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Silicon Valley festival promises 'broad flavor' of films

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Organizers of the 23rd annual Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival booked more than just the 24 dramas, comedies and documentaries that comprise this year's lineup. They also booked two A-list celebrities, who will appear live on the festival stage.

Popular Iranian-born Israeli singer Rita and American TV fixture Larry King will bookend the festival, which kicks off 7:30 p.m. Oct. 18 with the documentary "Rita Jahan Foruz." The film recounts Rita's rise to the top of the Israeli music scene. A Q&A with the singer and live performance follow the screening.



Israel singer Rita and U.S. media personality Larry King will appear at the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival. photos/courtesy svjff

The festival ends Nov. 16 with a screening of "When Comedy Went to School," a documentary exploring the impact of Jews on comedy over the decades. Brooklyn native and longtime CNN news host Larry King, 80, who is interviewed in the film, will accept the festival's Lifetime Achievement Award.

In between, a variety of films that collectively shed light on Jewish life around the world. "This year we went the extra step and brought the biggest festival yet," said program director Margalit Raviv. "We are showing more films, with more variety than ever before."

Screenings take place at Campbell's Camera 7 Theater at the Pruneyard Shopping Center, the Camera 12 in San Jose, and the Oshman Family Jewish Community Center in Palo Alto.

As always many features come from Israel. This year, they include "Brave Miss World," a 2013 documentary about an Israeli beauty queen who survived a brutal rape and went on to speak out about violence against women.

Also slated: "Cupcakes," about a group of Israelis competing in an international singing contest; "Arabani," the first feature film by an Israeli Druze director; and the Israeli film "Hunting Elephants," a bank heist caper from 2013 starring British actor Patrick Stewart.



Dramas include "Aftermath," an acclaimed Polish thriller about the cover-up of a Holocaust-era massacre; "Out in the Dark," a taut Israeli film about an Israeli and a Palestinian and their forbidden relationship; and "Ida," a Polish film from last year about a nun who discovers her Jewish heritage.

Raviv said she and her colleagues made an effort to reach out to younger filmgoers this year. She cites the American family comedy "Blumenthal" and the wacky romance "One Small Hitch" as prime cinematic bait.



Young people are not her only target audience. With the South Bay now home to tens of thousands of Israeli ex-pats, the festival logically

features many Israeli titles, especially given the ever-increasing quality of Israeli cinema.

"They are putting more effort into understanding the international market," she says of Israeli filmmakers. "They want to be part of the international industry and have people come to their movies."

Raviv, too, is thinking big. "Our main goal is to reach out," she says. "Not only to Israelis and American Jews. We want everyone. We target everyone. The one thing I'm really proud of this year is we tried to add a broader flavor to the festival."

The Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival runs Oct. 18-Nov. 16 at the Camera 7, 1875 S. Bascom Ave., Campbell; Camera 12, 201 S. Second St., San Jose; and the Albert Schultz Cultural Arts Hall in the Oshman Family JCC, 3921 Fabian Way, Palo Alto. <http://www.svjff.org>