drinks 6:30pm screening
The Classic Cinemas,
9 Gordon St Elsternwick

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