

The CJFF: Preserving Jewish Culture Through Film

What connects Jews to their culture and each other more than anything else? The Jewish Film Festival.

The 2012 Pew Study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, reports that since 1914, the percentage of Jewish Americans who self-identify as members of "no religion" has steadily grown from 7% to 32%. Of these, 83% state that "being Jewish is more about culture and ancestry" than religion. Of course, the challenge for Jewish communities is to engage all Jews in activities that connect them to each other and the larger Jewish community - wherever they may find themselves. Activities that submerge the participants in tradition, open their hearts and minds and build friendships - activities that strengthen communities.

As arts funding waned during difficult economic times and opportunities for cultural connections dwindled, Jewish film festivals across the United States flourished. In both large and small cities, people flocked to their respective Jewish Film Festivals to connect with neighbors and friends as they explored history, culture, triumphs, and tragedies - and just plain great films.

The Charlotte Jewish Film Festival (CJFF) bridges religious and other differences by bringing Jews and non-Jews together to celebrate their Jewish identity through films that make you laugh, cry, think, and feel. The 2012 Pew Study respondents agreed that what it means to be Jewish is to "remember the Holocaust, live an ethical life, work for justice and equality, care about Israel, and have a good sense of humor." The CJFF has provided fans with all of those themes in recent years, and will continue to do so in 2015.

As you watch the screen, you will return to your parents' home, mouthwatering as the chicken soup simmers, latkes fry, rugelach bakes, beeswax candles burn, and New York City bagels set, as you remember your own life cycle events, those long Seders while all the kids could think about was the hidden afikomen, chuppahs and all the good things that family and human connection brings. For a few short hours each week, you'll feel like you're wrapped snugly in a warm blanket on a cold winter's evening surrounded by memories, family, and friends. Community, making the world a better place, taking care of each other, laughing, crying, and kvelling about the good...and not so good...old days. Let these memo-

ries and feelings transport you to the days gone by. What will you take away from the films this year? At the very least, laughter, tears, thoughts and feelings, bringing together a sense of community. The 2015 CJFF schedule will officially be released in the January edition of the Charlotte Jewish News and is scheduled to be available December 15 on charlotte-jewishfilm.com. It's going to be another exciting season. See you at the movies. ✨



At the brunch following the showing of "The Sturgeon Queens": Clockwise from far left -- Milt and Gene Poler; Marla and Brian Emery; Howard Epstein; Larry and Shelly Lipman; Lee and Diggie Pesakoff.

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"The Jewish novel will live until Jewish writers run out of things to complain about, and I don't think there is any danger of that."

- Dan Greenberg in Israel Shenker, *Coat of Many Colors*

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